

European Civil Society or Transnational Social Space?

Conceptions of Society in Discourses of EU Citizenship, Governance and the Democratic Deficit: An Emerging Agenda

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Abstract

A key feature of recent debates on European Union (EU) integration is the attention paid to the issue of European society, to what extent it exists, what form it takes, and its role in the integration process. This interest in European society has emerged within three academic discourses: EU governance; post-national citizenship; and the democratic deficit. The EU's own understanding of European society reveals how the need to govern transnational space has replaced the need to construct the EU as a nation-state 'writ large'. At issue is the extent to which nascent European society can be conceived as a unified and cohesive civil society. It is argued that the emerging agenda on European society points to the need to more fully understand the dynamics of transnational European social spaces, which itself requires an understanding of globalization which allows for the possibility that it may work in ways other than to promote integration.

Key words

■ civil society ■ democratic deficit ■ European citizenship ■ European governance ■ European Union ■ globalization ■ transnational social space

Recent interest in the extent to which European society can be said to exist has been prompted, in part, by the recognition that European integration has occurred to a significant degree in the economic, and more recently political, field but that social integration remains relatively underdeveloped. It has also been stimulated by the realization that one of the biggest tasks facing the European Union (EU) is how to manage transnational space – a genuinely European realm distinct from that of its constituent member states. In both cases, European society is important because of its absence: the missing piece of the integration

jigsaw without which 'ever closer union', European governance and European democracy are not possible. When European society (or its absence) is under discussion, what is at issue is not simply the Europeanization of member states' societies, or the extent to which social convergence between member states can be said to have developed.¹ References to a nascent European society allude to a European public sphere, or more commonly, a European civil society.

This recent preoccupation (within both the EU itself and academia) with the issue of European society has emerged most strongly within three different but closely related fields.² Firstly, forms of governance developed by the EU have accorded a priority to the development of organized civil society. Secondly, the absence of a civil society is seen as contributing to the EU's democratic deficit. Thirdly, EU citizenship requires a compatible public space within which citizens can exercise their rights beyond the nation-state.

The discourses responsible for shaping contemporary debates on European society also point to the need to understand the global dimension in EU integration. Citizenship, governance and democracy have come to be viewed as post- or transnational in origin and cosmopolitan in practice. It is argued that in order to come to terms with transnational space EU studies has to embrace an 'inclusive' notion of globalization which does not reduce it to a series of economic processes, but emphasizes wide-ranging developments through which the world has become increasingly interconnected (not necessarily unified) and our consciousness of the world as a single place has increased (Robertson, 1992). This necessarily involves engaging with a range of sociological literature, centring on the work of Albrow (1996), Beck (2000) and Robertson (1992), in addition to the work of political scientists such as Axford (2001), Held et al. (1999) and Scholte (2000) who all emphasize the cultural and political, as well as economic, dimensions of globalization. Diverse cultural phenomena, technological innovation, mass communications, and supra-state regulation have all 'caused' globalization to happen (Scholte, 2000: 89–108).

There are several points that we should note concerning the usage of the term 'transnational social space'.³ First, saying that the EU is an example of transnational space is not the same as arguing that the nation-state is no longer important, an argument which is associated with some variants of globalization theory. In fact, the nation-state is simultaneously strengthened and weakened by globalization (Held et al., 1999; Robertson, 2001; Scholte, 2000). Transnational space recognizes that the nation-state continues to exist alongside other, non-national spaces. According to Albrow (1998a) '[t]he transnational exists in the context of relations across national units, whether in the shape of nation-states or not'. In other words, the transnational traverses the national but it is not necessarily nation-states who are the primary actors in transnational relations. Second, it implies a different understanding of territoriality. Transnational space is not necessarily bounded, cohesive or geographically contiguous. This has important ramifications for the way we understand society. In the words of Beck (2000: 28), '[t]ransnational social spaces cancel the local associations of community that are contained in the national concept of society.'⁴

After surveying a range of key issues in the study of society in general, and European society in particular, we turn our attention to the question of what form of society is assumed or advocated within the recent literature on European citizenship, governance, and the democratic deficit, and within the EU's own discourses on society. We then give consideration to the limitations of civil society as a characterization of European society. It is argued that studies of European integration need to engage more fully in discussions about the nature of transnational space and the dynamics of globalization in order to apprehend the characteristics and dynamics of European society.

Studying European Society

Over recent years the idea of society has undergone a transformation: no longer can its meaning be simply assumed or taken for granted (Albrow, 2001). Under the management of the nation-state the nature of society, its boundaries, constituent parts and cleavages were believed to be well understood. Today, under conditions of profound social change stimulated by diverse factors such as globalization, post-materialist values and the rise of identity politics, European integration, and the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the nature of society is much less clear. All of this is particularly relevant to discussion of the nature and form of European society where traditional nation-state categories and modes of comprehension must in any case be applied with caution. It should not be assumed that a society emerging at the European level will correspond to a nation-state 'writ large', and we need to question whether the familiar ground upon which society is constructed does in fact exist in transnational space. According to Habermas (2001), a 'European-wide public sphere must not be imagined as the projection of a familiar design from the national onto the European level. It will emerge from the mutual opening of existing national universes to one another.' In short, society has been freed from its national moorings and what form it takes, and what holds it together or regulates it is increasingly at issue (Beck, 2000; Soysal, 2001).⁵

In the emerging literature on the topic of European society there is no consensus on whether the object of enquiry should be termed European civil society, a European public sphere, or European social space(s). However, European civil society has emerged as the dominant understanding of European society, in large part as the result of the EU's own preference for and usage of the term (Rumford, 2002: 86–94). Civil society can be defined broadly as the public interactions of citizens, non-state institutions, and autonomous collectivities,⁶ and it is no exaggeration to say that in general terms the idea of civil society has positive connotations, formed in large part through its positioning in the democratic struggles against communism in the countries of the former Soviet bloc in the 1970s and 1980s, and its increasing employment to designate a widening of democracy beyond the parliamentary sphere in Western Europe in the same period (Keane, 1998). For Outhwaite (2001) 'civil society politics in both its Western and

Eastern European forms from the 1970s onwards remains one of our most fruitful political experiences and resources’.

The application of civil society to a transnational context has attracted criticism, particularly that such a move represents an attempt to reproduce on the supranational level a model that has reached its limits on the national level (Delanty, 1998). There is also the suspicion that the attempt to transnationalize civil society represents a failure to break with the conceptual imagery of the nation-state: ‘our most basic understanding of what counts as societies are shaped more than we usually care to admit by the modern era’s distinctive rhetoric of nations and national identity’ (Calhoun, 1999). Indeed, from the perspective of studying the EU, one methodological advantage in positing a European civil society is that a basis for comparison between the EU and the nation-state is thereby established. The idea of European civil society has been encouraged by the popularity of a comparative politics perspective to studying the EU (Hix, 1999).

To many commentators the extent to which civil society exists is a benchmark of EU democracy, therefore a fully-fledged European civil society is desirable (Eder and Giesen, 2001; Giorgi et al., 2001). On the other hand, the usage of civil society to designate European society is contested by those who see it as not actually existing at the present time. For example Closa (2001: 189) argues that nothing like the *national* public sphere exists at the European level. However, the survival of the civil society model is not simply a product of its entrenchment within national models of society. It has also been bolstered by the advent of the idea of global civil society and encouraged by developments such as post-national forms of citizenship, international NGOs, transnational communities of interest (Scholte, 2000). It has also been fostered by theories of cosmopolitan democracy (Archibugi, 1998). On this reading, civil society can be transnational or global as well as local and national.

In addition, the concept of civil society has been sustained by the deployment of ‘uncivil society’ as a catch-all term for a wide range of disruptive, unwelcome and threatening elements deemed to have emerged in the spaces between the individual and the state, and which have become increasingly difficult to control and regulate, particularly when they extend across national borders. Examples range from child pornography, right-wing extremism and anti-globalization protestors, to the general lack of unity, social consensus and civic values which many believe characterize contemporary Western societies. The forces that made possible the emergence of a global civil society have also facilitated the transnationalization of ‘uncivil’ elements. In the words of UN General Secretary Kofi Annan, networks of terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime are all forces of ‘uncivil society’ engendered by globalization (quoted in Rumford, 2001b).

The use of the term ‘public sphere’ in relation to European society most often designates a type of social space conceived more broadly than civil society (limited to the realm of autonomous political and social actors), and not necessarily founded upon the nation-state. A public sphere – seen as a realm of public debate and social communication and interaction – is frequently seen as a prerequisite

for civil society. But one can encounter the idea that Europe has a public sphere but not a civil society (Closa, 2001). Importantly, the idea of the public sphere (or spheres) also avoids the equation of civil society with the desirability of fostering civility (Hefner, 1998; Siedentop, 2000). Equally important, it opens the way to thinking about European society in terms which emphasize that the autonomous actions of social actors can comprise dissensus rather than consensus (Delanty, 1998). Society need not be civil any more than it needs to be harmonious, cohesive and inclusive (Rumford, 2001a).

Citizenship and European Society

Citizenship has been the focus of some of the most important debates in EU studies of late, as it has within the social sciences more generally. At issue is the fact that citizenship can no longer be presumed to refer solely to membership in a nationally constituted community. Postnational citizenship forms – not limited to EU citizenship, by any means – offer inclusion and participation in national state systems of rights and benefits without the need for formal membership of the nationally constituted community (Soysal, 1994, 2001). These new forms of citizenship betoken a public space within which citizens can become active, make claims and achieve representation outside the formal mechanisms of representative government instituted at the national level.⁷

The central place accorded to European citizenship in recent literature on the EU signals a concern with the forms of social solidarity which exist within the EU, distinct from those which have a national orientation (Eder and Giesen, 2001). EU citizenship has also placed on the agenda the idea that a European society can be accomplished as part of the process of integration. Citizenship is cast in the role of an interface between 'state and civil society, government, and the people, the territorial political organization and its members' (Giesen and Eder, 2001: 4). Put simply, citizenship signifies society, and European citizenship, in addition to bestowing additional rights, heralds new forms of participation in a European public sphere. More than this, European citizenship is held up as a potential basis for the collective identity of Europe and the idea of an inclusive community beyond the nation-state (Eder and Giesen, 2001: 267).

There is a degree of consensus in the literature that citizenship and civil society are derived from the nation-state but not yet fully instituted at the European level (Closa, 2001; Streek, 1996).⁸ The central issue is to what extent EU citizenship and the civil society to which it must be wedded (or help give rise to) depart from the nation-state 'norm'. EU citizenship rights are derivative of national citizenship and as such do not form a compelling basis for a European citizenship of participation (Delanty, 2000: 83). By which he means that rights stemming from the 'four freedoms' – the movement of capital, goods, persons and services – are premised on the idea of 'citizen as worker'. Political rights such as the right to stand and vote in elections in another member state are much more recent additions.

Alternatively, the 'gap' between the lived experience of national and European forms of citizenship can invite a retrenchment of the idea that democratic practices, citizenship especially, are best guaranteed by the survival of the nation-state. For example, Siedentop (2000: 128) laments what he sees as the substitution of the consumer for the citizen, and prefers a traditional relationship between citizenship and civil society, in which citizenship is conceived rigidly as a mode of civic participation, 'an active sense of public duty' nurtured by the nation-state. Such a view resists a broader understanding of citizenship, as outlined in Urry's (2000) notion of 'extended citizenship', or Stevenson's (1997) idea of 'cultural citizenship', for example.

There are those who hold that EU citizenship rights are insufficiently distinct from those stemming from the nation-state. Put simply, where citizens' rights emanate from the EU they will tend to be experienced as if they were national. Preuss (1998: 146) notes that as EU law is implemented by member states rather than supranational agencies, 'the European character of the rights conferred by the Community is rarely visible'. In other words, although European citizenship is non-national in character and EU law has supremacy over national law, pre-existing patterns of citizenship rights determine the experience of European citizenship. Preuss views citizenship status rather narrowly in terms of legal rights, and sees the existence of a variety of citizenship concepts in Europe as a barrier to the development of a genuinely European citizenry with common rights and duties. Because of this, he downplays certain features of European citizenship such as new opportunities for claims making and the ways in which transnational rights-asserting movements impact on domestic legal rights (Soysal, 2001). He also downplays the extent to which a diversity of citizenship forms are coalescing around collective cultural participation, consumption, and ecology (Urry, 2000).

The debate on the relationship between citizenship and civil society assumes rather than problematizes the relationship between citizens and civic engagement, and the existence of a single, unified public realm within which they can act. It is commonly assumed that the actors involved in European governance must 'see themselves as part of a polity-building exercise that has to evolve from the lower level "upwards"' (Crysochoou, 2001: 17). Delanty (2000: 88) takes the opposing view that citizenship does not necessarily imply civil society. The idea of civil society is tied to a territorialist conception of space which no longer obtains under conditions of globalization and postnationalism: 'Society does not exist as a self-contained domain.' These themes are also explored in the work of Soysal (2001) who outlines how citizenship activity within European social spheres undermines the idea of a European civil society conceived as a cohesive and unitary social realm. Citizenship is increasingly post-national, rather than national, and the rights and benefits of citizenship frequently accrue to resident non-citizens.⁹ Equally, the spaces within which citizenship is enacted and contestation and claims-making take place do not necessarily coincide with either the nation-state or the EU. In short, there exists 'a proliferation of new forms of participation, and multiple arenas and levels on which individuals and groups

enact their citizenship' (Soysal, 2001: 160). The bond between citizenship and civil society can no longer be assumed, and 'nationally coded public spheres do not hold' (p. 172).

In summary, the link between European citizenship and the European society which it is expected to catalyse is premised on the relationship between citizenship and the nation-state from which this model of society is derived. Sociological critiques of this relationship between citizenship and society recognize the contribution of global citizenship norms in the formulation of European citizenship. Rather than emanating from within the EU, post-national citizenship rights have multiple origins. The EU's human rights regime mirrors that introduced by the Council of Europe, and global rights regimes are sponsored by the UN. More than the EU, these institutions are responsible for enacting the cosmopolitan legal regimes that binds individuals to an order beyond that of the nation-state. As Goldblatt (1997: 145) points out, 'international tribunals and declarations of human rights have posited and sustained the duties of individuals to a legal order beyond that of nation states'.

Civil Society and Governance

The terms 'governance' and 'European society' – more particularly 'European civil society' – have become increasingly connected of late, in large part as a result of the EU's attempts to develop forms of governance in which civil society organizations play a central role.¹⁰ Governance has become the preferred term for the form of government characteristic of the way the EU regulates: the EU should not be thought of as a 'super-state' (Majone, 1996). Civil society is seen not as something to be managed and controlled, but as a partner in governance. In short, the mode of governance with which the EU increasingly identifies requires the participation of an organized civil society.

While the idea of government is associated with national administration and internal organization, governance – incorporating as it does the idea of non-state agencies, multi-level structures, the co-option of social partners, and the emergence of transnational or cosmopolitan democratic forms – points to a different range of activities both within and beyond the national level. Rosamond (2000: 108) explains the distinction in the following way: 'Governance is usually defined as being about the exercise of authority with or without the formal institutions of government,' and notes that in recent years the term has come to be used to note the drift of authority away from government by the state. And, we might add, away from national government. In Scholte's (2001) words, '[c]ontemporary governance is multilayered. It includes important local, substate regional, suprastate regional, and transworld operations alongside and intertwined with national arrangements.' One consequence of these shifts is that governance has become more fragmented and decentralized (Scholte, 2000: 143). As was the case with citizenship, there exists consensus that globalization has accelerated these processes by creating gaps in effective governance at national level and refocusing

attention on problems best dealt with at the sub- or supra-national level. Globalization, then, has opened up the field of European governance.

The idea of multi-level governance has risen to prominence as the conceptualization which best characterizes the way the EU integrates a broad range of sub- and supranational authorities, in addition to the national level of the member state (Rosamond, 2000). The appeal of multi-level governance is that it both strives to capture the transformed capacity of the EU as a state – working at multiple levels through governance – and gives expression to its aspirations for greater democracy, social inclusion, and participatory citizenship. Multi-level governance posits that European, national and subnational levels are interdependent and that while subnational involvement has increased and regions empowered, the state retains an important role. Multi-level governance thus attempts to capture the way that authority has been ‘recalibrated in a way which has changed the relative roles played in the EU policy process by sub-national actors on the one hand and the “nation-state” on the other’ (Jeffery, 1997: 204). Moreover, within the EU the different levels – subnational, national, and supra-national – are locked together in a way which opens up the European arena for domestic actors (Hooghe, 1996: 18).

The development of a European civil society has been identified by the EU as a solution to the problem of the democratic deficit and a means through which transnational governance can be secured. The role allotted to civil society is to mediate between the national and the supranational, thereby connecting national society to transnational governance. The integration of the EU opens up the possibility of transnational organizations participating in the development of transnational governance. In other words, European governance cannot be brought about simply by the establishment of a pan-European citizenship and rights regime, or through nationally sponsored moves towards greater integration, but requires the creation of new constituencies of European NGOs, citizens’ groups, and other actors co-opted in the business of governing of Europe, generating fresh momentum for European integration, and who can help advance genuinely European solutions to European problems.

In this context, it is interesting to examine how the EU understands civil society. In fact, there is a major difference of understanding between the European Commission and the Economic and Social Committee (ESC). The latter displays an understanding of society rooted in the ‘European social model’ and structured around the participation of ‘social partners’ – representatives of labour and capital – and other groups characteristic of post-war industrial society. The ‘European model of society’ assumes a specifically European social order, ‘based on the mixed economy, civilized industrial relations, the welfare state, and a commitment to basic social justice’ (Ross, 1995: 46), and driven by economic growth and the single market, which in turn act as a catalyst for institutional and social developments. The ESC model is one in which pan-European NGOs, representing Europe-wide constituencies, constitute a formal and hierarchical ‘civil society organized at the European level’. Civil society constitutes a ‘third force’, alongside the state and the economy, capable of making a positive

contribution to European integration. A highly organized civil society can work to combat exclusion and ameliorate the impact of the information society, about which the ESC is ambivalent, due to its potential for generating both rapid economic growth and increased 'social exclusion'.

In contrast, the Commission has moved away from the 'European model of society' which it did so much to promote in the mid-1980s. It now chooses to emphasize the dynamic nature of the 'European social model' (Diamantopoulou, 2000a), and the way industrial society has given way to the information society. Civil society reinforces extra-parliamentary democratic structures and as such has a leading role to play in countering the democratic deficit. It is emphasized that governance involves an interaction between multiple levels of the exercise of power, and the involvement of non-governmental actors in the policy-making process. The idea that governance comprises a partnership between 'EU institutions, national governments, regional and local authorities and civil society interacting in new ways: consulting one another on a whole range of issues; shaping, implementing and monitoring policy together,' has been termed 'network Europe' by Commission President Romano Prodi (2000).

The EU's institutional discourses of European society briefly considered here reveal doubts that a cohesive and unitary European society exists. For example, the European social model 'takes many forms in the Member States' Diamantopoulou (2000b).¹¹ In other words, while EU members share common values concerning social protection and welfare, the institutionalization of these values varies across Europe. It is acknowledged that European civil society is embryonic and is not embraced by citizens to the same extent as nationally contained civil societies (Prodi, 2000). The information society exists mainly in terms of its potential for the future integration of Europe, and has the capacity to undermine inclusionary social strategies. The 'social model' favoured by the ESC is losing ground to the Commission's vision of governance through civil society. The EU's civil society in-the-making is less a unitary and structured realm to be managed and more a 'network society'. In this sense, the rise of civil society as the dominant way of imagining European society is linked to the decline of the idea that an integrated Europe would be a nation-state 'writ large'. Civil society has been identified as the means through which the EU can secure the governance of transnational spaces (Barry, 1993).

There is a close match between the popular idea of multi-level governance – the EU as a series of interlocking and mutually reinforcing levels (regional, national and supranational) – and the thesis advanced by Held et al. (1999) that European transnational space has been impelled by globalization and takes the form of amalgamated levels of governance, deriving from, displacing but not eliminating the nation-state. The nation-state has been subject to pressures from new, mainly supranational levels of authority and globalization is responsible for creating 'multiple power centres and overlapping spheres of authority' (Held et al., 1999: 441). What this has led to in Europe is a form of supranational regionalism alongside a 'number of subregions and regimes which stack up on top of each other to produce a patchwork effect' (Held et al., 1999: 76). In

relation to European society more particularly, this theory of transnational spaces relies upon the idea that a transnational 'level' of civil society is emerging. One important effect of globalization is to encourage new forms of public life and the emergence of transnational actors empowered to debate regional and global issues (Held et al., 1999: 452).

A weakness of the multi-level governance approach is that European society is only transnational in the sense that nationally constituted actors are increasingly connected via networks operating across large distances and integrated by a new level of governance operating above that of the nation-state. Multi-level governance thus fails to incorporate a true global dimension to an understanding of the EU. For example, it discounts the possibility that post-national citizenship could have global origins or that sub-national regions could be animated from beyond the EU (Marks et al., 1996).¹²

Civil Society and the Democratic Deficit

There is hardly a sphere of EU activity not implicated in the democratic deficit, a rather imprecise term ranging across diverse issues such as the representatives of EU institutions, the abstract nature of citizenship rights, and the 'gap' between policy-making and citizens. Hence the belief that the democratic deficit will remain until the EU and its institutions become more accountable to its citizens (Smith and Wright, 1999). The democratic deficit most commonly refers to the problem of instituting democratic mechanisms within the EU which compare favourably with those already functioning at nation-state level. Markoff (1999: 34–5) reminds us of the ambivalent attitude to democracy characteristic of the EU. Freedom to organize and express interests is secure and the EU has no coercive apparatus of its own. It is in terms of representative democracy that the EU is deficient: 'the only central institution whose members are elected by citizens is weaker by far than the parliamentary counterparts within any of the member states.' Furthermore, the democratic deficit has only latterly risen to the top of the agenda of an EU seeking to 'acquire some of the bells and whistles of democratic constitutionalism' (Armstrong, 2001).

The democratic credentials of the EU, particularly the likelihood of it becoming more democratic in the foreseeable future, are the subject of considerable debate. On the one hand, sceptics such as Markoff (1999: 40) are not convinced that greater integration will lead inevitably towards greater democracy. Likewise, Moravcsik (1998) challenges the assumption that the EU will become progressively more democratic. He puts the case that the EU is not in the processes of deepening its democracy because there is a limit to how democratic national publics and elites want the EU to become. Others point to the democratic credentials of the member states who gave birth to the EU. Laffan (1999: 347) rejects the idea that the EU is undemocratic as 'fallacious.' The democratization of the EU is underpinned by its origins as a system founded by democratic states who have proceeded to democratize the EU in a piecemeal fashion.

Siedentop (2000) holds that Europe is a political construction built upon nation-states which are the enduring locations of democracy. Other commentators point to a split between the functioning elite level democracy and the absence of a mass democracy (Eriksen and Fossum, 2001; Lord, 1998: 129).

Given this background, it is not difficult to see how the Europeanization of civil society – its increased role in governance at the EU level, and its adoption of an explicitly European rather than purely national dimension – has risen up the agenda as part of the debate on the democratic deficit (Warleigh, 2001: 620). Put simply, there is concern that the EU needs to become a true polity if the democratic deficit is to be reduced (Giorgi et al., 2001). On this view, the non-existence of a European public sphere or civil society is a fetter on further democratization, and a democratically viable Europe requires a public space independent of both the market and the state (Grundmann, 1999). In other words, the non-existence of such a public sphere is both a cause and a symptom of the EU's democratic deficit.

There are two main dimensions to the democratic deficit, as it relates to the debates on European society. One is that Europe is a political construction built upon nation-states which are the true repositories of democracy (Siedentop, 2000), and that these nation-states maintain national societies to the exclusion of a European society. The second is that a true European public space shows a great reluctance to emerge and this inhibits democratization, European identity formation, enlargement and further integration: 'institutional reform is inadequate in the absence of a European public space' (Giorgi et al., 2001: 74). On this reading a European civil society is a must if the EU is to win the confidence of its citizens and project a democratic image to non-members, especially candidate countries.

Grundmann (1999) links the deficit of democracy within the EU to the absence of European publics. In addition to there being no European media system, 'there are no parties with a European wide range, there are no (or only a few) European political figures, and there is no European public sphere' (Grundmann, 1999: 127). There are two routes towards an enhanced European public sphere: the emergence of a transnational European public and the Europeanization of national public spheres. The latter possibility is limited by the national nature of the European media.¹³ Regarding the former, Grundmann (1999: 137) suggests that the emergence of pan-European issues such as BSE and the introduction of the single currency could lead to the 'synchronization of national public spheres and thereby strengthen the transnational public sphere'. The national orientation of the media is not necessarily an insurmountable problem if national cycles of attention can be synchronized. Similarly, Habermas (2001) argues that it would be an advance if national media were to cover relevant controversies in other countries, 'so that all the national public opinions converged on the same range of contributions to the same set of issues, regardless of their origins'.

In relation to the role of civil society in the democratization of the EU, Keane (1998) identifies four mechanisms by which a post-national Europe is being

created, all of which indicate an enhanced role for civil society vis-à-vis the state. First, the EU is developing multi-level governance, comprising 'interlocking networks of democratically accountable subnational and supranational institutions' (Keane, 1998: 102). Second, the EU, in common with the UN, is responsible for the formulation and application of internationally recognized guarantees of national identity, one consequence of which is that national identity is becoming a 'civic entitlement' identified with civil society, not the state (Keane, 1998: 107). Third, within civil society national identity becomes one identity among many. Fourth, the EU represents the internationalization of civil society, wherein people can intermingle and develop mutual understanding. Identity is a matter of politics and choice rather than fate, and difference is a right and a duty for everyone. For Keane the construction of an EU civil society is equated with the development of transnational *civic*, rather than supra-*national* space.

Keane's version of the civil society argument is important in that it promises a European social space distinct from the aggregated national spaces of the member states. On this view, a European democratic realm, identified by so many commentators as so important for the emergence of a true European polity, is becoming a reality. At the same time, he draws heavily upon the idea of multi-level governance in order to establish that civil society is a necessary component of European integration. This is still a model of European society enmeshed in the structures of the nation-state, only in his version European civil society is made possible by the decoupling of state and society promoted by cosmopolitan democracy and European integration: European civic space transcends national space.

Conclusion: European Society within the Global Frame

In studies of EU integration 'Europe' is frequently treated as an agglomeration of national space, one consequence of which is that the global dimension of the EU is displaced or ignored. As Axford (2001: 136) points out, when consideration is given to constructing Europe, questions about transnational governance tend to get converted into 'the niceties of territorial government, thereby suggesting that uniting Europe is, or can be, a process akin to that of nation-building'. It has been emphasized that within EU studies the idea of European society is not drawn exclusively from the model of the nation-state: the transnational dimensions of civil society are also well mapped out. Yet there remains a strong sense in which European society takes its inspiration from the national societal imaginary. This inheres, as Axford correctly identifies, in the assumption that civil society must be integrated, whole and inclusive. Within the discourses of European civil society considered in this article – governance, citizenship and democracy – the idea of a unitary societal order still dominates.

The most common way in which globalization is understood in relation to European integration generally, and governance, citizenship and democracy in particular, further contributes to the tendency to view society as necessarily

unitary. Globalization, particularly when conceived in predominantly economic terms, tends to be seen as a series of processes contributing to social destabilization and the 'crisis' of the nation-state by undermining the traditional basis of community, belonging, citizenship and identity. At the same time, civil society is advanced as a remedy to the 'crisis' through its evocation of inclusion, cohesion and unity. In other words, civil society is deployed to counter the threat of fragmentation and division which would otherwise undermine the integrative image of a cohesive EU.

It would be rather simplistic to assume that the project of European integration, even in its post-Maastricht phase of economic and monetary union and the single currency, necessarily entails, or could lead to, a bounded and integrated European society. Furthermore, there is little evidence to support the idea of a nascent European society, even among those who would most welcome its coming. Indeed, the evidence indicates that European society will not be an outcome of integration, at least not in the way that society has hitherto been understood by social theorists: a purposeful, integrated, functional unity of institutionalized cleavages. As such, the preference for talking of a European *civil* society seems doubly naïve, given its association not simply with the society of the nation-state, but more importantly with an integrated and structured community of interest. In Delanty's (2000: 87) terms, '[w]e are living in an age which has made it impossible to return to one of the great dreams of the project of modernity, namely the creation of a unitary principle of integration capable of bringing together the domains of economy, polity, culture and society'.

One outcome of our survey of the way European citizenship, governance and democracy have been associated with the emergence of European society has been to identify the need to better understand the dynamics of European transnational society within a global frame of reference. Discussion of citizenship, governance and the democratic deficit has pointed to the non-integrative dynamics of European social spaces. In terms of citizenship, membership in a nation-state and the benefits and status which goes with it are supplemented not simply by European citizenship, but also by the global institutionalization of human rights regimes based on the universalization of personhood rights. Citizenship once provided the bonds of a cohesive nationally constituted social order. Under conditions of globalization, citizenship is an index of the extent to which societies accommodate difference rather than institutionalize social cleavage.

Contemporary thinking on EU governance accords a high priority to pan-European partnerships between the Commission and organized civil society. The rise to prominence of this form of EU governance has been stimulated by the popularity of multi-level governance models which aim to incorporate a global dimension to understanding EU integration and attempt to demonstrate how different levels – regional, national, supranational can – be integrated. The Commission's interest in securing the services of civil society in regulating and managing a European space stands to encourage the institution of a formal European civil society. However, several important questions remain unanswered. For example, why should European civil society organizations limit themselves

to a European sphere of operation, and why must they necessarily work for rather than in opposition to integration?

Of the three discourses under consideration, debate on the democratic deficit is the most reluctant to break with the nation-state model of society, and the most inclined to advocate civil society as a solution to the perceived problem. In this context, the idea of a European public sphere, a broader realm than civil society, and one less constrained by national belonging, is a superior model for understanding European social spaces. However, neither public spheres or civil society adequately address the issue of where greater democracy will come from, the overriding assumption being that democracy is a contribution that each member-state brings to the Euro-party. Democratic politics in Europe is still resolutely national in scope: transnational democracy remains the dream of cosmopolitans rather than the stuff of everyday EU activity. Beck (1999) contends that '[t]here will be no more democracy in Europe – unless it is a transnationally enhanced democracy', a starting point for which would be the recognition that Europe exists not as closed realm but at the intersection of a multiplicity of global processes and forces containing both threats and opportunities for democracy.

To conclude, it is necessary to challenge prevailing ideas regarding the necessary correspondence between a European civil society, citizenship, governance and democracy. The majority of approaches considered here assume that all of these elements must exist in a functional unity. We must move away from the need to understand public spheres and political communities in terms of their integration or cohesiveness. In the contemporary EU citizenship, governance and democracy are not only national or European in origin. Global norms and values exercise an increasing hold on the imagination of Europeans and legitimate transnational social spaces which may be unconnected with the project of integration.

Notes

- 1 Some commentators argue that through the efforts of the EU to coordinate national diversity European societies are becoming 'more European' (Streek, 1999). Others contend that attempts to establish a social dimension to EU policies have 'modified member-state social policies in relatively few areas' (Pierson, 1998: 144).
- 2 The idea of civil society is frequently associated with the debate on the role of NGOs in Europe. In much of this literature it is presumed that the existence of NGOs is evidence of civil society (for a refutation of this view see Warleigh, 2001). In the present article the rise of European NGOs is subsumed under the general heading of governance. The question of whether a European identity can be said to exist also makes reference to the idea of civil society. In this literature, the issue is catalysed by the wider discussion on citizenship (see Eder and Giesen, 2001), and it is within this context that it is considered in the present article.
- 3 Migration studies has developed a relatively sophisticated notion of transnational space (Pries, 2001), but one applied less in relation to Europe than the Americas and Asia-Pacific regions (Rogers, 2000).

- 4 Transnational space is also associated with the idea of 'network society', developed (in very different ways) by Castells (2000) and Axford and Huggins (1999).
- 5 Some thinkers have abandoned the concept of society altogether (Laclau, 1996; Mann, 1998). Others see society as something coterminous with modernity, and under conditions of postmodernity must be dispensed with in favour of the post-social or post-societal (Rose, 1999). According to Urry (2000: 5) the idea of society is too deeply embedded within notions of nation-state, citizenship and national society to have any application outside of these contexts.
- 6 Keane (1988: 3) defines civil society as 'the realm of social (privately owned, market-directed, voluntarily run or friendship-based) activities which are legally recognized and guaranteed by the state'. Similarly, Held (1989: 6) holds that civil society 'connotes those areas of social life – the domestic world, the economic sphere, cultural activities and political interaction – which are organized by private or voluntary arrangements between individuals and groups outside the *direct* control of the state'. It should be noted that some versions of civil society exclude economic activity, others include it. For a discussion of all these issues see Foley and Edwards (1996).
- 7 Although many studies of post-national citizenship emphasize how claims-making is constrained by national citizenship structures (Koopmans and Statham, 2001).
- 8 Thereby conforming to Cryssouchoou's (2001: 3) view that 'the current state of integration tends to be conceived of as an unspecified grey area between forms of polity that more often than not rely on a statist analogy'.
- 9 The EU's Draft Charter of Fundamental Rights is notable for the rights it confers on non-EU nationals: the right to working conditions equivalent to those of citizens of the EU (Article 15), the right to social security benefits (Article 34), right of access to EU documents (Article 42), right to petition the European Parliament (Article 44), freedom of movement (Article 45).
- 10 The Prodi Commission's White Paper 'European Governance' (European Commission, 2001) has already inspired academic debate. See for example the contributions in *EUSA Review* 14 (1) 2001 and the papers available at the dedicated website www.jeanmonnetprogram.org/01/010701.html
- 11 Hay et al. (1999) 'unpack' the European social model to reveal four distinct conceptions. First, a generic European model which has emerged in the post-war period based on social protection and institutionalized social cleavages. Second, within this overall context a variety of national models. Third, 'the development of a distinctive trans-national social model', with the EU replacing some of the functions previously carried out at the national level. Fourth, new social models emerging from within former state socialist regimes.
- 12 For a discussion of Europe's regions within the integration process which takes issue with the 'Europe of the regions' approach, see Albrow (1998b) and Rumford (2000).
- 13 Similar concerns are voiced by Beck (2000: 157) for whom there is 'no real European newspaper. Nor is there a European television programme worthy of the name (that is which grips its European audience to such an extent that national programmes slip down the table of viewing figures).' Major European television events do exist of course. The European Football Championships, the Champions League, Ryder Cup golf (Europe versus the USA), and the Eurovision Song Contest, all of which command large viewing audiences. Whether they constitute a European public sphere is another question. As regards newspapers, it is worth noting that many European dailies are involved in collaborative publishing projects, and European newspapers increasingly prepare English language editions. In terms of other media, the Internet

is changing the way we access our news and information and is not hamstrung by national publishing traditions.

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