



***The Interpretative Moment of
European Journalism***
*The Impact of Newspaper Opinion
Making in the Ratification Process*

*Hans-Jörg Trenz, Maximilian
Conrad and Guri Rosén*

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of political journalism in EU constitution-making. More specifically, we ask whether political journalists take an active role in shaping public preferences and opinion on European integration. An analytical framework is developed distinguishing between the critical and the representative function of media opinion-making. Journalists are found to interfere with the democratization of the EU either as a critical watchdog controlling and advising political decision-makers, or as a collective voice representing long-term expectations and public dispositions in the debate. This research framework is applied to the analysis of newspaper commentaries in the ratification period of the EU Constitutional Treaty (November 2004 to June 2005). The ratification process is analyzed as a critical juncture of European integration in which enhanced debates and politicization are expected in all member states.

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The interpretative moment of European journalism

The European public sphere has primarily been analysed as an infrastructural requirement for promoting the legitimacy of the EU as well as enhancing the knowledge and positive attitudes on the part of the European citizens. Particularly the European Commission has developed an instrumental approach to public communication management, acknowledging that the so-called gap between the EU and its citizens is grounded in a communication deficit and that the EU should therefore strive for increased legitimacy in terms of public accountability, openness and participation, in other words in terms of democracy (European Commission 2006). Accordingly, European public sphere research has been designed as a quality test of media performance in facilitating European democracy. Recognising the social responsibility of the mass media, the bulk of existing media studies has analysed the quantity and quality of media information about the EU, its distribution and outreach and the mediating function of political journalism.¹

However, this question of how deliberative, rational and truth-oriented the media is misses one central point of research: media are not simply an amplifying mechanism of European news-making; media is also an independent actor who is deeply engaged in 'making European news'. Media should therefore be understood as an independent and self-referential organisational system that does not replicate the system logics of the EU, but that strives instead for autonomy in terms of selecting, re-interpreting and evaluating political news. This is exactly what we aim to analyse in this article as the *interpretative moment of European journalism*. From our perspective, the evaluation of the role of the media as an *infrastructure* of European democracy must be complemented by an analysis of the role of the media as an active *player* in democracy. This implies the conceptual task of turning the media from a dependent into an independent variable of European integration.

The question we are trying to answer in this study is whether and to what extent journalists make use of their power of opinion-making to shape and influence the debate on European integration. To understand the active role of the media in framing European politics constitutional debates in the ratification period of the Constitutional Treaty will be analysed. The process of EU constitution-making represents one of the points in time where media could be expected to play a central role in agenda-setting, promoting constitutional reasoning, controlling power, aggregating individual preferences and steering public opinion and will formation. Did journalists become actively involved in promoting particular visions of the EU and impose their normative choices on the audience? Or did journalists act mainly as neutral transmitters of pre-formulated views of political actors to the broader audiences? Is there a specific pro- or anti-European bias in news commentaries on EU constitutional issues? By analysing this interpretative moment of European journalism, a closer understanding of *mediatization* can be developed as the ways media *interfere* with the democratisation of the EU by advancing and constraining the development of a legitimate political order.

¹ Indicators for measuring the democratic performance of the media in promoting a European public sphere are developed, for instance, by Peters et al. (2005); van de Steeg and Risse (2003); Kantner (2004).

The impact of the EU punditry

From the historic analysis of European integration, we know about the strong impact of political entrepreneurship in moving integration forward (Milward 1992). Especially at crucial moments of the integration process, such entrepreneurs know how to make use of policy windows to promote their visions. Their promotional activity is usually analysed within the political arena and measured according to their capacity of cross-national agenda-setting. In the process of EU constitution-making, political entrepreneurship was crucial in the agenda-setting phase (e.g. the Fischer speech at Humboldt University), but also throughout the process of deliberation and negotiation (the charismatic role of Giscard d'Estaing) (Trenz 2007).

Such a view on the role of political entrepreneurship leaves open the question of how particular visions about the future of European integration are spread and amplified to reach broader mass publics. The expectation is that political entrepreneurs are particularly successful when they enter into coalition with public intellectuals and journalists. This links back to our research question whether and to what extent journalists act as political entrepreneurs, either by openly campaigning for or against European integration (expressing the 'media voice') or by claiming to represent and amplify popular opinion (expressing the 'public voice'). If the former can be verified, political journalism should be expected to have a particular impact on ratification, i.e. the period when EU constitution-makers went public. The question is further whether journalists are members of a close and distinctive class of intellectuals who promote relatively unitary public opinion (an emerging EU punditry) or whether they express plural opinions and attitudes according to ideological or national cleavages. Hence, the unitary, plural or fragmented character of media opinion in relation to EU constitution-making needs to be explored.

The existing literature on the question of the campaigning role of political journalism has delivered ambivalent findings. Traditionally, it is believed that journalists mainly serve national audiences and systematically renationalize the European debate. The campaigning role of political journalism would preserve particularistic views on European integration and traditional national biases. This would exclude collective opinion-making across national borders (Meyer 2002, Siapera 2004). By contrast, in an investigation of the initial constitutional debate from 2000 in quality newspapers in Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Austria and the UK, Trenz (2007) describes instead an attitude of progressive Europeanism among news commentators who were overall supportive of the project of democratising and constitutionalising the EU and in many cases even openly campaigned for it. Journalists were found to endorse the deepening and widening of the EU as a kind of moral imperative in defence of the collective good of Europeans and against the self-interest of single governments. Similarly, Pfetsch (2005) confirms the strong role of elite journalism in promoting the democratization and constitutionalization of the EU. In a cross-country survey of claims-making in editorials, journalists are found to be highly supportive of European integration. With the exception of the UK, the average of negative claims in several EU countries analysed is below 5 per cent (Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, France and the Netherlands). Italy and France are found to be the most supportive countries. Negative opinion about the EU among journalists only prevails in the UK. Moreover, a significant difference between different types of newspapers is identified: the proportion of negative claims in the regional and tabloid press is four times higher than in quality papers (Pfetsch 2005).

Our critical assessment on the performance of newspaper opinion-making will further break down these ambivalent research findings. The research objective is not only to locate journalists between conventional nationalism and progressive Europeanism. It is also to characterize the relationship between journalism and European integration given the pivotal role of the media in producing meaning about the European Union and negotiating its scope of legitimacy.

Methodological design

Quality newspapers distinguish opinion articles from general news articles. Whereas news articles are meant to provide unbiased information and to abstain from value judgments, the newspaper commentary is the place for expressing the media's opinion on a particular issue (Neidhardt et al. 1998, Eilders et al. 2004).² In the following, only this latter category of articles will be examined. Our content analysis of newspaper commentaries focuses on the ratification period of the Constitutional Treaty (26 October 2004 – 15 June 2005). The six countries and 12 newspapers chosen represent different degrees of involvement in campaigns for imminent or upcoming popular referenda (France, Denmark, UK) or parliamentary ratification (Germany, Sweden).³ In countries with a high density of political campaigning and heightened partisan competition on European integration such as France, we expect a strong involvement of elite journalists in the constitutional debate and a direct interactive style of appealing to the reader. In countries with low public attention, demobilisation and absence of partisan conflicts such as Germany, we expect a lower commitment of journalists, either appearing as more distant observers of the ratification process, or as external evaluators of the performance of the political elite. In Denmark, Sweden and the UK, ratification was path dependent on prior choices taken in other member states, which makes early media involvement likely to evaluate the impact of external events on changing domestic preferences. Norway is discussed as a case of the external effects of EU constitutionalisation on non member states.

The qualitative content analysis includes 12 commentaries per newspaper, yielding a sample of a total of 144 articles. The articles are primarily chosen with regard to coverage of three events: (a) the signing of the Constitutional Treaty in late October 2004, (b) the Spanish referendum on ratification of the Treaty in late February 2005; and (c) the French and Dutch referenda in May and June 2005. In terms of value added to research on the European public sphere, the inclusion of the Scandinavian countries represents an important and necessary broadening of the empirical focus in previous research. Particularly the inclusion of recently acceded and potential future EU member states – in our case represented by Sweden and Norway – may fundamentally change the way we assess the status quo of the European public sphere (Conrad forthcoming 2007).

² In the interpretation of our data we will speak of commentaries in an unspecified way as a sample category of the rather heterogeneous practice of newspapers' opinion-making. In our coding, we have distinguished between commentaries, editorials and background opinion articles. Commentaries and background opinion articles must be written by regular journalists of the respective newspaper and signed by the authors. Editorials are collectively authored by the editorial board to represent the newspaper's official positions on the issue.

³ The newspapers included in our analysis are *Le Monde* and *Figaro* (France); *Frankfurter Allgemeine* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Germany); *Times* and *Guardian* (United Kingdom); *Aftenposten* and *Dagsavisen* (Norway); *Politiken* and *Berlingske Tidende* (Denmark); and *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* (Sweden).

The coding of the articles was completed with the help of the *atlas.ti* computer package. This computer programme is suited for semi-structured content analysis of text material based on a standardised codebook. Variables referring to the structural elements of newspaper discourse contained a closed list of values. Variables referring to the interpretative elements of newspaper discourse were confined by an open list of values that could be extended according to new interpretations and aggregated meaning 'discovered' in the coding process. Elements of media discourse are thus ordered quantitatively and qualitatively, which facilitates the systematic comparison of the material and reveals the relational structure of transmedia discourse. The coding was done by a team of three researchers which provided sufficient controlling through double coding and cross-checking of the articles.

Interpretation of findings

Who writes the commentary?

Elite newspaper journalism is still a dominant male business.⁴ Commentaries are usually written by well-known national journalists who have a general knowledge to contextualise European affairs and to evaluate their overall relevance as well as their normative implications. This rather exclusive practice also helps newspapers to maintain a clear divide between neutral provision of information and opinionated articles. The foreign and EU correspondents, who develop a more specialized and instrumental knowledge in the field, are used mainly as information providers. As a distinctive class of journalists who are increasingly detached from their home contexts, EU correspondents have developed considerable power as transnational agenda setters, but with limited possibilities to influence media opinion-making in the domestic field (Meyer 2002). To a large extent, EU correspondents control access to European information by pre-selecting European news, but they are by and large excluded from opinion-making. Consequently, although qualitative case studies show that EU correspondents tend to support pro-European opinions and to favour the deepening of European integration and democracy (Siapera 2004), their positive attitude would only be indirectly reflected in the media.⁵

These observations are confirmed in our survey. EU correspondents did not raise a competing European voice in national debates but rather enhanced general knowledge on EU topics. Many newspapers earmark much space for analyses and background opinion articles. The concern of the newspaper with the 'informed opinion-making' of their readers was particularly visible in the French debate. *Le Figaro*, for instance, chose a popular format to fight misinformation and lies in the ratification campaign. A daily column called *vrai-faux* was launched in the last four weeks before the referendum in order to correct popular prejudice about the Constitutional Treaty and to balance the passionate political debate. *Le Monde* chose a similar format commenting directly on different articles of the CT and their impact for the country: 'The Treaty in 40 questions'. A more elitist approach was chosen by

⁴ This remarkable gender bias in media opinion making on EU constitutional issues applies to all countries and newspapers with the exception of *Dagens Nyheter* (SWE). In our sample, the overall average of female journalists in media commenting is barely 12.5 per cent. It varies between 3 per cent (*FAZ*) and 30 per cent (*Times*).

⁵ The relatively subordinate role of EU correspondents holds across countries and newspapers. Only in Swedish newspapers, the EU correspondents were found to be more integrated.

the German FAZ, which opened a legal-constitutional debate among well-known constitutional lawyers.

These different formats chosen for commenting on the EU reflect the efforts of quality newspapers to decouple their advisory-educating role from opinion-making. European debates are still exceptional in the sense that newspapers are less interested in promoting polarised opinions on contentious issues rather than giving guidance to their readers as to how they should *understand* the process and project of European integration.

Main issues and debates

Table 1 indicates that all newspapers (including Norway) chose to comment intensively on ratification. Ratification created an enhanced need for interpretation and guidance by the media that was displayed throughout the whole period. The issue cycle shows a clear peak around the French and Dutch referenda in May and early June 2005. This suggests that ratification failure was experienced in similar terms as a collective trauma attached to a sense of 'deep crisis' that needed to be reappraised in newspaper commenting.

Table 1: Opinion-making articles (including guest commentaries): issue cycle

	26-31 Oct 04	Nov 04	Dec 04	Jan 05	Feb 05	Mar 05	Apr 05	May 05	1-15 Jun 05	Total
<i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i>	4	2	1	2	6	3	10	31	14	73
<i>FAZ</i>	4	5	3	2	1	5	4	21	23	68
<i>Le Monde</i>	3	17	5	5	10	21	42	154*	36	293
<i>Figaro</i>	3	4	4	15	18	19	24	57	20	164
<i>Aftenposten</i>	3	12	2	2	7	13	6	14	12	71
<i>Dagsavisen</i>	0	7	4	4	3	4	7	5	12	46
<i>Guardian</i>	1	1	2	4	5	1	5	18	28	65
<i>Times</i>	1	0	2	5	2	6	4	16	25	61
<i>Politiken</i>	2	13	4	6	3	7	18	24	33	110
<i>Berlingske Tidende</i>	2	5	4	1	3	6	6	16	27	70
<i>Svenska Dagbladet</i>	6	3	2	2	5	5	2	12	7	44
<i>Dagens Nyheter</i>	0	1	5	1	3	1	3	9	8	30
Total	29	69	38	49	66	91	131	377	245	

Note:

* A special issue of *Le Monde* of 5 May 2005 contained 125 articles in a mixed format providing background opinion and information on EU constitutional issues.

Yet it should also be noted that the wide range of ratification procedures sustained the image of a Union still made up of national public spheres. The ideal that the process should be characterized by a common focus and shared criteria of relevance (Eder and Kantner 2002) was undercut by the reality of re-nationalised debates in the Member States which varied widely in intensity and content. The signing of the Constitutional Treaty in Rome was chosen by most newspapers for commenting (with the exception of *Dagsavisen* (NO) and the British newspapers) but did only spark a debate in France and Germany. Other events like the referendum in Spain or ratification in Germany and Italy were treated as domestic events and did not initiate opinion-making in foreign newspapers.

The single unifying event that held the ratification debates together was the French referendum of May 2005 which focused most of the media attention in other member states. In France, the domestic referendum debate was outstanding and was commented upon in more than two articles per day in the four weeks running up to the referendum. From mid-April onwards, newspaper commentaries also converged in the rest of Europe in interpreting the upcoming French (and Dutch) referenda, and later mapping out the consequences of the failures for the future of the European integration project.

While European newspapers commented closely on the French referendum, they devoted only limited space to domestic ratification procedures. In the UK and in the Scandinavian countries, where European issues are traditionally highly contested, domestic debate about the Constitutional Treaty had barely started, although the issue of a future referendum was looming in both Denmark and the UK. In Germany, parliamentary ratification helped to uphold the prevailing consensus culture in dealing with European constitutional issues. The domestic procedure of ratification which was initiated in April 2005 drew only little attention (only one commentary in the *FAZ* and five in the *SZ*).

In sum, the high density of comments on EU constitution-making indicates its shared relevance across different media spheres. However, the attempts by the governments to synchronize the timing of ratification were only partly successful.⁶ Only the French debate became a focal point, and somewhat of a substitute, for the debate in other countries both before and after the referendum. Possible reasons for the French to vote 'yes' or 'no' in the referendum were also heavily debated in other countries. Last but not least, the French referendum opened a space of reflection, in which ratification failure, the upcoming 'crisis of the EU' and future scenarios of European integration were collectively made sense of.

The critical voice of the media

Ratification debates cannot simply be a continuation of constitutional deliberation in the drafting period of the Convention. Debates about ratification tend to polarize complex normative questions and to restrict voice to a 'yes' or 'no' to the Constitutional Treaty. As a result of previous rounds of negotiations, the Treaty can be either approved or rejected but it cannot be amended, improved and corrected. The proponents of the treaty therefore strongly rely on symbolic strategies to find public resonance and to motivate the enthusiasm of the Europeans for their project. While the opponents of the treaty will in turn most likely appeal to popular resentment and cynicism to motivate popular resistance against the European project.

Media debates on the other hand are more complex than simply abiding to this biased yes-no scheme. As a matter of fact, there are only few instances where a clear yes or no can be deduced from the journalistic statements in the commentary. The constitutional project is generally embraced by the journalists. Only 19 per cent of the articles were clearly expressing a negative attitude towards the EU constitutional process, 46 per cent were expressing an affirmative attitude, while 34 per cent were coded neutrally. Broken down to country and newspaper levels, this pattern remains

⁶ The expected affirmative result of the Spanish referendum of February 2005 was thought to give a positive signal to France and the Netherlands. Also the timing of German Parliamentary ratification was chosen to affect positively the choice of the French voters.

stable, although the *Times* and the *FAZ* stand out as the most negative newspapers, and Sweden and Norway account for 73 per cent of the articles that take a neutral position towards the Constitutional Treaty. In other words, journalists prefer a constitutionalized and democratic European Union to the maintenance of the status quo, but they seem reluctant to campaign outright for it.

Despite this general readiness of journalists to support a constitutionalized EU, newspaper commentaries tend to be rather critical in evaluating the results of the negotiations and the performance of European actors and institutions in the process of constitution-making. This emphasis on criticism largely corresponds to the self-understanding of political journalists as the fourth estate which observes the political process from a distance and which is alert of power abuse and misconduct. A strong constitutional engagement on the part of the media is frequently linked to the expression of disillusionment with the contents of the Constitutional Treaty or with the ratification process. Only 14 per cent of the commentaries were outright affirmative in their style of commenting, whereas 42 per cent commented the ongoing events in the ratification process negatively, and 42 per cent took a more distanced, objective analytical attitude. Whereas the French and German newspapers as well as the *Guardian* (UK) accounted for most of the affirmative articles, Danish and Norwegian journalists conducted the debate with a more distanced and objective-analytical view, while the most negative tone was applied by Swedish commentators and by journalists of the *Times*.

Ideological as well as national cleavages between the newspapers have only a minor effect on the journalists' support or rejection of the Constitutional Treaty. In more left-leaning newspapers, negative views on EU constitution-making are more or less absent, whereas more right-leaning newspapers like the *FAZ*, the *Times* and *Le Figaro* at least occasionally break the chorus of support. In their style of commenting, so-called 'left newspapers' make slightly more use of irony linked to populism whereas 'right newspapers' are more polemical (mainly the *Times*).

The objects of critique and the respective attitudes promoted in newspaper commentaries are changing over time and across countries. In practice, 25 different ratification procedures resulted in 25 segmented debates on ratification. Nevertheless, some common patterns of newspaper discourse can be identified. In general, journalists tend to focus their critique less on particular contents and provisions of the Constitutional Treaty than on instances of domestic politics. Domestic actors (both governmental and oppositional) and instances of domestic politics were a more likely object of critique in the strongly politicized ratification debates in France and in Sweden. In the more distanced debates in Germany, Denmark, Norway and the UK, the domestic arena of contention was secondary, but governmental actors from other Member States are critically scrutinised by the media (mainly the French president Chirac). Except for the *Times* and partly also *Berlingske Tidende* (DK), EU actors and institutions are largely exempted from criticism.⁷

In sum, the impression is that EU constitution-making is generally supported by media commenting. Journalists do nevertheless enter into a practice of criticizing the process and outcomes of ratification, but overall do not take the opportunity to become involved in more comprehensive debates. Critique is guided by long-term expectations

⁷ Similarly, EU actors are significantly less quoted in the commentaries and their statements are less contested by the journalists.

in a constitutionalized and democratic European Union. Yet only few journalists would step forward to campaign openly for the European constitution. The particular worldviews of quality newspaper journalism must therefore be traced back behind the specific rhetoric and justificatory practices that are used to represent the debate.

The representative voice of the media

The role of political journalism as general interests' advocates (Nimmo and Combs 1992) is made explicit in media representations of the constitutional process. Quality newspaper journalists frequently favour the expression of a European perspective against nationalist particularism. By advocating general interests and asking what is at stake for the EU, the newspapers mostly play a balancing role in relation to external input into the debate.

Journalists do not systematically enter into a practice of reason-giving and justification, telling their readers what the Constitutional Treaty stands for: whether it is useful or not (instrumental justifications), good or bad (value-based justification), and just or unjust (rights-based justification).⁸ Avoiding justification is, of course, also a way of avoiding political contestation. The issue is simply treated as non-controversial, as non-political. This consensual style in representing EU constitution-making is further reflected in the low degree of interdiscursivity of commentaries.⁹ Actors' relationships, confrontations or cooperation are only highlighted in exceptional cases; different positions in the debate are not systematically linked to each other.

The actual use of justifications does not necessarily display a divide between the defence of an interest-, value-, or rights-based European Union. In most cases, the project of EU constitution-making is promoted by reference to instrumentality and efficiency. Critique is predominantly linked to instrumental reasoning, but also evokes principles of universal justice and rights or defends contextualised identities. Instrumental reasoning is primarily used to express pro-European attitudes, but also to criticise the insufficiencies of governmental performance in not defending the common interest or by not complying with the functional requirements of European integration. From the perspective of justice and rights, the concern is less with the merits of EU citizenship and democracy than with EU elitism, inequality and the suppression of popular sovereignty. An elitist Europe is the shared object of critique, but different emphasis is placed on the EU's social and welfare dimensions. Only one newspaper (the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*) regularly defends the Constitutional Treaty on the basis of democracy and rights, yet combined with a strong criticism of the disregard of European integration for the primary needs and belongings of the citizens.

Instead of providing justifications, the media voice is based on more indirect judgments which are contained in the particular story lines and interpretations that make up the constitutional debate. In our analysis, this implicit way of constructing the meaning of EU constitution-making is reconstructed through the exploration of particular frames of interpretation. The reference to frames as ready-made interpretative packages to be

⁸ A similar finding is reported from media claims-making analysis of constitutional debates. Only about one third of the claims raised by individual or collective actors in the media were justified (Vetters et al. 2006)

⁹ It should be mentioned however that an element of transnational discursivity is introduced by the frequent practice of guest-commenting, which all newspapers make use of. Brüggemann et al. (2006) use guest commentaries as an indicator for the inter-discursivity of an emerging European public sphere.

applied in public discourse allows journalists to emphasize particular worldviews without entering into a practice of reason giving and justification for a clear yes or no. Frames are patterns of interpretation and meaning that can be used to build larger story lines, in which particular opinions and arguments are embedded. They are not to be taken for opinions or justifications, but rather mark the semantic space for the unfolding of opinion making (Eilders et al. 2004: 27).

We distinguish frames by grouping journalistic statements along three central interpretative dimensions a) the mechanisms of integration/disintegration emphasized, b) the framework for constitutional cooperation/integration highlighted; and c) the role ascribed to constitution-makers in relation to citizens. Articles can make reference to one or several of these dimensions. On this basis, we deduct eight frames that were consistently applied in structuring journalistic discourse and interpretations across the different media spheres¹⁰: (a) the adversarial frame; (b) the compromise-equilibrium frame; (c) the destiny/no choice frame; (d) the social rights/welfare frame; (e) the neo-liberal/economic competition frame; (f) the citizenship/ rights frame; (g) the heroic frame; and (h) the elite against the people frame.

(a) The *adversarial frame* centers on the diversity of actors' interests that give rise to conflict. Such conflict is seen as the constitutive feature of the EU. Correspondingly, constitution-making is interpreted as a power play between top politicians who gain and lose in the defence of strategic interests and the fight for voters' preferences. The Convention, the IGC, and the campaign for ratification are instances of this strategic game that consists of building temporary coalitions and compromises, accumulating personal advantages and imposing interests on others.

In media coverage of EU constitution-making, the dominant elite consensus in most countries has not supported strategic news framing. This restricts the use of the adversarial frame in commenting. Journalists have only limited scope to portray ratification as a power game between political elites, but rather tend to use the adversarial frame as a kind of background understanding of European integration as fundamentally conflict-driven. From this point of view, the adversarial frame is predominantly used with a diagnostic accent illustrating the heterogeneity of the member states and the incompatibility of national interests. In some cases, it is also used as a negative template, as something that belongs to the 'old' Europe and that should be overcome through the expression of the common will of the Europeans in ratifying the treaty.

(b) The *compromise-equilibrium frame* is in many ways the counterpart of the adversarial frame. It conceives of the EU and its constitutional project as an accommodation of different interests, a balance of power, a fragile compromise, and an outcome of complex bargaining that nevertheless creates some stability and order. The legitimacy of the EU stems from its heterarchical structure and is based on a mixture of different legitimacy principles (contributions by the European Parliament, the national Parliaments, governments, etc.). The Constitutional Treaty is

¹⁰ Our approach to re-constructing frames from media discourse is purely deductive. In a first reading of the data, journalistic statements are typified along these three dimensions making the underlying schemata of interpretation recognisable. In employing these frames, the aim can of course not be to build coherence of media discourse but to categorize different and often contradictory schemes of interpretation that shape public perceptions of the EU.

seen as a technical instrument guaranteeing the smooth functioning of a complex institutional architecture and promoting efficient governance.

The compromise-equilibrium frame is used both to defend and attack the treaty, as well as to promote different visions of the Union. As such, it is compatible both with an intergovernmental and a supranational vision of the EU. In most cases, this interpretative frame was used to support constitutionalisation as an attempt to re-establish the European equilibrium in light of recent challenges of political integration and enlargement. Fundamental treaty reform should therefore be strived for to redefine the coherence of the multi-level system of governance.

(c) The *destiny/no choice frame* focuses on the Constitutional Treaty as something automatic and inevitable that is needed for functional reasons or as an absolute normative priority, and as the only viable option for Europe. The Treaty is presented either as the rational agreement of deliberation in the Convention or as the fruit of complex intergovernmental bargaining that should not be exposed to further contestation in public debate. European integration is generally perceived as the realm of necessity and functional requirements, not as the realm of political choice. If the road towards constitutionalisation is predestined, a negative referendum means a momentary setback for European integration. In many defiant statements made by the protagonists of European constitution-making, this implies an expression of disregard for the vote of the people.

Remarkably, the destiny/no-choice frame was most widely used in France, i.e. in the only country in our sample where the people actually had a choice. In France, a slogan has been created for this: 'pensée unique', i.e. the dominance of a European dogma according to which the 'no' is excluded for its fatal consequences. Even where journalists recognize that the no-camp is right in blaming the many insufficiencies of the Constitutional Treaty, the 'yes' is still regarded as compulsory for lack of any better alternative. By this account referenda are rendered superfluous since they take place in a no-choice context, in which the yes-option is framed as rational consensus, constructive and progressive, and the no-option as irrational, destructive and regressive.

(d) The *social rights/welfare frame* emphasizes the Constitutional Treaty's role of providing a framework for welfare, the fight against unemployment, and a guarantee of economic stability and growth. The EU is seen as a service provider for European citizens, it protects citizens from economic risks in the context of unbound competition and globalisation.

The social rights/welfare frame is used with least frequency by the journalists. This is somewhat surprising considering that social issues were put forward as one of the main reasons for the French and to some extent also the Dutch rejection of the Constitutional Treaty. In France, where the welfare dimension was brought in by the no-campaign (Ivaldi 2006) the journalists took a defensive attitude in either avoiding the issue altogether¹¹ or defending the merits of the Treaty in laying the grounds for a future expansion of EU competencies in this field.

In other countries, the welfare dimension is taken up only indirectly and discussed as a typical French concern, which has little or no relevance for other member states.

¹¹ In total, only five references to this frame were found in the two French newspapers.

This different emphasis on the social rights/welfare dimension points to a latent cleavage in EU constitution-making, which is not only determined by competing interests among the governments of the Member States, but also by diametrically opposed expectations among the different constituencies. Commentaries hint at such fundamental dissent but do not offer a forum to mediate between the positions.

(e) The *neo-liberal-economic competition frame* sees the EU basically as a market for competition as well as for the exchange of goods and explicitly *not* as a political Union. The Constitutional Treaty can be seen as providing insufficient solutions or simply be seen as unnecessary for the completion of the internal market.

In France, this frame becomes the negative template of an EU concerned mainly with market building (*l'Europe liberale*). Nevertheless, journalists seem rather reluctant to join the campaign against the neo-liberal market Europe, a campaign mainly led by the political left as the principal argument for rejecting the treaty. Instead, political commentators use the frame in a diagnostic way to explain the result of the referendum. Some British journalists construct a story in which market-building and constitution-making are seen as mutually exclusive. Growth and competitiveness are presented as what should constitute the core of the integration project. The rejection of the treaty in the referenda is thus welcomed as Britain's chance to launch a different Union or even roll back European integration.

Although the affirmative use of the neoliberal frame is most apparent in Britain, also the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in Germany and *Le Monde* in France argue that market orientation and the completion of the internal market have been the cornerstones of the European integration process from its inception. From the continental perspective, however, only few would argue that economic growth and competition are superior to the political and normative integration into a common constitutional framework. As a result, the British vision of a liberal market Europe is difficult to reconcile with mainstream media debates in other member states.

(f) The *citizenship/rights frame* emphasizes the Constitutional Treaty as a new supranational framework for individual or collective rights. Its main contribution consists in promoting European citizenship, rights and participation, thereby strengthening the democratic components of the newly emerging polity. Europe is seen as a space for participation of European citizens and for the enhancement of democracy.

The commentaries in our sample mention the democratic component in an unspecified way usually evoking the democratic deficits of the EU but not expressing their preferences for a particular democratic design or procedure (participatory, representative, deliberative, etc.). All in all, the interpretative context of citizenship, rights and democracy was less frequently referred to than one would generally expect in a process of constitution-making. One reason for this relates to the non-controversial nature of the issues at stake. There can be only little debate about the general importance of fundamental rights to be enshrined in the treaty, and the substance of European citizenship also remained principally untouched, with no substantial amendment to the legal provisions already established by previous Treaty reform. Secondly, the modest frequency of the citizenship/ rights frame can be explained by the timing of constitution-making, which, at the time of our analysis, had entered the stage of ratification. Consequently, most articles were preoccupied with the process of ratification and its possible outcome, rather than evaluating the content of the treaty.

The media were much more concerned with how to secure people's consent and what strategy would be conducive to ratifying the Treaty, not however what normative criteria the process would have to fulfil in order to secure democratic legitimacy.

(g) The *heroic frame* focuses on the moral integrity of EU constitutional entrepreneurs linked to the high value of the constitutional project. Constitution-makers are the heralds of a better future who fight for the common good of the Europeans. As such they stand in the tradition of the founding fathers, whose mission they carry on. The project of European integration here assumes a value of its own; it is portrayed as something worth fighting for. Perceived as an historic achievement 'without precedents in the history of humankind' (Figaro, 27.10.04), the constitution for the united Europe has been shaped by the heroic deeds of the grand Europeans, but at the same time is also perceived as the logical outcome of the history of European integration which has created commonality and a strong commitment for one another:

The heroic frame was primarily used in the context of the signing of the Constitutional Treaty in Rome. Journalists typically refer to the grand achievement of the founding fathers, the milestones of treaty reform as well as the Union's economic and political success. The signing of the Treaty in Rome becomes a key event that is repeatedly commemorated in later contributions. Ratification thus creates its own 'heroic' history with major accomplishments such as the signing of the treaty or the Spanish referendum as constituting a collective practice of commemoration. The heroic frame also brings in an additional element of drama with the outlook of a 'no' (or two 'no') as a kind of historic rupture in the success story of European integration. As such, it is used by all newspapers except for the UK, where the *future* potential of the Union is given a stronger emphasis, rather than evoking its historic dimension and its past achievements.

(h) The *elite against the people frame* is by far the most frequent interpretative device in discussing the constitution-making process across countries and newspapers. This frame is based on the assumption that the will of the people is different from the one expressed by European elites. The Constitutional Treaty is seen as yet another example of a political class out of touch with ordinary citizens. European elites fundamentally misrepresent the will of the people. European integration is seen as driven by anonymous market forces or by a 'new political and media aristocracy' (Figaro, 27.05.05) that affects people's life.

In defending the rights and identities of the people, referenda are interpreted as upheavals of popular sovereignty against the elitism of the EU. The 'No' is perceived as a victory of democracy over the relentless train of Eurocracy or over the conspiracy of European elites. It is an act of resistance against the 'no-choice ideology' and the consequential logics of European integration.

There are some noteworthy country specifica in the use of the elite against the people frame. In Germany, the frame is only 'discovered' in the aftermath of the referendum and used as an interpretative tool to make sense of ratification failure. In light of the deep disillusion of most commentators as 'convinced Europeans', this frame is used to introduce a new spirit of fatalism that sees the European project close to failure. In the two Norwegian newspapers, the overall dominance of this frame reflects the importance of the issue of popular sovereignty for mainstream Euroscepticism that had already been decisive in the two referenda campaigns of 1972 and 1994. The elite

against the people frame is surprisingly least diffused in the two French newspapers despite the fact that the Constitutional Treaty in France had been subjected to more intense debate and public scrutiny than in any other country. A possible explanation relates to the high levels of external politicization in the French referendum debate. Since the condemning of the elite bias of European integration played a prominent role in the French 'no-campaign', journalists opted for a more neutral position in the debate.

Mediatization and Politicization

In the ratification period of the Constitutional Treaty, the European Union and its Member States went through a relatively short but still decisive process of politicization.¹² Politicization implies that the EU constitution becomes the focal point for the expression of societal opposition and resistance. As such, the constitutional debate that unfolded in the months prior to the French and Dutch referenda was largely at odds with the general patterns of politicization carried by mainstream political parties and institutions, which in most Member States gave preference to a consensual style of settling EU constitutional issues (Mair 2005). The referenda campaigns thus developed as a rather unusual case of bottom-up politicization carried mainly by non-institutional and peripheral actors (Zürn 2006). Do our findings support the thesis of a political commitment of journalism to the aims and ideals of European integration? To what extent was politicization in the ratification process supported or even stirred up by political journalists? Did journalists offer themselves as amplifiers of popular contention or did they instead seek to calm down and demobilize their readers?

Our findings point to a possible discrepancy between politicization measured in terms of societal contention and mediatization measured in terms of media amplification of political conflicts and debates. In our empirical survey, we used different indicators to measure the level of conflict in the media debates on EU constitution-making (position of the author, style of commenting, actor- or issue-focus, rhetoric tools). In general, these indicators revealed a low inclination of journalists to become involved in politicization, and a preference to take a neutral, informative-educative role instead. Little evidence was found of individual journalists taking an active role in campaigning either in favour of or against the Constitutional Treaty (with the exception of the *Times* and to some extent also the *Guardian*). The cross-country comparison of the findings further indicated that the referenda did not fundamentally change this passive-mediating attitude of political journalists. Only few journalists took the opportunity of European referenda to take a more active, political role in the debate about Europe.

The common assumption that mediatization has increased the likelihood of politicization of EU issues, slowly undermining the consensus culture of the EU (Meyer 2005), was thus not confirmed by our data. Contrary to our expectations, politicization and mediatization did not support each other. In fact, our data point to the possibility of a negative correlation. In countries with a high level of politicization such as France and to some extent Sweden, many journalists decided to step back in the debate. By contrast, in countries where the constitutional choice was not contended in the political arena (e.g. Germany and the UK), the media voice became more salient. In this latter

¹² Intensified political debate across all member states was mainly restricted to a short peak of the three weeks around the French and Dutch referendum.

case, the willingness of political journalists to become engaged in critical role-taking did actually increase in the course of the debate. Lacking domestic politicization was at least partially substituted by enhanced mediatization pushed forward by political journalists as the main promoters of constitutional debates in their countries.

The resonance of the French case is of particular relevance for understanding the dynamics of mediatization in other countries. Politicization in France had a kind of substitute function for other Member States where similar opportunities were not given. The French debate was not only closely observed by all newspapers, journalists also identified with the issues and concerns that were raised in the French debate and used them to open a forum for domestic debate. In particular the results of the two referenda were taken as representative of the deep gulf between the EU and its citizens and furthermore as a clear indicator of a crisis that affected the whole of Europe. Journalists thus did not fall into the trap of interpreting ratification failure as merely domestic events caused by the internal dynamics of the French and Dutch debates. While it was recognised that such domestic factors (e.g. the unpopularity of Chirac) also played a role, journalists were ready to politicize EU constitution-making on the basis of the more general concerns that were raised in the debate and that affected the whole of Europe.

Conclusion

Our research findings point to a rather differentiated picture with regard to politicization in the ratification period, which was only supported and amplified *in part* by the media. The diversification of nationalized ratification procedures was a major obstacle for the timing of parallel debates about the EU constitutional project and the initiation of discursive exchange between the member states. Even though we could observe a general commitment on the part of journalists to become engaged in normative debates about the democratic and constitutional design of Europe, the expectation of an entrepreneurial role of political journalists in actively promoting European integration was not confirmed. In contrast to earlier debates, where journalists were found to display an attitude of 'progressive Europeanism' (Trenz 2007), the ratification period was marked by a critical distance of the media. Except for the British *Times* and Swedish *Svenska Dagbladet* the great majority of European journalists expressed generally pro-European attitudes, but did not identify closely with the project of EU constitution-making. On the other hand, journalists did not amplify popular discontent with European integration either. The critical voice was mainly taken up in the aftermath of the referenda as part of reflecting on how to overcome the gap between the EU and its citizens.

If commentaries are supposed to be a site for the critical and representative function of newspaper journalism, it must be concluded that quality newspapers were not at the forefront of popular contention for or against the project of EU constitution-making. Journalists were primarily engaged as expert actors and used the commentary for giving advice. Advice is two-directional: criticising political choices on the basis of better alternatives and enhancing public knowledge and educating the public. Not surprisingly, quality newspapers generally chose an attitude of critical distance and were not ready to amplify popular resentment against the EU. In commentaries, quality newspaper journalists speak to the political elite and not to the people. By detaching public *reasoning* from popular *voice* in the ratification period,

they gained argumentative strength, but created a situation of potential misrepresentation. This was partially corrected after the referenda results and used for a critical reflection on the EU communication and democratic deficit.

The result of the French referendum may be used as an indicator for measuring media impact on shaping voter preferences. The French negative vote *against* the overwhelmingly positive voice expressed in the media would thus expose the bankruptcy of journalism as an instrument for public opinion formation (Fossum and Schlesinger 2007). Journalists were accused of no longer being the fourth estate that controls power in the name of the public interest, but one of many interest actors trying to shape public life. Rather than controlling public opinion, quality newspapers in countries like France thus became the negative template of public opinion. Their commitment to rational discourse was embedded in a strategy of distinction that allied progressive Europeans with the elite readerships of the newspapers and that dissociated them from the anti-European popular mass publics. The media's defence of reason and objectivity alienated substantial parts of the public who felt that their concerns were being marginalized. The recognition of the people's deeply rooted Euroscepticism entails the need for more popular news formats, which will inevitably enter a trade-off with deliberative reasoning.

If the French case stood for a temporary decoupling of politicization and mediatization through quality newspapers, the opposite relationship was found in other European countries. The general impression based on our data is that journalists promoted constitutional debates in the absence of domestic contention. They there-by raised the voice of their respective publics against domestic governmental or partisan actors who were still reluctant to become engaged in the constitutional debate.

However, facing the lack of domestic contention, the French and Dutch referenda generated much more media commenting than the respective national ratification debates. Subsequently, the French debate functioned as a surrogate debate, allowing the newspapers to raise some fundamental questions with regard to the present and future of European integration and the normative options implied in it. Although it remains clear that the majority of the journalists in our sample were supportive of the European integration project and by and large also of the Constitutional Treaty, the way the EU and the member states handled the constitutional ratification process was subjected to rather massive criticism.

In most newspapers, the critical and the representative voice of the media are combined with an anti-elitist attitude of blaming the technocratic character of European integration. However, the amplification of popular discontent and contention through journalists remained restricted to the single and unique opportunity of referenda, which resonated across the European space and took a substitutive function for politicization in other member states. The voice of the people against the constitutional project imposed from above was articulated and amplified at one short moment in time and linked to parallel and interconnected debates across the European space.

The question is whether this short-term commitment of political journalism in making and representing public opinion on European integration will also predominate in debates to come. Is political journalism ready to challenge European governance and give popular discontent a regular voice? Will mediatization and politicization of

European integration converge and in the long run lead to regular debates and contention about the EU? The low intensity of the debates that followed in the so-called reflection period gives reason for scepticism. The negative votes in the French and Dutch referenda might therefore not be seen as the beginning of the belated and long expected politicization of the EU (Mair 2005; Zürn 2006). In light of our research findings, they rather mark the endpoints of the relatively short and still exceptional politicization of the EU.

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