

Discursive construction of (trans)national vs. party politics in three European Affairs Parliamentary Committees: a critical discourse analysis approach

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DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF (TRANS)NATIONAL VS. PARTY POLITICS IN THREE EUROPEAN AFFAIRS PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS APPROACH

ABSTRACT: This paper analyses and compares the discursive and ideological construction of identities in the European Union (EU) committees of the parliaments of the United Kingdom, France and Spain. The sessions under focus deal with the Draft European Constitutional Treaty, an issue inherently related to the construction of a European identity. Following Critical Discourse Analysis, a qualitative analysis has been carried out, which specially draws on the concepts of 'legitimization' vs. 'delegitimization', 'positive self-presentation' vs. 'negative other-presentation', 'consensus' vs. 'polarization', and the pragmatic notions of 'presupposition' and 'implicature'. The analysis has revealed that the sessions focus on regional, national or party identities, instead of on a true European identity. Whereas the British and French members' interventions attempt to foster a national identity within the framework of a European build-up and seek national interest, most of the Spanish spokespeople's turns are devoted, curiously enough, to the creation of a mere party identity.

CONSTRUCCIÓN DISCURSIVA DE LA POLÍTICA (TRANS)NACIONAL FRENTE A LA POLÍTICA DE PARTIDO EN TRES COMISIONES PARLAMENTARIAS DE ASUNTOS EUROPEOS: UN ENFOQUE BASADO EN EL ANÁLISIS CRÍTICO DEL DISCURSO

RESUMEN: Este artículo analiza y compara la construcción discursiva e ideológica de las identidades en los comités de la Unión Europea de los parlamentos de Reino Unido, Francia y España. Las sesiones versan sobre el Proyecto de Tratado Constitucional Europeo. Siguiendo el Análisis Crítico del Discurso, se ha llevado a cabo un análisis cualitativo, basado principalmente en los conceptos de 'legitimización' vs. 'deslegitimización', 'presentación positiva' vs. 'presentación negativa del otro', 'consenso' vs. 'polarización', y las nociones pragmáticas de 'presuposición' e 'implicatura'. El análisis ha revelado que las sesiones se centraron en identidades regionales, nacionales o partidistas, en lugar de en la identidad europea. Mientras las intervenciones de los diputados británicos y franceses intentaban fomentar una identidad nacional en el marco de una construcción europea y perseguían el interés nacional, la mayoría de los turnos de los portavoces españoles se dedicaban, curiosamente, a la creación de una mera identidad de partido.

CONSTRUCTION DISCURSIVE DE LA POLITIQUE (TRANS)NATIONALE CONTRE LA POLITIQUE DE PARTI DANS TROIS COMMISSIONS PARLEMENTAIRES DES AFFAIRES EUROPÉENNES : UNE APPROCHE PAR L'ANALYSE CRITIQUE DU DISCOURS

RÉSUMÉ: Cet article analyse et compare la construction discursive et idéologique des identités dans les commissions européennes des parlements du Royaume-Uni, de France et d'Espagne. Les sessions mises au point traitent du projet de traité constitutionnel européen, une question liée à la construction européenne. Suite à l'Analyse Critique du Discours, j'ai effectué une analyse qualitative, qui s'appuie sur les concepts de 'légitimation' vs 'délégitimation', 'présentation positive de soi' vs 'présentation négative de l'autre', 'consensus' vs. 'polarisation', et les notions pragmatiques de 'présupposition' et 'd'implicature'. L'analyse a révélé que les sessions se concentrent sur les identités régionales, nationales ou partisans, plutôt que sur une véritable identité européenne. Alors que les interventions des députés Britanniques et Français tentent de favoriser une identité nationale dans le cadre d'une construction européenne et recherchent l'intérêt national, la plupart des interventions des porte-parole espagnols sont consacrées, assez curieusement, à la création d'une simple identité de parti.

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SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. 2. The discursive construction of (trans)national identities. 3. EU deficits. 4. Research framework: Critical Discourse Analysis. 5. An object for analysis in context: EU Committees within their Parliaments. 6. Analysis of the parliamentary committee's sessions: results and discussion. 7. Concluding remarks. 8. References.

PALABRAS CLAVE: estrategias discursivas; Análisis Crítico del Discurso; Comisiones Parlamentarias de Asuntos Europeos; construcción lingüística de la identidad; intereses partidistas.

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MOTS-CLÉS: stratégies de discours; analyse critique du discours; commissions parlementaires des affaires européennes; construction linguistique de l'identité; intérêts partisans.

Sommaire: 1. Introduction. 2. La construction discursive des identités (trans)nationales. 3. Les déficits de l'UE. 4. Cadre de recherche: Analyse critique du discours. 5. Un objet d'analyse en contexte: Les commissions de l'UE au sein de leurs parlements. 6. Analyse des sessions des commissions parlementaires: résultats et discussion. 7. Remarques finales. 8. Références.

1. Introduction

At times like the present when Spain seems to be starting to play a more fundamental role in European decisions, or when we are all concerned about EU-friendly countries like Ukraine in the face of the tragedy it is going through, it is easy to wonder why there is still no real sense of European identity among citizens. This feeling may not be surprising at a time when Europe is living through a decisive period due to a financial crisis which is affecting economies all over the world and has become systemic. Processes such as Brexit have undoubtedly played a role in this perception, too. Nevertheless, this does not represent a new challenge for the European project, for it has always been present in the whole process of European construction. We may wonder if politicians did a good job when, in better times, they had the responsibility of laying the foundations for a European feeling of unity and of common identity.

One such moment took place during the workings of the Convention on the Future of Europe (2002-2003) that produced the Draft Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe. The Draft Treaty, agreed on in Brussels in June 2004 and signed by the leaders of the 25 member states in October 2004, was extensively discussed in EU parliamentary committees of the different European member states before its ratification either in Parliament or through public referenda (see Krzyżanowski and Oberhuber, 2007). These committees or Delegations for the EU have undertaken a leading role in key processes such as decision-making and negotiations, but their role is not as visible as that of plenary parliamentary sessions which can be broadcast to a whole nation.

In this paper I have attempted to analyse, from a linguistic perspective, the discursive and ideological construction of identities

in the Spanish EU Committee, in comparison with that of two other EU parliamentary delegations, namely those of France and the United Kingdom, the latter, now outside the EU, following Brexit. The choice of the British and the French Parliaments is based on the fact that these countries maintained a substantially different position within the UE; while France is a fundamental pillar of the UE, the UK holds a significant confrontation between pro- and anti-European political positions. As regards Spain, although it is a country with no euro-sceptic positions in the party system, at least at that moment, it typically represents a clear example of ‘party politics’.

Our main hypothesis is that the question of Europe will be established differently in these three member states, and will not always centre on European-specific issues (cf. Oberhuber *et al.*, 2005; Hellström, 2009). A focus on mainly national interests will be expected in the “not-so-clearly-Europeist” UK of the time, and a possibly more transnational-European focus will be expected in the French committee, all the while bearing in mind their own national interests. As opposed to this, we expect a focus on party interests in the Spanish EU committee.

In this study I have followed a *qualitative critical discourse analysis* (see ‘Research framework’) and attempted to answer some relevant research questions (Oberhuber *et al.*, 2005: 234):

- What are the main *topics* of debate in the domestic debates on European construction preceding the referenda?
- How do the actors involved in the debates position themselves in relation to each other?

More concretely, I have mainly concentrated on the following research issues:

- What linguistic discourse strategies do they use?
- Is there a focus on European, national or party interests?

2. The discursive construction of (trans)national identities

Identity has recently become one of the most frequently explored topics in different fields such as anthropology (Bellier, 2002), sociology (Jenson and Mérand, 2010), social psychology (Chryssochoou, 2003), history (Sowińska, 2009), political science (Wodak *et al.*, 2009) or pragmatics and discourse analysis (Obradović, 2021). Discourse is an undeniably powerful instrument in the construction of identities. The choice of topics and the use of *discursive* strategies play a decisive role in the portrayal of an image of sameness or of difference/diversity, as language is inherently and intricately connected with beliefs, opinions and ideological means “without being ideological *per se*” (Wodak, 2007a: 1). This is linked to the ‘social-psychological’ suggestion that identity becomes the context within which people *construct* their worldviews, and in the name of which they *communicate* their positions

(Chryssochoou, 2003). In our understanding of this configuration of the world, we make use of relevant *pragmatic* issues such as *assumptions* and *presuppositions* (*background knowledge*) (cf. Pearce and Wodak, 2010).

The *discursive* construction of national and transnational identity has been under focus in a large number of studies (Weiss, 2002; Millar and Wilson, 2007; Magistro, 2007; Wodak, 2006; Wodak *et al.*, 2009). One aspect which has received wide attention is the contradictory, though supplementary, relationship between national identities of EU countries and European identity, and the possible effect of intense national feelings in euro-scepticism (Wright, 2000; Phillipson, 2003). Besides, in this complex scenario, regionalist tendencies coexist (Pearce and Wodak, 2010) with globalising tendencies (Krzyzanowski, 2003).

The tensions between conflicting regional, nationalist, national or transnational interests tend to provoke a decrease in due parliamentary attention to purely EU issues when EU matters are under focus (Finke and Dannwolf, 2013), but also party politics hinder the discussion of European matters in parliaments where attention is mainly devoted to the Government-Opposition game (Green-Pedersen, 2010). The Spanish Parliament is a clear example of a *partitocracy* (Matuschek, 2003), for party interests seem to be above the common good, be it either Spain's interests or Europe's (Chaqués, Palau and Baumgartner, 2015).

The first book that focused entirely on the discourse construction of a European identity by European citizens is probably the one by Millar and Wilson 2007, which includes pragmatic and discursive surveys. Another relevant contribution is that of Wodak *et al.* (2009), who combine discourse-historical analysis and political science perspectives to study the construction of national identity in Europe.

Despite many efforts and remarkable achievements, the project of a united Europe still seems to be an utopia and the 'consensus' on an European identity still encounters waves of diffidence and scepticism (Abélès, 2010; Walters and Haar, 2005; Magistro, 2007).

3. EU deficits

There seems to exist a general lack of the feeling of being European prevalent among EU citizens, who, on the other hand, possess clear national identities (Just, 2009). As Magistro (2007: 51) points out, identity is a "‘product’ that need[s] to be advertised to smooth the process of European integration". Language, of course, plays a preeminent role in this marketisation of a supranational identity to 'buyers' with well-defined local identities (Caliendo and Magistro, 2009). EU-discourse is making use of new macro-strategies (Krzyzanowski and Oberhuber, 2007), which expound different *modes of legitimisation*,

such as the use of the historical concept of 'Europe' as a synonym of the EU, symbolising 'integration' (Sowińska, 2009: 23).

If European integration was, until recently, mostly examined from a political and economic perspective, with the expansion of euro-scepticism, some analysts have begun to raise the question of communication performance and the power of communicating the project. The rejection of EU issues in Ireland 2001 and Sweden 2003 and the rejection of the Constitution in France and the Netherlands in 2005, (in all cases the national populations voting against the will of the majority of their representatives), have pointed to the deficiency in the communicating power. The most serious and prominent case is that of the UK's separation from the EU following the result of the referendum held in June 2016 and the definitive withdrawal as a member state, after various extensions, in February 2020.

Koukoutsaki-Monnier (2010: 117) has put forward the European "communication deficit" as one of the reasons for the expansion of euro-scepticism in EU countries. This lack of transparency is linked to a "democracy deficit", due to the exclusion of the citizens from participation in everyday politics (Wodak, 2006: 300).

Fortunately, the EU has begun to recognize these deficits and is trying to palliate them, encouraging stronger interaction with regional and local governments and civil society, at a time when the economic, social and ideological tensions between the 'local' and the 'global' are more disputed than ever before (Abélès, 2006; Hopper, 2007).

4. Research framework: Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) encompasses different approaches to the social analysis of discourse varying in methodology, theoretical standing issues and research objects, but coinciding in their problem-oriented approach (Fairclough, 2000). The shared perspective and programme of CDA relate to the term 'critical', which does not mean 'negative' but rather "skeptical", in the sense of conveying "critical knowledge that enables human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection" (Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 7). For CDA researchers, the notion of 'context' is a key concept with social-psychological, political and ideological dimensions. Hence, CDA favours 'interdisciplinarity' in order to understand how language works in transmitting knowledge, organizing social institutions or creating power structures and ideologies which should be revealed and unmasked (Fairclough, 1995; Martin and Wodak, 2003). Thus, CDA is not interested in the relatively coherent set of ideological beliefs or values, but in the hidden, latent and disguised ones which can be revealed through a discursive analysis, for it is discourse that can make ideologies "observable" (Van Dijk, 2005: 1). Power is also

central for CDA analysts, interested in the way dominating groups discursively abuse other groups who discursively resist such power abuse (Van Dijk, 2009).

Recent interdisciplinary CDA approaches focus on 'globalisation', 'media and information society', 'knowledge-based economy', 'cognitive issues', 'corpus linguistics', 'ethnography, historical processes and hegemonic narratives', among others. Politics is, undoubtedly, the field in which discursive and ideological differences are more vividly expressed, and this, of course, does apply when referring to the EU context. Scholars such as Gastelaars and de Ruijter (1998), Bellier (2002) or Magistro (2007) highlight the EU efforts to create images and symbols of unity through linguistic means. Besides, the discursive study of decision-making and everyday life in political institutions has recently been focused on by CDA researchers (Krzyżanowski and Oberhuber, 2007; Wodak, 2009).

According to CDA analysts, most discursive strategies used in political situations find their origin in the particular ideological principles and standpoints of the actors involved, which make them stand for or oppose other actors. In Van Dijk's terms: "An ideology is the foundation of the social representations shared by a social group. Depending on one's perspective, group membership or ethics, these group ideas may be valued 'positively', 'negatively' or not be valued at all." (2005: 1). Thus, when being ideological, we tend to follow "the ideological square", that is, to "emphasize *our* good things/*their* bad things" and "de-emphasize *our* bad things/*their* good things" (2004: 8).

Among the extensive number of discursive strategies expressing ideologies, especially relevant for our study are those of 'legitimization/delegitimization', 'positive self-presentation/negative other-presentation', and 'polarization' as opposed to 'consensus'.

Chilton and Schäffner (1997: 211-215) classified 'legitimization and delegitimization' as a "strategic function", an intermediate level between political situations and discourse types. Legitimization is the permanent process of (re)creation and co-construction of the approval of a policy, which will be perceived as being legitimate as long as it represents the interests of its demos. When a speaker claims to be right and enacts legitimization, there is the implicit claim that he has a particular authority to do so which his interlocutor/opponent has not (cf. Van Dijk, 1998; Martin and Wodak, 2003). Furthermore, when listing the reasons to be obeyed, the speaker assigns different ideological positions to each party involved (cf. Reisigl and Wodak, 2001; Chilton, 2004), and portrays himself as the charismatic leader "matched against an emerging threat" (Cap, 2009: 4).

Legitimization strategies are related to 'positive self-presentation', boasting, self-praise, expressions of high evaluative dimension, and expressions of moral evaluation, whereas delegitimization includes

‘negative other-presentation’, blaming, or accusing (De Cillia and Wodak, 2021).

Special attention will be paid in this study to the discursive strategies applied in the ‘positive self- and negative other-presentation’ (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001: 44-85), with a special emphasis on the referential use of personal pronouns (‘polarization ‘us-them’’) which implies a categorical division of ‘inclusion/exclusion’ (ingroup and outgroup people (Wodak, 2007b)), and the use of argumentative fallacies, such as *argumentum ad hominem*, *argumentum ad baculum*, *argumentum ad nauseam*, or the fallacy of hasty generalization (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2010).

Trying to identify the intended meaning of the utterances and, thus, the intentions of the interlocutors, relies on our ability to interpret textual, para-textual and contextual clues. For this reason, pragmatic concepts such as ‘presupposition’ and ‘implicature’ will be recurred to, as there can be no interpretation in context that does not take into account cognitive categories (Van Dijk, 2004). In political contexts, in particular, much of the meanings are not explicitly expressed but presupposed to be known, and it is general sociocultural knowledge which helps to infer the meaning.

5. An object for analysis in context: EU Committees within their Parliaments

After the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) in December 2003 in Brussels (the Brussels Summit), which was the first attempt to reach an agreement on the “Draft Constitutional Treaty”, there were debates in different national parliaments on the proposed constitution. These debates took place in parliamentary EU committees within each parliament.

As stated above, the present study focuses on the discursive and ideological construction of identities in the Spanish EU Committee, in comparison with that of two other EU parliamentary delegations, namely those of France and the United Kingdom, the latter, now outside the EU, following Brexit. The corpus for analysis will be three sessions of these committees dealing with European affairs, all of them having several key features in common. In the first place, they are all sessions of an EU committee with the attendance and hearing of the Minister for Foreign Affairs or the Minister delegate for European affairs of the respective countries, who is examined by the committee (M. Michel Barnier by the French delegation, Sr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos by the Spanish joint committee and Mr. Denis McShane by the British select committee). Secondly, they are very close in time, the three sessions of the national EU committees having taken place in June 2004 (the British session was held on 22 June, the French session on 15

June and the Spanish session on 10 June). Lastly, and most importantly for our purposes, all of them dealt with the same topic, i.e. the European Constitutional Treaty.

5.1. THE UE SELECT COMMITTEE IN THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT

As known, the UK Houses of Parliament consist of two chambers: the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Both Houses of Parliament have a well-established system of committees and sub-committees, and there is a main distinction between select and standing committees. The most well-known are select committees, most of which are enquiry or investigative committees on a certain matter or policy area. One major select committee is the European Union Lords Select Committee¹, whose main functions before Brexit consisted of scrutinising EU draft proposals, documents and other matters, and which is currently in charge of EU-UK relations after Brexit.

5.2. LA DÉLÉGATION PARLEMENTAIRE POUR L'UNION EUROPÉENNE IN THE FRENCH PARLIAMENT

The French Parliament is also bicameral and is constituted by the National Assembly (*l'Assemblée Nationale*) and the Senate (*le Sénat*) together. There is a main distinction between Standing Committees and Parliamentary Delegations, of a permanent character, and temporary '*ad hoc*' committees of inquiry. The Parliamentary Delegation for the European Union² functions in a similar way to a committee, it is mainly in charge of scrutinising the executive's European activities and, most importantly, it bears a decisive role in the decision-making and negotiation processes.

5.3. COMISIÓN MIXTA PARA LA UNIÓN EUROPEA IN THE SPANISH PARLIAMENT

The Spanish Parliament, or *Cortes Generales*, is also a two-chamber system, made up of the Congress and the Senate. The Spanish parliamentary committee system also draws a distinction between Standing Committees and '*ad hoc*' temporary committees. 'Mixed or Joint Congress-Senate Committees' are permanent committees composed by members of both Houses. The Mixed Committee for the European Union³ has the presence of all parliamentary groups in

¹ For more information go to: http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/lords_eu_select_committee.cfm (Last accessed: 15 June 2023).

² More information can be found at: <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/english/european-delegation.asp> (Last accessed: 14 June 2023).

³ This can be found at: <http://www.senado.es/solotexto/otrasdis/legislac/normas/LEY894.html> (Last accessed: 15 June 2023).

proportion to their number in the chambers. Among its main functions, it considers legislative proposals from the EU and scrutinizes the Government on EU activities.

6. Analysis of the parliamentary committee's sessions: results and discussion

6.1. BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY SESSION: GENERAL *CONSENSUS* ON NATIONAL INTERESTS

Following the brief intervention of the Minister for Europe at the session held on 22 June 2004, the Lords and Baronesses questioned him in a quick, spontaneous succession of questions-answers. The straightforward interventions were intended to gather knowledge on the advances of the Constitutional Treaty and, more particularly, how they would affect Britain's interests.

Far from any partisan interests, there is a true concern in the interlocutors to seek common interests and prevent any loss of privilege with the EU Treaty. The general 'consensus' throughout the entire session, on all linguistic and paralinguistic levels, is most particularly shown in a common referential use of personal pronouns, and the repetitive use of verbs and nouns pertaining to the semantic field of 'common national interest'.

6.1.1. Inclusive "we" = UK

There is a recurrent use of inclusive "we", with which all speakers refer to the UK. One of the many instances is the exchange (1) held between Lord Marlesford and the Minister Dr. MacShane in which the question and the colloquial humorous answer from the Minister are totally in tune.

- (1) Q19 LORD MARLESFORD: ...there has been a certain amount of confusion that in some way **our position as a permanent member of the Security Council with the right of veto has been affected by the constitution**. Can you confirm that, first, it is not affected and, secondly, that HMG has no intention of changing **our position and our powers as a permanent member of the Security Council, one of the five with a veto**?

DR MACSHANE: I would give a year's salary to get that printed on the front page of *The Sun*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph*, et cetera! You have put the Government policy much better than I could.

In answering Lord Marlesford's question, the Minister borrows his colleague's concerns and turns them into his own. Thus, the Government's policy and the Lords' petitions coincide in an evident consensus on this topic. Inclusive "we" represents we-UK in "our position"

and “*our* position and *our* powers”, nominal groups pertaining to the semantic area of national interest.

One further instance of the general attitude of ‘consensus’ throughout the session is the exchange (2) between Lord Woolmer and the Minister.

- (2) Q20 LORD WOOLMER OF LEEDS: Minister, I note that there is a declaration for incorporation in the final Act... **Does it safeguard our interests or not?**

DR MACSHANE: It does indeed. (...) A declaration fully safeguards **our right to choose** how to exploit **our energy resources** and the structure of **our supply**. (...) I think that **we have** therefore **safeguarded our right to control** North Sea oil and **our right to decide** the taxation basis. **We have** also **safeguarded our policy** of being able to push for liberalisation. **I would like to thank the energy industry, MEPs of all parties and parliamentarians who have joined with us in achieving quite a substantial success for the UK in this particular area.**

Q21 LORD WOOLMER OF LEEDS: **So we remain masters of our own sources of energy...**

Both for Lord Woolmer and for the Minister, “*our*” represents “*our* country” in “*our* interests/right/energy/supply/sources”. There is an insistent repetition of Britain’s rights and the need to “safeguard our interests”. Also, the Minister thanks “MEPs of all parties and parliamentarians” for “joining” the Government in such a success for the UK. This is almost unimaginable in the Spanish Parliament, as will be explained in section 6.3.

6.1.2. Semantic field of ‘self-compromise’ (to national interest)

There is also a constant repetition of words like “control”, “ensure”, “our concern” in the speakers’ turns denoting self-compromise to “national” interest, as reflected in the syntactic context, in which the “national” interest of the British is contrasted with other broader European interests in other EU countries. Thus, in example (3), the Minister expresses how “*our concerns*” go “in the other direction in other nations, where they are worried for [not] having common *European* provisions”. The UK’s concern implies that they have law procedures that “*we* had to *ensure* remained under *national control*”.

- (3) DR MACSHANE: (...) It is a very serious point, because these are genuine concerns in other countries; whereas **our concern was that we had distinctive criminal law procedures which we wanted to ensure remained under national control**. The concern is almost in the other direction in other nations, where **they** are worried ... for [not] having common European provisions in respect of fraud and

other criminal activities. **If we are right to have our concerns, I think that we should also respect the strong desires of some other governments in Europe...**

6.1.3. Polarization ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ = UK vs. the other European countries

Another outstanding feature is the constant polarization ‘us-them’ which establishes a categorical distinction of ‘inclusion/exclusion’, although there is an ever-present respect for Europe and the position of other countries (*they*), even if it opposes that of Britain (*we*). Thus, the occasions on which “we” refers to Europe are relatively scarce and can be easily pragmatically inferred, as in example (4).

- (4) Q22 DR MACSHANE: **We have the euro, we have Schengen and we have defence arrangements... Now we have the chance of flexibility.** Where a number of countries choose to move forward, it hardly makes any difference –and it requires a sizable number of *them* –**I do not think it is right, for example, that Britain should seek to stop them.** That surely is all that this proposal means? **It cannot be forced on us.** There is no proposal underneath this article that can interfere in **our criminal law system.** However, if a number of countries feel that it is right for *them*, then *they* should do it.

When Dr. MacShane says that “We have the euro, *we* have Schengen and *we* have defence arrangements”, he is obviously referring to the EU. Right after this, when commenting on the different interpretation of an article in the constitution dealing with the law system (“It cannot be forced on *us*”), “we” becomes “*Britain*” again as opposed to the other countries (“*them*”).

6.1.4. Prevailing explicit agreement

‘Consensus’ prevails to such an extent that there is only one instance of explicit disagreement in the whole session (exchange 5). Relevantly enough, it is not the result of a partisan interest but of a difference in criterion on the linguistic strength of a wording, and a respectful tone prevails readdressing the previous threatening act.

- (5) Q61 LORD WILLIAMSON OF HORTON: (...) the word “guarantee”, as you say, in fact appears in our Annex 32 ... but **[t]here is a disagreement between us...** **You think that** a guarantee is just about the same as the existing wording; **I personally do not. I think** that it does go beyond the existing wording.
 DR MACSHANE: **You have to set the word “guarantee” in its full sentence and it should be seen in context.** (...)

In spite of this anecdotal disagreement, in the end, the minister keenly praises the good work of the committee and says he is proud of it.

6.2. FRENCH PARLIAMENTARY SESSION: GENERAL CONSENSUS ON (TRANS)NATIONAL INTERESTS

After a presentation by the Minister Mr. Barnier at the session held on 15 June 2004, the members of the delegation questioned him. He usually responded after listening to three or four questions from the representatives, although he was able to answer immediately if required.

Whilst the British session centred on the way in which the Constitutional Treaty would affect the UK's "national" interests, the French session was also characterized by a general consensus, this time on achieving "European" construction, for a strong Europe renders France stronger, too.

6.2.1. Inclusive "nous" = EU members; semantic field of 'cooperation'

"Nous" does not usually refer to France, which appears as "la France", but to those involved in European construction; for this reason, there is a parallel use of words related to the idea of consensus and compromise over EU construction. Fragment (6) is an example of this lexical cohesion ("*les travaux sur la Constitution européenne, positions communes, chemins de compromis, réelle volonté d'aboutir, négociation, la construction européenne, l'Europe est en ordre de marche*").

- (6) M. MICHEL BARNIER: *Après de nombreux mois de **négociation**, les **travaux sur la Constitution européenne** entrent dans leur dernière ligne droite. **Nous** sommes... à deux jours du Conseil européen qui doit... conclure sur la Constitution. Il existe aujourd'hui de **nombreuses positions communes** et des **chemins de compromis entre les États membres sur les questions restant en discussion**, ce qui me rend optimiste. Par ailleurs, il me semble qu'il **existe une réelle volonté d'aboutir** De plus, les citoyens ... ont témoigné d'une certaine **inquiétude** à l'égard de la construction européenne. **Il faut leur envoyer le message clair que l'Europe est en ordre de marche.***⁴

There is also concern for the criminal law system, but France's position differs from Britain's, for, instead of trying to preserve particular national norms, the French are interested in achieving agreements be-

⁴ "After numerous months of negotiation, the works on the European Constitution enter into their last stage. In two days we are holding the European Council which must finish the Constitution. There are today numerous common positions and ways of compromise among the Member States over the remaining questions under discussion, which makes me optimistic. Moreover, it seems to me that there is a real will to succeed. Besides, the citizens have shown a certain concern for European construction. We must send them a clear message that Europe is ready to set off." (All translations are by the author)

tween member states through a “qualified majority” in order to extend EU powers. This explains the sharp contrast between Michel Barnier’s words (example 7) and those of his British colleague; in this case, it is not “*our* national interests, *our* national resources, *our* national rules” that matter, but “*la coopération judiciaire, la protection des intérêts de l’Union*”.

- (7) M. MICHEL BARNIER : *Sur ce point, **des pays ont été très réticents, comme la Grande-Bretagne, qui a fixé de nombreuses «lignes rouges»** en matière de politique étrangère et de sécurité commune, de fiscalité, de sécurité sociale, ou de ressources propres... la règle de la **majorité qualifiée** pourrait s’appliquer à la **coopération judiciaire** en matière pénale, ... , et les attributions du parquet européen pourraient être étendues de la **protection des intérêts financiers de l’Union** à la lutte contre la criminalité organisée.*⁵

6.2.2. 1st person ‘je’ = personal involvement in European construction

When the French members inquire, as the British did, about the Minister’s opinion on the citizens’ lack of interest in the European elections, and the high degree of abstention, their standpoints are again those of someone talking on behalf of the EU; consequently, ‘*nous*’ refers to those interested in EU matters. Moreover, they seem so truly concerned that they express their inner feelings and opinions.

- (8) M. ROBERT DEL PICCHIA: ***J’ai été particulièrement déçu** du faible taux de participation aux élections européennes...**Avez-vous une explication à cette rapide désaffection pour l’Union européenne?***
M. MICHEL BARNIER: *Tous les gouvernements ont été secoués par cette désaffection des citoyens et **nous** ne pouvons nier qu’elle manifeste une **réelle incompréhension du fonctionnement des institutions communautaires**. ... Il **me** semble que la vraie réponse à cette abstention serait de **créer un véritable débat politique européen, au même titre qu’il existe un débat politique national.***⁶
- (9) MME DANIELLE BIDARD-REYDET : ***J’ai été particulièrement frappée** par la faible participation.... Je pense que cela traduit le sentiment*

⁵ “On this point, some countries have been very reluctant, like Great Britain, which has fixed numerous «red lines» in matters such as foreign policy and common security policy, tax system, social security and its own resources... the rule of qualified majority might be applied to the cooperation in law matters, ..., and the powers of the European courts might be extended from the protection of the financial interests of the EU to the fight against organized crime.”

⁶ “I have been particularly disappointed by the weak turnout at the European elections... Do you have any explanation for this sudden indifference towards the European Union?” “All the governments have been shaken by the citizens’ indifference and we cannot deny that it reveals a real lack of understanding of the functioning of the Community institutions. I think that the true answer to this abstention would be to create an authentic European political debate, on a par with the national political debate.”

que les députés européens ne servent à rien, ce qui est une réelle mise en cause du fonctionnement démocratique de l'Union. Ne faudrait-il pas prendre en compte cet avertissement et envoyer un message clair aux citoyens?

M. MICHEL BARNIER : *Les citoyens ont du mal à comprendre ce que font leurs députés européens... Un travail d'explication est nécessaire sur le rôle des parlementaires européens.*⁷

The participants in examples (8) and (9) are concerned about the citizens' apparent indifference and the general feeling that European representatives are of no use (*"le sentiment que les députés européens ne servent à rien"*). This emphasizes the democracy and communication deficits in the EU institutions, for the politicians cannot convey a clear message of their project.

6.2.3. Constructive critical remarks

The few critical remarks in the session are always aimed at demanding a bigger effort from the French Government in European construction. But, even in these cases, the attitude of the interlocutors is always constructive, as in exchange (10).

- (10) M. PIERRE FAUCHON: *Les électeurs se seraient-ils aussi peu mobilisés **si la classe politique française avait parlé plus positivement du Parlement européen et de la Commission européenne?***

M. HUBERT HAENEL: ***Pouvez-vous nous dire ce que vous comptez faire pour que la France redevienne un bon élève de l'Europe?***

M. MICHEL BARNIER: ***Je suis d'accord avec vous.** (...) **Je réfléchis aux remèdes possibles ... Faut-il trouver le moyen de renforcer l'association des deux Assemblées.***⁸

M. Fauchon and M. Haenel's criticism is based on the idea that the Government has not done everything feasible in order to transmit a good European image, and, accordingly, they demand that an effort should be made for *"la France"* to *"redevienne un bon élève de l'Europe"*. Following the general spirit of consensus, M. Barnier agrees

⁷ "I was really struck by the weak turnout... I think that it reveals the feeling that the European representatives are good for nothing, which is a real test of the EU's democratic function. Shouldn't we take this warning into account and send the citizens a clear message?"

"The citizens already have difficulties in understanding what their European representatives do... It is necessary to work on explaining the role of EU representatives."

⁸ "Would the turnout have been so scant if the French political class had spoken in a more positive way about the European Parliament and the European Commission?"

"Could you tell us what you intend to do so that France becomes a good pupil of Europe again?"

"I agree with you. (...) I have been thinking about possible solutions ... We must find a way to strengthen the association between the two assemblies."

with them and proposes some measures to ‘reinforce’ the European entity.

6.3. SPANISH PARLIAMENT: *LACK OF CONSENSUS* (MOVING AWAY FROM THE TOPIC UNDER DEBATE)

In the session of the Spanish Parliamentary committee held on 10 June 2004, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Moratinos, outlines the Spanish role in Europe. The Minister and the parties’ spokespersons follow a fixed order and timing, and the question-answer process is not as fluid and straightforward as in the other two committees. Each intervention is longer and full of *rhetorical strategies*, in a similar way to the debates in plenary sessions of the Congress or the Senate.

The Minister emphasizes the work of the Government (20 references) in maintaining Spain’s identity (26 references) within the frame of European identity (he names the EU or European construction/integration on 44 occasions).

The main party of the opposition, the conservative Popular Party (PP), is determined to show that the Socialist Government is not fit or capable of defending the national interests, as their group would. The other opposition parties are mainly interested in their regional/nationalist benefit.

Thus, the most relevant feature in the Spanish committee is not ‘consensus’ as in the British or French parliamentary commissions, but the constant ‘*appeal to consensus*’ by the Government (cf. Rivas & Carranza, 2009).

Our analysis of the session reveals that the party interventions, most particularly those of the opposition at that time (the Conservative PP and the nationalist parties), make absolutely no contribution to the creation or consolidation of a strong European image. In spite of the Foreign Affairs Minister’s efforts to emphasize a European identity without losing sight of national interests, the European perspective is completely lost as the debate moves away from truly European matters and centres on the PP’s attempts to discredit the Government’s work and the nationalist focus on regional interests.

6.3.1. *Government’s appeal to consensus (on European/national interests): We = Spain / Europe*

It seems highly revealing that Mr. Moratinos criticized the other speakers’ irrelevant contributions to the topic under debate when he regretted that ‘in an EU Committee one must talk about the EU’. As a matter of fact, his interventions were the only ones strictly adhering to the proposed goal of discussing the treaty.

There is in his turns a recurrent, almost insistent, emphasis on the need for 'consensus' ("*recuperar el consenso*", "*una política de consenso*", "*trabajar juntos*"), both in the preservation of European as well as of national interests. In this attempt to keep a balance between both interests he frequently conflates the Government's voice with that of Spain and that of Europe, and feels personally involved in the task of European construction, which is discursively reflected through the use of the 1st person singular pronoun and words denoting compromise.

- (11) *...mi compromiso personal y el de este Gobierno es que España apueste decididamente por consolidar la política exterior de la Unión Europea. Tengo la convicción de que la Unión debe desempeñar un papel de actor global (...) en la sociedad internacional.*⁹

6.3.2. *The moving away from the topic under debate (i) Regional opposition parties: we = their party/ autonomous region (local regional interests)*

The Opposition parties representing autonomous communities (CiU from Catalonia, Basque Parliamentary Group from the Basque Country, Group Esquerra Republicana from Catalonia, Group Coalición Canaria from the Canary Islands), with a comparatively much smaller representation, tend to begin their interventions showing their support, or not, for the Government's initiatives relating to European construction, but then use their turns to insist on their mainly linguistic, regional and nationalist demands. Their interventions focus on the establishing of a "visible" position within the institutional frame of the EU and demand the inclusion of their co-official languages, for having their 'own' voice is the best way to frame an identity. In this portrayal of a regional/nationalist identity 'we' is equivalent to their party or their autonomous community (SR. GASOLIBA (CiU) "*Me gustaría ver cómo podemos realmente situarnos a nivel español y a nivel de la UE*" [I would like to see how *we* can really establish a position at a national and European level]).

Special attention should be paid to the main opposition party, for, in their attempt at criticizing the Government, they use a whole battery of discursual weapons, ignoring the fact that they are losing sight of the true goal of the debate.

⁹ "[M]y personal commitment and that of my Government is that Spain should clearly support the consolidation of EU international politics. I am convinced that the EU should play the role of a global actor in this international society".

6.3.3. *The moving away from the topic under debate (ii) Main opposition party: the overuse of strategic discourse*

Ideological discursive strategies are typical of all sorts of political debates and political parties of all kinds, but it may seem surprising that, in the sessions under analysis, they are apparently scarce in the voice of the Government and of the majority of minor parties in the opposition. The reason for this is that their voices appear to be somewhat faded when compared to the amazing number of strategies displayed by the PP, the main party of the opposition.

An extensive battery of rhetorical devices ('irony', 'metaphor', 'disclaimers') is used throughout their interventions, in which the speakers recurrently repeat words and ideas in long-winded circumlocutions as if tireless insistence would imply possessing the truth (*argumentum ad nauseam*).

6.3.3.1. "We/Our group vs. You/Your group": Positive self-presentation vs. negative other presentation

Political ideologies become overt protagonists when the PP spokespeople hold their turn. What really matters is the government/opposition 'polarization' instead of European construction, which is obviously far from being adequate when a good European image is aimed to be built and projected onto the citizens. This polarization is discursively constructed through 'positive self(PP)-presentation' versus 'negative Government-presentation'. In addition, the Government is attacked on a 'supposed historical basis', which 'legitimizes' the opposition's attitude, as if the present were a natural extension of the past (Duranti, 2006), '*you* proved to be incompetent in the past, *you* cannot do it any better, *we* will do better'. Thus, the Government is "excluded" in this 'inclusion/exclusion' (Wodak, 2007b) "test of validity".

- (12) Mr. Soravilla: *No tengan la menor duda de que a **nosotros** nos sobra el sentido del estado y vamos a actuar con mucha más responsabilidad que **ustedes**.*¹⁰

'We', on all these occasions, stands for the PP (not Spain, nor those involved in European construction). Besides, as in example (12), they are used in general statements without much foundation (*fallacy of hasty generalization*).

¹⁰ "Be assured that *we* know only too well what a sense of state is and we shall act with much more responsibility than *your* party".

6.3.3.2. Personal attacks (*argumentum ad hominem*)

The intervention by the spokesman representing the main party of the opposition, Mr. Soravilla Fernández, seems to us a perfect example of the use of argumentative fallacies (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2010). His speech is mainly based on trying to intimidate the Government's representative, instead of providing constructive arguments (*"vamos a seguir muy de cerca su acción, como corresponde, con rigor y con seriedad"* [we are going to keep close watch on you, rigorously and responsibly, as it should be]) (*argumentum ad baculum*); by attacking his work and personality and those of the Prime Minister (*argumentum ad hominem*), and on making generalizations without foundation (fallacy of hasty generalization).

The most recurrent instances of hasty generalizations have to do with allusions to the Government's "insane" behaviour (*"[si vuelven] a la cordura en política exterior"* [if you go back to sanity in foreign politics]) and "disastrous" performance (*"España no tiene ningún peso porque ustedes [lo] han dilapidado absolutamente"* [Spain has no political weight for you have absolutely squandered it]). Also frequent are the direct personal attacks (*argumentum ad hominem*) either addressed to the Prime Minister, Mr. Zapatero, accused of an authoritarian attitude (*"un tufillo un poco autoritario"*) and complete dyslexia (*"dislexia absoluta"*), or to Mr. Moratinos, accused of showing an irresponsible attitude (*"a usted no le cuesta ningún esfuerzo ir cuesta abajo y sin frenos y llevarnos donde Dios nos diga."* [you have no trouble in speeding downhill with no brakes taking us to God knows where.]).

6.3.3.3. Irony as a letter of introduction

The main opposition party's strategy of linguistic attrition of its opponent includes the incessant use of irony, which becomes an obstacle that hinders communication and the development of the subject under debate.

a. Irony through disclaimers: 'We give you our support... → the problem is / on condition that...'

"Disclaimers" suit the 'ironic' attitude in the construction of a 'negative opponent-presentation' for they "briefly save face by mentioning *Our* positive characteristics, but then focus rather exclusively on *Their* negative attributes" (Van Dijk, 2005). "Apparent" gratitude or apparent support are highly frequent in the PP's interventions for they save face in front of the rest of the political groups and the potential receivers of their discourse, although the explicit criticisms which immediately follow reveal their true ironic innuendos.

- (13) *Señor Moratinos, muchas gracias por la información y bienvenido a esta su primera comparecencia... le emplazamos a que vuelva y nos*

*deleite con el placer de estar aquí con nosotros. Ahora mismo ha fusionado dos compareencias que eran obligadas...*¹¹

In extract (13), Mr. Soravilla, the PP spokesman, expresses an ‘apparent gratitude’, as a politically correct polite opening for his speech, which in fact amounts to pure irony, for, right after thanking the Minister for his presence, he blames him for having “merged two compulsory attendances” into one. The speaker becomes almost sarcastic when he overdoes his expression of gratitude ([“we call upon you to come again and delight us with the pleasure of being here with us”]).

What seems even more ironic is the fact that, in a ten-minute intervention, Mr. Soravilla utters nine explicit instances of “apparent support” which involve the ‘presupposition’ that his party is truly interested in a consensus with the Government to the citizens’ benefit. Nevertheless, each one of these nine tokens of support is immediately followed by a sharp attack, which clearly contradicts this fake backup and reveals his true intention, as shown in table 1.

¹¹ “Mr. Moratinos, thank you very much for the information and welcome to this first attendance of yours... we call upon you to come again and delight us with the pleasure of being here with us. You have just merged two compulsory attendances...”.

Apparent support	→	“Intention revealing” attack
<i>Estamos dispuestos a darles nuestro apoyo,</i>	→	<i>...lo que ocurre es que [los intereses] desde mi grupo están muy claros, pero desde el suyo no lo veo tan claro.</i>
<i>No dude que vamos a darle nuestro apoyo</i>	→	<i>...en que recuperen ustedes el norte en política exterior.</i>
<i>Les apoyaremos con mucho gusto</i>	→	<i>...cuando ustedes tomen la decisión de hacer políticas en positivo.</i>
<i>Quiero decirle sinceramente que estamos dispuestos a apoyarle</i>	→	<i>...siempre y cuando ustedes, en vez de volver a Europa, vuelvan a la cordura en la política exterior.</i>
<i>España ya no [tiene] peso, tiene usted razón,</i>	→	<i>...porque ustedes [lo] han dilapidado absolutamente.</i>
<i>Le apoyaríamos, desde luego</i>	→	<i>...si avanzaran en las políticas antiterroristas.</i>
<i>Estamos dispuestos a darles también nuestro apoyo</i>	→	<i>...[a]l contrario que ustedes, en una política de inmigración que sea seria y sensible.</i>
<i>Nosotros estamos dispuestos a apoyarles</i>	→	<i>...si ustedes aplican la política de Estado en el sentido que lo tienen que hacer.</i>
<i>Estamos también de acuerdo en apoyarles</i>	→	<i>...si es que van a tratar de lograr un mayor peso en la política de la Unión Europea.</i>

Table 1. Instances of ‘apparent support’¹²

Although the speaker apparently proposes true syllogisms where the premise is based on a true condition ‘if/when *you* do this, *we* will do that’ (if you do the right things, we will support you), the hearers in general infer the strong implicature that that premise is false because they have no intention of supporting the Government at all (“We would support you if you behaved correctly; as you won’t do it, we won’t sup-

¹² “We are ready to give you our support, → the problem is that the interests from my group are very clear, but I am not quite sure about yours”.

“Do not doubt our support → in helping you find the right direction in foreign affairs”.

“It will be a pleasure to support you, → when you finally decide to develop positive policies”.

“I am sincere when I affirm that we are willing to support you → on condition that, instead of going back to Europe, you go back to sanity in foreign policy”.

“Spain had no [political] weight anymore, you are right, → for you have absolutely squandered it”.

“Of course, we would support you, → if you made advances in antiterrorist politics”.

“We are also ready to give you our support, → unlike you, in a serious and sensitive immigration policy”.

“We are ready to support you, → if you put state politics into practice in the right sense”.

“We are also ready to support you, → if you try to achieve more weight in the EU politics”.

port you”). In fact, as with the case of disclaimers, that premise is an excuse before the audience to save face.

b. Irony through reminders: “I / We remind you that...”

As opposed to true reminders (e.g. Sra. Presidenta: “*Les recuerdo que el tiempo son 10 minutos.*” [Chairwoman: “I remind you that you have 10 minutes.”]), when used by the opposition spokespeople, reminders become a tool to “take the Government to task”, to discredit its work and, most of the times, to distract attention from the matter in hand. The use of negative politeness by means of hedging ‘I wish to remind you that...’ becomes part of the “irony” strategy for they are not true reminders, but obvious criticisms, as in fragment (14) where the PP spokesman accuses the Minister of not having done his duty, an accusation which is borne out by data lending him authority:

- (14) *Señor Moratinos, **quiero recordarle que debiera** de haber mandado un informe escrito, que es preceptivo y que seguimos esperando, que se estipula en el artículo 3 e), segundo párrafo de la ley 8/1994.*¹³

Seriously enough, most of the “reminders” are employed to bring up national issues which bear no relation at all to European matters, as if they were throwing weapons around (**red herring** fallacy). For example, the fact that the EU Constitutional Treaty was not going to be signed in Madrid is used by the opposition to “remind” the members of the committee of 11M bombings, ETA terrorism, different national projects and even sport events, which are connected in a bizarre way.

c. Irony through parenthetical embedded and subordinate clauses: “which, by the way, ...”

Any topic seems the perfect excuse to introduce internal issues not related to the matter under debate.

- (15) *Nosotros les apoyaremos en el avance de la agenda de Lisboa -**que les recuerdo que** fue una propuesta que hizo el Gobierno del Partido Popular, con un Gobierno de Gran Bretaña, **que por cierto** ahora no tiene tiempo de cenar con nadie ni de hablar de Gibraltar.*¹⁴

The above sentence is another instance of ‘apparent support’ in which the PP spokesman expresses his party intention to collaborate with the Government. Nevertheless, the ironic tone is conveyed by two

¹³ “I wish to remind you that you should have sent a written report, which is mandatory and which we are still waiting for, such as is stipulated in article 3 e), second paragraph of the law 8/1994”.

¹⁴ “We will support you in the advances of the Lisbon Strategy, *which, I remind you*, was a proposal made by the Popular Party Government, with the British Government, *which by the way* has no time now to dine with anyone or talk about Gibraltar”.

relative clauses; the first one introduces a ‘reminder’ of the PP merits in the matter (party positive presentation), and the second one, a ‘by-the-way’ clause, serves as an accusation against the Government for its relation with Great Britain regarding Gibraltar.

In (16), the PP supposed support for the Government’s ‘immigration policy’ is contradicted by the post-modifying relative clause “which (should) be serious and sensitive”, which conveys the idea that the PP will not really support it for, in their opinion, neither the policy nor, by extension, those who conduct it are serious or sensitive. Furthermore, it is followed by a causal subordinate clause introducing national issues unrelated to EU matters.

- (16) *Al contrario que ustedes, estamos dispuestos a darles también nuestro apoyo en una política de inmigración **que sea seria y sensible, porque** a nosotros todavía nos llegan los ecos de aquello de papeles para todos y de las expulsiones de Barcelona.*¹⁵

d. Irony through rhetorical questions: “Do you think by any chance that...?”

Rhetorical questions are clear examples of indirect speech acts whose syntactic mood is interrogative but convey the illocutionary force of statements. When Mr. Moratinos complains about the PP filibustering tactics, the PP spokesman employs two structurally identical rhetorical questions in order to ironically contradict the Minister, suggesting that they do not filibuster but negotiate firmly just as trade unions do.

- (17) ¿Es que el señor ministro piensa que cuando un sindicato negocia firmemente está obstruyendo? ¿Es que el señor ministro piensa que cuando un sindicato llega a ejercer su derecho de huelga está haciendo una obstrucción intolerable?¹⁶

These ‘trick questions’ admit no refusal, for the Socialists, who traditionally feel nearer to workers’ vindications than right-wing parties, will not refute his words.

7. Concluding remarks

Hodge & Kress (1993: 5) maintained that “there is no pure act of perception, no seeing without thinking... What we actually see is limited by where we look and what we focus on”. The same can be applied to

¹⁵ “Unlike you, we are ready to give you our support in a serious and sensitive immigration policy, for we still remember the papers-for-all policy and the Barcelona expulsions”.

¹⁶ “Does the Minister think by any chance that a trade union filibusters when they negotiate firmly? Does the Minister think by any chance that a trade union is intolerably filibustering when they exercise their right to strike?”.

the political interlocutors in the three sessions under analysis, whose discursive strategies were mediated by their interests and ideological standpoints. As we expected, though the topic was the same, i.e. the European Constitutional Treaty, the interests of the different political formations conditioned to a great extent the focus of attention, making their priorities and ideologies “observable”.

In the French and British Parliaments the main aim was to achieve the best results for their respective countries within the framework of the European Union, and discursive strategies are oriented towards that goal. Quite on the contrary, in the Spanish parliamentary committee, party interests take all the limelight off European issues. The Government shows a true interest in preserving national interest within the framework of the EU, the minor opposition parties prove interested in achieving a regional identity within the sphere of the Union, and, finally, the main party of the opposition seems to forget what the topic of the sessions is about dedicating its efforts to discrediting the Government.

One may wonder how politicians intended to encourage a strong European feeling of unity among their citizens when, in these important sessions of European debate (namely those dedicated to the creation of a common constitution), no consensus and no European spirit was present at all.

If national interests seem to be in open conflict with European objectives as a whole, according to this survey, European construction is also hindered by partisan interests in modern partitocracies, whose *strategic discourse* represents another obstacle to be added to the ‘EU communication deficit’. In short, it seems difficult to build and transmit a coherent and attractive image of the European project when politicians within one same country go in opposite directions.

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