

# Competitive Representative Claims-making: Party Politicians and Institutional Factors in the Case of EU Budget Negotiations

---

To be presented at the EUSA Conference, 3-5 March 2011, Boston

Pieter de Wilde

WZB, Social Science Research Center Berlin

[dewilde@wzb.eu](mailto:dewilde@wzb.eu)

## ***Abstract***

This study provides an empirical comparative case study of representative claims-making in EU budget negotiations. Two questions are addressed in this paper. First, the paper asks what the role of elected or appointed partisan politicians is in comparison to other representatives. This question is relevant given the reported increasing importance of non-elected representatives. Secondly, the paper asks what the influence of institutional factors is on the practice of representative claims-making. As representative claims-making unfolds in the public sphere, the institutional factors of the public sphere may affect both the claimants it provides a platform for as well as constituencies represented. The paper finds that politicians continue to perform a crucial role in representation, both with regards to their prominence in the public sphere and with regards to the plurality of constituencies represented in their claims. Although institutional factors clearly affect claimants, there are much less pronounced – though noticeable – differences in the constituencies represented in different public spheres. The overall picture is one of a highly plural representative space in which multiple claimants compete with each other to get their message across. In doing so, claimants address the interests of multiple constituencies. It may well be the inherent competition among claimants, fostered by institutional factors, that ensures the plurality of the EU representative space.

# 1. Introduction

Perhaps the most (in)famous claim in EU politics is Margaret Thatcher's statement of 'I want my money back'. The former UK Prime Minister made this claim in the context of negotiations on the EU multi-annual budget at the time of the EU Fontainebleau summit, in 1984. The claim was widely reported by mass media throughout Europe, and has resonated in EU budget negotiations ever since. It has strengthened an understanding of EU budget negotiations as highly conflictuous intergovernmental battles concerning Member States' net-contributions (Dür and Mateo, 2008; Laffan, 1997; 2000; Lindner, 2006). Literally, the claim makes no sense as Mrs. Thatcher had no personal money invested in the EU. Yet, it is clear to all observers that she was in fact not talking about her own money, nor would she personally like to receive funds from the EU. Rather, she made an argument for the reduction of financial contributions of the United Kingdom to the EU budget. The statement presented herself – the claimant – as a representative of the UK – the constituency – in the public sphere and is thus an example of a practice referred to as representative claims-making (Saward, 2006).

Theory about political representation has recently drawn attention to this practice of representative claims-making. The argument is that representation ought to be understood as a dynamic interrelationship between representatives and represented, which is constituted through discourse in the public sphere (Hendriks, 2009; Pollak et al., 2009; Rehfeld, 2006; Saward, 2006; 2009; Taylor, 2010). That is, representation should not be solely understood as a static relationship between elected politicians and voters, constituted through periodic elections. Instead, a dynamic understanding of representation is necessary in light of two trends facing western democracies. First, growing international

interdependencies as a result of globalisation problematise the principle of territorial representation on which nation-state democracy is founded. Decisions made by representatives of nation-states now carry consequences for people in other nation-states, even though they have no say in who is representing them. Secondly, elected politicians are losing their monopoly on representation as trust in political parties is declining throughout the west (Citrin, 1974; Katz and Mair, 1995). The two trends increasingly lead to blurred channels of representation and prominent roles for non-elected representatives in politics. A prime example is U2 singer Bono claiming to represent 'Africa' in his 'Making Poverty History' campaign (Saward, 2009). Of course, if Bono is to present himself as representative of Africa, he needs a platform to reach out to a wider audience. This brings us back to the public sphere in which representative claims-making unfolds and raises the question of how existing institutions structuring the public sphere provide a platform for different claimants to profile themselves.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to this dynamic understanding of representation by conducting an in-depth empirical case study of representative claims-making in EU practice. Two questions raised in the literature will be addressed. The first question concerns the extent to which representative claims-making in western democracies is still primarily conducted by elected or appointed party politicians (Hendriks, 2009; Schmitter, 2009). Secondly, the question is to what extent different institutional factors such as mass media affect the nature of representative claims-making (Pollak et al., 2009, p. 23), for instance by providing a platform for certain representatives while excluding others.

This paper investigates these two questions in the case of EU budget negotiations. It does so through a comparative study of claims-making in the media and parliaments of the Netherlands, Denmark and Ireland in the three most recent multi-annual budget

negotiations. The EU budget affects a plurality of constituencies in the EU, multiple levels of government and has consequences for people living outside the EU (Begg, 2005; Laffan, 1997; Lindner, 2006). It is a package deal of all EU revenues and expenditures. Expenditures include funds for farmers (Common Agricultural Policy) and poorer regions (Structural Funds), as well as EU administrative costs, development funds and nature preservation policy. The question of revenues concerns tax payers throughout the EU as well as the balance between richer, net-contributing Member States, and poorer net-recipient Member States. The EU budget thus provides an interesting case for the study of representative claims-making as it potentially concerns multiple representatives and multiple constituencies in a continuously developing representative space.

## **2. Competitive Representative Claims-making**

Students of democratic political representation in the EU have largely followed a traditional focus on elections (Katz and Wessels, 1999; Schmitt and Thomassen, 1999). This includes empirical comparative work on the demographics and opinions of political elites and citizens. Thus, Thomassen and Schmitt (1999) conclude that European Parliament elections do not function well as a representation mechanism since campaigns are not fought over European issues. However, although the mechanism is faulty, the result is normatively acceptable in as far as Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) do not significantly differ on left – right economic issues from the average voter (Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999).

Yet, in political theory beyond EU studies, a more dynamic understanding of representation has recently been developed (Hendriks, 2009; Pollak et al., 2009; Rehfeld, 2006; Saward, 2006; 2009). Here the focus is more on the act, rather than the result of

representation. In the words of Michael Saward (2006, p. 298): *“We need to move away from the idea that representation is first and foremost a given, factual product of elections, rather than a precarious and curious sort of claim about a dynamic relationship.”* This focus on the representative claim is particularly warranted, given the alleged decline of elected party political representatives in parliaments and governments whose legitimacy is based on clearly territorially demarcated constituencies. In a globalising world with increasing interdependencies among countries, people are affected by political decisions while not having voting rights in the relevant elections. Some non-elected representatives take up this perceived injustice (Saward, 2009). Elected political representatives have become further marginalised as a result of increasing technological complexity of policy issues. This has made professional experts and their networks increasingly important (Hendriks, 2009). Schmitter (2009), on the other hand, upholds that despite such developments, representation in ‘real existing western democracies’ is still dominated by political parties competing for office. These developments thus support an understanding of representation as act rather than result in which the importance of elected political elites ought to be questioned, rather than taken for granted.

Representatives need not necessarily be elected in order to be legitimate representatives. Rather, they need to be accepted in their roles by the relevant audience (Rehfeld, 2006). The question is thus how (would be) representatives reach out to this wider audience. Therefore, this paper aims to look at acts of representation in the public sphere – or ‘representative claims’ (Saward, 2006; 2009) – through which the EU’s representative space is shaped and altered in public discourse (Trenz, 2009). Just like electoral rules affect the representative outcome and functioning of elections, so do institutions of the public sphere affect representative claims-making. Thus, understanding the public sphere as an

arena where a representative space is constantly reshaped and reproduced, directs our attention to ways in which the institutional factors of the public sphere affect this practice (Pollak et al., 2009, p. 23).

Two primary institutions structuring the European public sphere in which representative claims-making unfolds are mass media and national parliaments (Eriksen and Fossum, 2002; Fraser, 1992). Mass media have come to dominate political communication in western societies, transforming modern politics into mediated politics (Altheide, 2004; Bennett and Entman, 2001). A range of different representatives have incentives to make the news with their claims on EU issues. This is so, not only because trust in political parties in Europe has been declining, but also because the under defined and continuously developing political nature of the EU forces both national and European politicians to seek legitimacy through reaching out to the public (Morgan, 2005). Yet, mass media operate under media logics making them non-neutral transmitters of representative claims. It is well known that media particularly report on personalised conflict (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). Also, quality journalists often aim to present 'both sides of the story', thus providing a platform for a plurality of representatives (Donsbach and Patterson, 2004). In short, mass media provide a competitive space, both in terms of which representatives make the news and in terms of emphasising conflict between them. The parliamentary arena is also characterised by institutionalised conflict. Here, different political parties compete for office and policies with the ever looming prospect of the next elections. This stimulates inter-party competition (King, 1976; Lijphart, 1999; Schumpeter, 1976). In the language of representative claims-making, elected party politicians in parliament have an incentive to present themselves as prime representatives of certain constituencies and challenge similar claims made by other parties.

This paper therefore places a focus on competition at the centre of the study of representative claims-making. A mapping of competitive representative claims-making in practice is necessary in order to answer the two central research questions of this paper. The analysis of the role of party politicians and institutional factors in representative claims-making first requires answering a basic descriptive question: who claims to represent whom on relevant EU issues in the public sphere, how often, and where? In terms of amounts of claims, this will consequently allow for the comparison of how prominent different claimants are and to what extent they engage in addressing the interests of multiple constituencies. Furthermore, it will allow for the analysis of how prominent different constituencies feature in representative claims and whether they are claimed to be represented by multiple claimants or are rather monopolised by a single claimant.

### **3. The Case of EU Budget Negotiations: Data and Method**

The EU may be considered an ideal laboratory for studying patterns in representative claims-making for several reasons. First, the EU itself as a composite polity is characterised by three channels of representation (Lord and Pollak, 2010; Lord, 2007; Norris, 1997). Citizens directly elect the European Parliament and the different national parliaments. Furthermore, they are informally represented by interest groups, social movements and NGOs. Secondly, the EU as a polity itself remains constantly under development. It is as of yet unclear and contested what kind of polity the EU is and what it will become in the future. As a result, there are multiple competing representatives in need of legitimating themselves in the eyes of the wider public (Morgan, 2005). These representatives have a continuous incentive to establish a publically acknowledged role for them in the EU's developing political system.

EU budget negotiations involve representatives from all three channels and, due to their periodic renegotiation, provide a picture of historical developments in the EU. The European Commission has sole right of initiative and interest groups such as farmers' associations have an opportunity to influence the drafting of the proposals. Then, the different components of the financial perspectives are negotiated in the relevant Council of Ministers leading up to a unanimous decision on the whole package in the European Council. As the decision rests on unanimity, every national parliament has an opportunity to effectively control their government's action in the Council. Finally, following the Council decision, the package is renegotiated between the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission resulting in an Inter Institutional Agreement. The periodic renegotiation of the budget, the involvement of a broad range of legislative actors from all three channels of representation, and the broad effects on multiple contributing and recipient constituencies make the EU Budget a highly interesting case for studying competitive representative claims-making (Laffan, 1997; Lindner, 2006).

In order to isolate and contextualise patterns in competitive representative claims-making, the present study builds on an embedded comparative case study design (Yin, 2003). Since a key characteristic of the representative claim is that an audience is able to observe the claim being made, a study of representative claims-making in the public sphere is conducted. There is as of yet little evidence of a single overarching European public sphere since there are few significant European-wide media outlets (Fossum and Schlesinger, 2007; Wessler et al., 2008). Rather, public spheres remain largely national in scope. A comparative study of national public spheres is thus necessary. In order to control for country specific characteristics that might affect representative claims on the EU budget, this study includes data from the Netherlands, Denmark and Ireland. These three countries resemble a net-



contributing country (Netherlands), a country receiving more or less as much from EU funds as it contributes (Denmark), and a net-recipient country (Ireland). To isolate possible institutional factors, both plenary parliamentary debates and newspaper articles are included. Finally, to minimise idiosyncrasies caused by unique events, data is collected from three different budget negotiations. This includes the three most recent negotiations on the financial perspectives of 'Delors II' (negotiated between February 1992 and December 1992), 'Agenda 2000' (July 1997 – March 1993) and 'Financial Perspectives 2007-2013' (February 2004 – December 2005). To summarise, the embedded comparative case study includes data from three different countries with different net-contributions to the budget, two of the most prominent institutionalised public spheres and the three most recent budget negotiations.

Taking into account the operationalisation of a representative claim by Saward (2006), this study builds on the empirically tested method of claims-making analysis (Koopmans, 2002; Koopmans and Statham, 1999) as a specific form of qualitative content analysis. A claim is defined as a unit of strategic or communicative action in the public sphere: *'... which articulate[s] political demands, decisions, implementations, calls to action, proposals, criticisms, or physical attacks, which, actually or potentially, affect the interests or integrity of the claimants and/or other collective actors in a policy field'* (Statham, 2005, p. 12). The archetypical claim would be a verbal speech act concerning some political good that could be loosely translated as: "I (do not) want ...". However, the definition above is far more inclusive, including claims such as meetings of the European Council, protests by farmers, resolutions tabled by parliaments and critical comments by journalists. In textual terms, a claim can be as short as a few words, or as elaborate as several paragraphs, as long as it is

made by the same claimant(s), making a single argument on a single topic related to the EU budget.

Coded variables of claims include WHERE and WHEN, WHO makes a claim, on WHAT, HOW, addressing WHOM, for/against WHOSE interests and WHY. Of particular importance for the present analysis are the claimant variables ('WHO') and constituency variables ('WHOSE interests'). It should be noted here that although all claims are made by a claimant in a particular time and space, not all claims are representative claims in the sense that they include an explicitly stated constituency. Only representative claims, including an explicitly stated constituency potentially affected by the claim, are included in the analysis. Further note that a representative claim in the definition used here does not always advance the interests of the mentioned constituency. A claim can also explicitly target the interests of a particular constituency, claimed to be illegitimate or overrepresented.

A sample of newspaper articles and parliamentary debates was coded using ATLAS.ti software, which were consequently exported to PASW/SPSS for quantitative analysis. The newspapers included in the sampling are *NRC Handelsblad*, *Trouw* and *Algemeen Dagblad* for the Netherlands; *Berlingske Tidene*, *Politikken* and *B.T.* for Denmark; and *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* for Ireland. This study thus incorporates both quality and sensation-oriented newspapers of different political signature in all three countries. As differences between quality and sensation outlets are larger than between different media – e.g. TV and newspapers – this sample arguably forms a representative sample of national media (Semetko et al., 2001). Newspaper articles and plenary debates were sampled from digitalised archives using the search string: “European budget” OR “EC / EU budget” OR “Delors II / Agenda 2000 / financial perspectives”, with the exception of plenary debates from 1992 in the Netherlands and Denmark, which were manually selected from the physical

archives of the *Tweede Kamer* and *Folketinget*. For the Netherlands and Denmark, every fourth newspaper article in chronological order and all plenary debates were selected for coding. Sampling for Ireland was twice as restrictive to cope with a larger amount of data. In total, 462 newspaper articles and 133 parliamentary debates were coded, resulting in 4435 claims<sup>1</sup>. Of these 4435 claims, 2129 (48%) contained explicit references to constituencies and are thus defined as representative claims.

## 4. Claimants and Constituencies

Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview of representative claims made in the media and parliaments respectively during EU budget negotiations. In the discussion of the data provided in Tables 1 and 2, attention will first be drawn to the presence of different claimants – or representatives – in both the media and in parliament. Secondly, the presence of constituencies – or represented – in both forums will be discussed. Furthermore, this descriptive discussion will be related to the two central questions of this paper: what is the role of elected or appointed party politicians as representatives in EU budget negotiations and how is competitive representative claims-making affected by the institutional factors structuring the public sphere?

Table 1 about here

---

<sup>1</sup> The codebook, the heuristic ATLAS.ti files and the SPSS database can be obtained from the author upon request.

Table 2 about here

#### **4.1. Claimants**

Interestingly, the most prominent representatives in the media (29,6% of all representative claims; Table 1) are those representing other Member States. Typically, such representatives are government executives, such as Prime Ministers, Finance Ministers or Presidents. For example, discussing the ratification process of the Maastricht Treaty, the *Irish Independent* reported that: *'Spanish Premier Felipe Gonzalez was a major driving force behind the planning for the [Cohesion] fund and his government feels that Spain has not received its proper share of EC [European Community] aid in the past.'* (Downing, 1992). We find similar claims in Danish news, as exemplified by a claim reported in *Berlingske Tidene*: *'Countries like Germany and Sweden, which pay considerably more to the EU than they get back, are at this moment fighting with all they have got to restrict the EU budget.'*<sup>2</sup> (Kragh, 2004). As these examples underline, EU budget negotiations were often portrayed as struggles between different Member State governments (cf. De Wilde, 2010). Particularly prominent are the 'big three': Germany, France and the UK, but also the Spanish government prominently featured in the news as representative of poorer Member States (Laffan, 2000). This finding may be considered interesting given that media cater to national audiences and therefore usually tend to emphasise domestic actors and interests (Hurrelmann et al., 2009). In this perspective, the relative prominence of international actors is remarkable. It needs to be noted here, however, that all three countries included in the sample are smaller Member States and the relative prominence of foreign actors may have been lower in German,

---

<sup>2</sup> Lande som Tyskland og Sverige, der indbetaler væsentligt mere til EU, end de får tilbage, kæmper i øjeblikket med alle midler for at få begrænset EU-budgettet, som i overordnede træk fastlægges for seks år ad gangen.

French or UK news. Besides governments of other Member States, prominent roles in the news were performed by the EU (European Council, rotating Presidency, European Parliament) (19,0% of representative claims) and the European Commission as key initiator of the negotiations (18,9%). For example, Commission President Delors claimed to represent poorer Member States in particular when presenting Delors II: *'Delors wants to take into account differences in welfare within the EC. He demands a larger share of GDP from Member States. Obligatory VAT contributions from EC capitals can then be reduced. Poorer Member States, where a larger share of income is consumed than in rich countries, will profit from this.'*<sup>3</sup> (Aben, 1992). The national government would typically be quoted in response to the claims of EU officials and other Member State governments (17,5% of representative claims in the media), in particular concerning the 'national interest': *"What is on the table now is unacceptable for the Netherlands," argued Balkenende after yesterday's government meeting. The government wants a significantly lower contribution to Europe than foreseen in the compromise tabled by Juncker, the Prime Minister of Luxembourg. "These proposals are unthinkable. They mean no significant improvement of the Dutch net-contribution," the Prime Minister stated.*<sup>4</sup> (Trouw, 2005). The national government regularly performs a dual representative role in the media. It defends the national interest in EU framework while at the same time defending the EU interest against domestic critics. The Irish Prime Minister

---

<sup>3</sup> Delors wil meer dan voorheen rekening houden met verschillen in welvaart binnen de EG. Hij verlangt van de lidstaten een groter deel (om precies te zijn 1,37 procent) van hun bruto nationaal product (nu is dat bijna 1,15 procent). De verplichte BTW-afdrachten uit de EG-hoofdsteden kunnen dan omlaag. De armere landen, waar inwoners een groter deel van hun inkomen consumeren dan in rijke landen, zullen daarvan profiteren.

<sup>4</sup> "Wat er nu ligt is voor Nederland een onbegaanbare weg," zei Balkenende gisteren na afloop van de wekelijkse ministerraad. Het kabinet wil een fors mindere afdracht aan Europa dan het compromis van de Luxemburgse premier Juncker. Hij heeft voorgesteld de Nederlandse bijdrage met 300 tot 500 miljoen euro te verminderen. "Deze voorstellen zijn ondenkbaar. Ze zijn geen verbetering van de netto-betalingspositie van Nederland," benadrukte de premier.

Bertie Ahern took the effort to write a letter to the *Irish Independent* representing the EU in Ireland while explaining how he and other European executives represented their nation states in the EU: *'These [EU budget] negotiations involve 25 Governments strongly pursuing their specific national interests while at the same time seeking to shape an overall agreement which will better promote those national interests than any Member State could do acting alone. That is what the European Union is about.'* (Ahern, 2005). Finally, a smaller but still significant role was played by journalists (9,0%) and farmers' associations (4,7%). Typically, journalists would take issue in op-eds with what in their eyes appears as irrational or unjust results from ad-hoc intergovernmental negotiations. For example, Danish journalist Ole Bang Nielsen (1998) argued in favour of a more just distribution of EU funds: *'In 2006, the New Member States will receive 14% of the EU budget, including agricultural funds. As the Enlargement will at least include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic with 58 million inhabitants, it is comparable to the 1980s enlargement with Spain, Portugal and Greece. There are today 59 million inhabitants in these three 'poor' Member States, but they receive 30% of EU funds. Candidate countries will not realistically have any influence on this biased distribution of EU funds [...].'*<sup>5</sup>

A clearly different picture emerges in the parliamentary debates (Table 2). Logically, since parliamentary rules generally only allow Members of Parliament and members of the government to take the floor, all claimants fall into the category 'national politicians'. When looking at the prominence of different party families, it is again unsurprising to find the

---

<sup>5</sup> I år 2006 er det beregnet, at de nye medlemslande samlet vil modtage ca. 14 procent af EUs budget, inklusive landbrugsstøtte. Da udvidelsen mindst må antages at omfatte landene Polen, Ungarn og Tjekkiet med i alt 58 mio. indbyggere er den på sin vis at sammenligne med optagelsen af de tre sydeuropæiske lande Spanien, Portugal og Grækenland i 80erne. I disse tre »fattige« EU-lande bor der i dag 59 mio. mennesker, men de modtager næsten 30 pct. af udbetalingerne fra EUs budget. Kandidatlandene kan næppe under optagelsesforhandlingerne nå at få nogen væsentlig indflydelse på denne skæve fordeling af EUs midler [...].

largest political parties of the mainstream centre (Conservatives, Christian Democrats, Liberals and Social Democrats) to be making the most amount of claims. Together, these mainstream parties are responsible for 73,9% of representative claims made in parliament. This reflects their dominance in both parliament and government. A significant share of these claims would be made by government officials outlining their strategy in EU negotiations. Thus, Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern argued how he defended Irish agricultural interests: *'From the outset we have availed of every opportunity to highlight the serious repercussions the [EU budget] reform proposals would have for Irish industry. Beet has long been a valuable cash crop for Irish farmers, as well as playing a significant role in the tillage cycle. Some 3,700 beet growers and producers, whose representatives I met last week, and the 1,000 people employed in the processing sector could be wiped out if the [European] Commission goes ahead with the proposals in this regard.'* (Dáil Éireann, 2005a). Claiming to represent the interests of farmers in the Irish parliament might be considered a no-brainer, since Irish farmers receive large amounts of EU funds contributing to Ireland's status as a net-recipient country. Yet, government – opposition dynamics would even in such cases bring members of the opposition to challenge government by representing alternative interests. In the heat of discussions on Agenda 2000, where major Irish agricultural interests were at stake, Trevor Sargent TD of the Green Party challenged government as follows: *'The Santer proposals will further widen the link between the primary producer, the farmer, and the consumer and it is time consumers were much more involved in this debate.'* (Dáil Éireann, 1997). Similarly, the Dutch government's efforts to reduce Dutch net-contributions were challenged in parliament. For example, Leoni Sipkes of the Green Left party (GroenLinks) argued: *'It appears that [Finance] Minister Zalm calculated the Dutch contribution too high by approximately 2 billion [Guilders]. The Minister denies this*

*vehemently. In light of all the embarrassing government behaviour concerning contributions, I would like to ask the Prime Minister to supply us with a clear letter on this issue, so we may know what we are talking about.*<sup>6</sup> (Tweede Kamer, 1997). Government and opposition representatives in parliament thus went into debate concerning both which constituencies ought to be represented and what exactly their stakes were in the EU budget.

With regards to the first research question, the conclusion is that elected or appointed party politicians continue to dominate the public sphere as representatives. In the media, we find that the executives of other Member States, the European Commission and the national government are most prominent as makers of representative claims. Together, party politicians are responsible for 78,9% of claims in the media and 100% of claims in parliament. Clearly, institutional factors matter as only elected politicians feature in parliamentary debates, whereas the media provide a more plural representative space. Besides party politicians, journalists and farmers contribute significantly to representative claims-making in the media. Finally, there is a clear difference among claimants with regards to how many different constituencies they claim to represent. Party politicians of both the Member State in question and other Member States together with EU officials and journalists defend and/or challenge the interests of all groups of constituencies presented in Tables 1 and 2. They may thus be characterised as ‘general’ or ‘plural’ representatives engaging in a broad debate on the interests of many different constituencies. Other claimants, like Countries outside the EU, Organised Business, Farmers and Citizens primarily

---

<sup>6</sup> Het schijnt dat minister Zalm de Nederlandse bijdrage zo’n 2 mld. te hoog heeft berekend. De minister weerspreekt dat op zeer hoge toon. Gezien al het, soms genant verongelijkte gedoe van Nederland over zijn EU-bijdrage, wil ik de minister-president vragen of wij hierover een klip en klare brief kunnen krijgen, zodat we weten waar we over praten.



claim to represent themselves or their direct constituencies. These claimants can thus be characterised as 'niche' or special interests representatives.

## 4.2. Constituencies

The prominence of other Member State governments as representatives in the news directly translates in prominence of other Member States as the most prominent constituency. Close to one third of representative claims in newspapers (29,6%) portrayed other Member States as the main interested party in EU budget negotiations of which half (14,1%) were made by other Member State representatives themselves. A few examples of this have been given above. Additional prominent constituencies include the nation (17,8%), often represented as either net-contributor or net-recipient of EU funds. Although these claims were most often made by executive actors, Members of Parliament regularly engaged the budget debate in the media as well. Either they would be quoted by journalists, or they would send in a letter, like Tom Behnke MF of the Danish Progress Party (Fremskridspartiet) did in 1992: *'A welfare tax that Danish society must pay because we are rich. According to the "Delors II" plans, Danish contributions will rise by 30% to 12 billion Kroner per year. The state has two possibilities for paying this tax. The first is to raise taxes in Denmark, to the detriment of all Danish. The second is to cut in public welfare provisions. This would weaken Danish social security, to the detriment of the weakest in Danish society.'*<sup>7</sup> (Behnke, 1992). The EU (15,9%) was regularly represented in claims in terms of whether the budget was in the EU's general

---

<sup>7</sup> En velfærdsskat som det danske samfund skal betale for at være rigere. Ifølge »Delors II -planen« skal Danmarks bidrag stige med 30 pct. til 12 mia. kr. om året. Denne skat vil staten have to muligheder for at betale. Den ene mulighed er at sætte skatten op i Danmark, hvilket vil skade alle danskere. Den anden er at beskære i de offentlige overførselsindkomster. Dermed forringes det danske sociale sikkerhedsnet, hvilket især vil skade de svageste grupper i det danske samfund.

interest and how budget negotiations, national contributions and the possibility of an EU tax impacted the stability and legitimacy of the EU as polity. Successive Commission Presidents all defended proposed increases in the EU budget as being in the wider EU interest: *'Mr. Barroso maps out ambitious plans in two of the EU's "growth areas": increased co-operation in home affairs and in beefing up Europe's presence on the world stage. Presenting his plans to the European parliament, the new Commission president said the EU could not deliver unless it was given the money to do so, a warning shot to countries like Germany, Britain and France, which want tight curbs on its next budget.'* (Irish Times, 2005). Yet, it is not so that representatives only claim to represent their 'formal' constituency. National politicians regularly claimed to represent the EU interest and EU officials claimed to represent national interests. Illustrative is a conflict between the Dutch Social Democrats (PvdA) in government and their MEP representative Piet Dankert during the negotiations on Agenda 2000. Dankert discussed criticism from his national colleagues after having challenged the Dutch negotiating strategy as not being in the national interest: *'In contrast to members of the Tweede Kamer, we [MEPs] allegedly would not be willing to defend the interests of the Netherlands. State secretary Patijn [European Affairs] dares to ask who we think we are representing.'*<sup>8</sup> (Dankert, 1997). Farmers – being the primary recipients of the funds in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, which takes around 40% of the EU budget – are prominently represented by a variety of claimants, not least by themselves and their own professional organisations. Also in net-contributing countries like the Netherlands, farmers made the news defending their own interests: *'A substantial dispossession of income for both crop and livestock farmers. That is the direct consequence of European Commission*

---

<sup>8</sup> In tegenstelling tot leden van de Tweede Kamer zouden wij geen oog hebben voor het Nederlands belang. Staatssecretaris Patijn durft zich dan ook af te vragen wie wij eigenlijk wel vertegenwoordigen.

*plans for agricultural policy as they were presented yesterday, according to agricultural association LTO Nederland. Price reductions in milk, wheat and meat will only partially be compensated and that is unacceptable to the farmers' association.*<sup>9</sup> (Trouw, 1998).

In Parliament, on the other hand, the interests of other Member States were represented less than in the media, though still present in the debates (9,4%). For instance, the interests of the new Eastern European Member States were claimed to be represented by Noel Treacy, Minister of European Affairs for the governing conservative party (Fianna Fáil): *'The enlarged European Union needs a [budget] deal now. This is of particular interest to the new member states which rely on cohesion funding to help drive their individual domestic economies forward. This point was brought home to me at many meetings of the cohesion countries where I represented Ireland, to underline our continuing commitment to the principles of economic solidarity which lie at the heart of the European Union.'* (Dáil Éireann, 2005b). Most represented in parliament were the interests of the nation (23,8%) and farmers (20,3%), but also those of countries outside the EU (17%) and citizens and tax payers (10,9%). Although rarely the recipient of direct EU funds, countries outside the EU are often argued – by leftist parties in particular – to be negatively affected by the EU's CAP which limits their possibilities to export agricultural products to the EU (cf. Karimi MP in Tweede Kamer, 2005). Furthermore, the second budget under study – Agenda 2000 – was specifically presented by the Commission as preparing the EU for Eastern enlargement, including funds to help bring candidate countries into the EU. In terms of differences among political party families, the national interest is most often claimed to be represented by

---

<sup>9</sup> Een forse achteruitgang in inkomen van zowel akkerbouwers als melk- en rundveehouders. Dat is volgens landbouwtuinbouworganisatie LTO Nederland het directe gevolg van de plannen van de Europese Commissie met het landbouwbeleid, zoals die gisteren werden gepresenteerd. De prijsdalingen voor melk, graan en vlees zullen slechts ten dele worden gecompenseerd, en dat is voor de boerenorganisatie onaanvaardbaar.

centre-right parties (Conservatives 9,2%; Christian Democrats 4,2% of representative claims in Parliament) whereas radical right parties present themselves as the primary defender of the tax payer's interests (2,9% of representative claims in Parliament). The latter would typically field in an argument to reduce EU funds.

To conclude, elected and appointed politicians continue to perform an important role when it comes to representative claims-making. Not only because they frequently feature in the news and feature exclusively in parliamentary debates as discussed above, but also because they claim to represent a wide range of different constituencies, both in the media and in parliament. To some extent the constituencies represented may not be surprising as national politicians claim to represent the national interest and EU officials claim to represent the EU interest, or when right-wing parties defend the interests of farmers and taxpayers while left-wing parties defend the interests of third world countries. Yet, the discussion above has also shown representatives to engage with each other. They do so in particular by discrediting the representative claims of other representatives in various ways. The result is a highly plural representative space where elected and appointed politicians perform a vital role in claiming to represent a multitude of constituencies and no constituency is monopolised by a single representative. The institutional factors have been shown to have an influence on the prominence of different constituencies, though institutional effects on who is represented are clearly less influential than on who is performing the representation.

## 5. Conclusion

Within political theory, attention has recently been drawn to representative claims-making as a dynamic practice, rather than understanding representation as a static result of periodic elections (Hendriks, 2009; Rehfeld, 2006; Saward, 2006; 2009). This theoretical innovation has opened up the questions of how elected or appointed party politicians and other representatives present themselves as claimants in the public sphere and how different institutional factors affect this practice of representative claims-making.

From the perspective of EU studies, the challenge in the study of representative claims-making is now two-fold. First, based on the theoretical work of Saward and others, a mapping of the EU representative space as constituted by claims is necessary in order to enrich our understanding of EU representative politics beyond the election of the national and European parliaments. Secondly, lessons from such empirical exercises should be drawn to improve upon the theory of representative claims-making as, so far, empirical studies of representative claims-making remain scarce. This study has aimed to contribute to these two frontiers by conducting a comparative empirical case study of debates on EU budget negotiations in the media and parliaments of the Netherlands, Denmark and Ireland. Dominant thought about EU budget negotiations perceives them as intergovernmental negotiations of Member State governments defending mutually excluding national interests. In contrast, representative claims-making analysis in this study has shown that there is a multitude of claimants contributing to the debates, claiming to represent a multitude of constituencies. Thus, the representative space of EU budget negotiations is much more plural than indicated in EU budget literature.

Despite the increasingly important role of non-elected representatives as a result of both globalisation and declining trust in political parties, this study finds that elected or appointed party politicians continue to perform a key role as representatives in the EU public sphere. Media prominently feature members of the national government, but also other Member State governments, EU officials and parliamentarians. In parliament, mainstream parties dominate, but the entire political spectrum from left to right engages in highly various representative claims-making. Together with journalists in the media, party politicians engage in the broadest or most general form of representation, addressing the interests of a wide variety of constituencies. This stands in contrast to niche representatives, like farmers' associations and citizens. Elected or appointed politicians thus maintain a key role in the EU's representative space. Yet, they clearly do not monopolise representation as significant roles in the media are played by farmers' associations and journalists among others.

There are very clear differences between the media and parliaments with regards to the claimants present in these respective public spheres. Media present a platform for a plurality of claimants, of which a large proportion consists of other Member States' governments, EU officials and non-elected representatives. In contrast, parliamentary debates only field Members of Parliament and ministers, where the mainstream parties are dominant given their larger share of parliamentary seats and government positions. A difference of constituencies is also noticeable, but it is much less pronounced than the difference in claimants. This points to how dynamics of competition that structure both mass media and parliamentary public spheres stimulate pluralism in representation. Representative claims in the media feature other Member States, the nation and the EU as

most prominent constituencies. In parliament, the nation, farmers and countries outside the EU are the three most often claimed constituencies.

This empirical study of representative claims-making draws attention to an aspect of representative claims-making that has so far been under appreciated in the theoretical literature. In emphasising the dynamic nature of representative claims-making, the inherent competitiveness of claims-making has been neglected. Both claimants and constituencies compete for presence in the public sphere. Even if different dynamics of media logic and partisan conflict underlie this competition, claimants compete with each other to bring their message across to potential constituencies. As illustrated by the examples of representative claims, claimants often combine a defence or challenge concerning a particular constituency's interests with a challenge to other claimants' conduct as representatives. Furthermore, this competition results in constituencies becoming contested by multiple claimants. That is, this study does not find important constituencies to be monopolised by one or few claimants. Rather, intensive representative claims-making concerning a particular constituency coincides with multiple claimants defending, challenging and reinterpreting the interests in question. We may therefore tentatively conclude that it is particularly this competitive nature of representative claims-making, stimulated by institutional factors in both mass media and parliamentary arenas, that ensures a plural representative space in the EU public sphere.

## **6. References**

Aben, H. (1992) 'Het prijskaartje van Maastricht', *Algemeen Dagblad*, 7 March, p. 6.

- Ahern, B. (2005) 'Regrets but we must remain optimistic about the Union', *Irish Independent*, 20 June, p.
- Altheide, D.L. (2004) 'Media Logic and Political Communication'. *Political Communication*, Vol. 21, No., 293-296.
- Begg, I. (2005) 'Funding the European Union', The Federal Trust, London.
- Behnke, T. (1992) 'Nej til dyr union', *Berlingske Tidene*, 15 December, p. 10.
- Bennett, W.L. and Entman, R.M., (eds) (2001) *Mediated Politics. Communication in the Future of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Citrin, J. (1974) 'The Political Relevance of Trust in Government'. *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 68, No. 3, 973-988.
- Dáil Éireann (1997) 'Agenda 2000 proposals: Statements', Volume 483, Oireachtas - Dáil Éireann, 27 November.
- Dáil Éireann (2005a) 'Ceisteanna - Questions. European Council Meetings', Volume 610, Oireachtas - Dáil Éireann, 23 November 2005.
- Dáil Éireann (2005b) 'European Union: Statements (resumed)', Volume 610, Oireachtas - Dáil Éireann, 23 November.
- Dankert, P. (1997) 'Geef Europa waar het recht op heeft', *Algemeen Dagblad*, 18 December, p. 11.
- De Wilde, P. (2010) 'Contesting the EU Budget and Euroscepticism: A Spiral of Dissent?', *ARENA Working Paper Series*. Vol. 2010, No. 02, ARENA, University of Oslo, [http://www.arena.uio.no/publications/working-papers2010/papers/WP02\\_10.xml](http://www.arena.uio.no/publications/working-papers2010/papers/WP02_10.xml).
- Donsbach, W. and Patterson, T.E. (2004) 'Political News Journalists: Partisanship, Professionalism, and Political Roles in Five Countries'. In Esser, F. and Pfetsch, B. (eds) *Comparing Political Communication. Theories, Cases, and Challenges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 251-270.
- Downing, J. (1992) '£8b EC fund: we'll lose aid if economy not in order', *Irish Independent*, 1 August, p. 3.
- Dür, A. and Mateo, G. (2008) 'Bargaining Power and Negotiation Tactics: Negotiations on the EU's Financial Perspective, 2007-2013', *DEI Working Paper Series*. Vol. 2008, No. 02, UCD Dublin European Institute,
- Eriksen, E.O. and Fossum, J.E. (2002) 'Democracy through Strong Publics in the European Union?'. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 401-424.



- Fossum, J.E. and Schlesinger, P. (2007) *The European Union and the Public Sphere. A Communicative Space in the Making?* (Abingdon: Routledge).
- Fraser, N. (1992) 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy'. In Calhoun, C. (ed) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), pp. 109-142.
- Galtung, J. and Ruge, M.H. (1965) 'The Structure of Foreign News: The Presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises in Four Norwegian Newspapers'. *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 64-91.
- Hendriks, C.M. (2009) 'The Democratic Soup: Mixed Meanings of Political Representation in Governance Networks'. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 689-715.
- Hurrelmann, A., Krell-Laluhová, Z., Nullmeier, F., Schneider, S. and Wiesner, A. (2009) 'Why the Democratic Nation-State is Still Legitimate: A Study of Media Discourses'. *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 48, No. 4, 483-515.
- Irish Times* (2005) Barroso sets out growth plan for EU. 27 January, p. 23.
- Katz, R.S. and Mair, P. (1995) 'Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy'. *Party Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 5-28.
- Katz, R.S. and Wessels, B., (eds) (1999) *The European Parliament, the National Parliaments, and European Integration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- King, A. (1976) 'Modes of Executive-Legislative Relations: Great Britain, France, and West Germany'. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 11-36.
- Koopmans, R. (2002) 'Codebook for the Analysis of Political Mobilisation and Communication in European Public Spheres', Europub.com Project, <http://europub.wz-berlin.de>.
- Koopmans, R. and Statham, P. (1999) 'Political Claims Analysis: Integrating Protest Event and Political Discourse Approaches'. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 203-221.
- Kragh, C. (2004) 'Enighed om næste års EU-budget'. *Berlingske Tidene*, No., 8.
- Laffan, B. (1997) *The Finances of the European Union* (London: Palgrave MacMillan).
- Laffan, B. (2000) 'The Agenda 2000 Negotiations: La Présidence Coûte Cher?'. *German Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1-22.
- Lijphart, A. (1999) *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

- Lindner, J. (2006) *Conflict and Change in EU Budgetary Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge).
- Lord, C. and Pollak, J. (2010) 'The EU's many Representative Modes: Colliding? Cohering?'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 117-136.
- Lord, C.J. (2007) 'Parliamentary Representation in a Decentred Polity'. In Kohler-Koch, B. and Rittberger, B. (eds) *Debating the Democratic Legitimacy of the European Union* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield).
- Morgan, G. (2005) *The Idea of a European Superstate. Public Justification and European Integration* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press).
- Nielsen, O.B. (1998) 'Discount-udvidelse af EU', *Berlingske Tidene*, 20 March, p. 15.
- Norris, P. (1997) 'Representation and the Democratic Deficit'. *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 273-282.
- Pollak, J., Bátorá, J., Mokre, M., Sigalas, E. and Slominski, P. (2009) 'On Political Representation: Myths and Challenges', *RECON Online Working Paper*. Vol. 2009, No. 03, ARENA, University of Oslo,
- Rehfeld, A. (2006) 'Towards a General Theory of Political Representation'. *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 68, No. 1, 1-21.
- Saward, M. (2006) 'The Representative Claim'. *Contemporary Political Theory*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 297-318.
- Saward, M. (2009) 'Authorisation and Authenticity: Representation and the Unelected'. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1-22.
- Schmitt, H. and Thomassen, J. (1999) *Political Representation and Legitimacy in the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Schmitter, P.C. (2009) 'Re-presenting Representation'. *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 476-490.
- Schumpeter, J.A. (1976[1943]) *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (Chatham: George Allen & Unwin).
- Semetko, H.A., De Vreese, C.H. and Peter, J. (2001) 'Europeanised Politics - Europeanised Media? Integration and Political Communication'. In Goetz, K.H. and Hix, S. (eds) *Europeanised Politics? European Integration and National Political Systems* (Abingdon: Frank Cass).
- Statham, P. (2005) 'Forging Divergent and 'Path Dependent' Ways to Europe?: Political Communication over European Integration in the British and French Public Spheres',

- European Political Communication Working Paper Series*. Vol. 2005, No. 11, EurPolCom, University of Leeds, [http://www.eurpolcom.eu/exhibits/paper\\_11.pdf](http://www.eurpolcom.eu/exhibits/paper_11.pdf).
- Taylor, L. (2010) 'Re-founding Representation: Wider, Broader, Closer, Deeper'. *Political Studies*, Vol. 8, No., 169-179.
- Thomassen, J. and Schmitt, H. (1999) 'Issue Congruence'. In Schmitt, H. and Thomassen, J. (eds) *Political Representation and Legitimacy in the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 186-208.
- Trenz, H.-J. (2009) 'Digital Media and the Return of the Representative Public Sphere'. *Javnost - the Public*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 33-46.
- Trouw (1998) Boerenorganisaties eisen aanpassing beleid Brussel. 19 March, p. 6.
- Trouw (2005) Balkenende ziet niets in voorstel Luxemburg. 11 June, p. 1.
- Tweede Kamer (1997) 'Debat naar aanleiding van de Europese top', Handelingen 1997-1998, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, TK 38, 3055-3079.
- Tweede Kamer (2005) 'Debat over de Europese Top van 16 en 17 juni 2005', Handelingen 2004-2005, Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, TK 93, 5578-5612.
- Wessler, H., Peters, B., Brüggemann, M., Kleinen-von Königslöw, K. and Sifft, S. (2008) *Transnationalization of Public Spheres* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan).
- Yin, R.K. (2003) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* 3rd Edition (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications).

Table 1: Percentages of Representative Claims in the Media, N = 1059

	Constituency									Total
	Nation	EU	European Commission	Other Member State(s)	Countries outside the EU	Organised Business	Farmers	Citizens / Tax Payers	Other	
<b>Claimant</b> National Politicians	6.2%	2.8%	.1%	2.4%	1.1%	.7%	1.6%	1.6%	.9%	<b>17.5%</b>
EU	2.0%	3.7%	.5%	6.6%	2.0%	.5%	1.6%	.7%	1.5%	<b>19.0%</b>
European Commission	3.5%	3.6%	.3%	4.1%	2.2%	.9%	2.5%	1.0%	.9%	<b>18.9%</b>
Other Member States	1.5%	3.5%	.1%	14.1%	.7%	.1%	1.7%	1.2%	.1%	<b>22.9%</b>
Countries outside the EU					.6%					<b>.6%</b>
Organised Business	.1%		.1%			.3%				<b>.5%</b>
Journalist	1.9%	1.4%	.3%	1.6%	.3%	.4%	1.0%	1.5%	.8%	<b>9.0%</b>
Farmers	.7%						4.0%	.1%		<b>4.7%</b>
Citizens / Tax Payers		.2%						.3%		<b>.5%</b>
Other	1.9%	.7%	.2%	.9%	.4%	.1%	.6%	.9%	.8%	<b>6.5%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>17.8%</b>	<b>15.9%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>	<b>29.6%</b>	<b>7.2%</b>	<b>2.9%</b>	<b>13.0%</b>	<b>7.2%</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 2: Percentages of Representative Claims in Parliament, N = 1070

		Constituency									
		Nation	EU	European Commission	Other Member State(s)	Country(ies) outside the EU	Organised Business	Farmers	Citizens / Tax Payers	Other	Total
<b>Claimant</b>	Radical Left	2.0%	.6%	.1%	.2%	.3%	.1%	.9%	1.5%	1.0%	<b>6.7%</b>
<b>Affiliation</b>	Green	.6%	.8%		.3%	4.2%		1.0%	1.4%	.4%	<b>8.7%</b>
	Social Democrat	2.9%	1.4%		2.3%	4.7%		3.5%	1.4%	1.6%	<b>17.9%</b>
	Progressive Liberal	.8%	.4%		.6%	.9%		.4%	.3%	.3%	<b>3.7%</b>
	Liberal	2.9%	1.4%	.1%	.7%	2.0%		3.3%	.8%	.2%	<b>11.4%</b>
	Christian Democrat	4.2%	1.3%		1.3%	.9%	.1%	4.1%	1.7%	2.3%	<b>15.9%</b>
	Conservatives	9.2%	2.7%	.0%	3.2%	1.0%	.7%	5.6%	.8%	1.7%	<b>25.0%</b>
	Radical Right	1.2%	.5%		.9%	3.0%		1.6%	2.9%	.8%	<b>10.7%</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>23.8%</b>	<b>9.0%</b>	<b>.2%</b>	<b>9.4%</b>	<b>17.0%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>20.3%</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	<b>8.4%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>