

The Netherlands: Reliving the 2005 Referendum on the Constitutional Treaty?

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Introduction

The Netherlands is not generally known for its Euroscepticism. As a founding father, it is more often considered a generally pro-European country. As a small country with an open economy and one of the world's largest harbours, with a self perception as a country of merchants and trade, the Netherlands has benefited enormously from European integration. A pro-European sentiment was especially strong in the early 1990s. When the Netherlands held the Council Presidency in 1991, it proposed a new Treaty to the other Member States that was so federal in scope that only Belgium supported it. In the end, the Presidency had to revert to an earlier, less federal, proposal of the previous Luxembourg Presidency that would become the blueprint for the Maastricht Treaty.

The 'no' vote during the June 2005 referendum on the Constitutional Treaty therefore came as a surprise to many, both within and outside the Netherlands. Yet, there have been strands of Euroscepticism within the Netherlands throughout the process of European integration that started with the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) Treaty in 1951. In fact, rather than perceiving the current Eurosceptic prominence as expressed in the June 2005 'no' vote as exceptional, some consider the pro-European episode of the early 1990s as peculiar in stead (Aarts and van der Kolk 2005; Harmsen 2004; Vollaard and Boer 2005a).

This Chapter considers Euroscepticism in the Netherlands as expressed during the campaign on the June 2009 European Parliament elections. It does so by studying online debates on frequently visited websites connected to professional journalism organizations (Nu.nl, Telegraaf.nl and NOS.nl)

and independent political blogs (GeenStijl.nl and Marokko.nl). Deviating from the dominant focus on party politics and public opinion polls within the study of Euroscepticism, the present Chapter explores Euroscepticism as portrayed in the media and as voluntarily offered by citizens responding to media stories in online commenting functions.

Euroscepticism in the Netherlands

Euroscepticism in the Netherlands has a long tradition, although it has only recently become a more politically significant influence. In the 1950s, Dutch political parties were not entirely convinced of the necessity to join in the initial steps towards European integration lead by France and Germany. That is, there was both strong opposition to political integration and strong support for economic integration (Haas 2004). In fact, Dutch resistance to political integration has lead to delays in the creation of the draft Treaty for Political Union. By the time Dutch resistance had receded, the window of opportunity in France had arguably closed as demonstrated by the failure of the European Defense Community in 1954 (Milward 2000: 186). Also, it was on Dutch initiative together with the other Benelux countries that the Council of Ministers was included in the Treaty of Paris as an intergovernmental institution to balance the powers of the High Authority and Common Assembly (Haas 2004: 249). At the same time, the creation of the eventual European Economic Communities can be traced to a proposal by Jan Willem Beyen, then Foreign Minister of the Netherlands (Milward 2000: 196). Thus, the Netherlands has been both a break on political integration and a driving force behind economic integration.

Principled opposition from political parties to European integration could, for a long time, only be found at the political fringes. Orthodox protestant parties *Staatkundig-Gereformeerde Partij* (SGP), *Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond* (GPV), *Reformatorisch Politieke Federatie* (RPF) and *ChristenUnie* have always been against European integration, which was perceived to be merely the newest of papal plots in a long history in search of domination of Europe by the Catholic Church,

challenging the divine independence of the Dutch people and their Queen (Voerman 2005; Vollaard 2005; 2006). On the left, the Dutch Communist Party *Communistische Partij Nederland* (CPN) was against integration which was considered a capitalist project strengthening the position of business at the cost of workers' rights (Voerman 2005). Whereas the mainstream protestant and catholic parties – *Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* (ARP), *Christelijk-Historische Unie* (CHU), *Katholieke Volkspartij* (KVP) and the later union of these three parties *Christelijk Democratisch Appèl* (CDA) – have always been strongly in favour of integration, the social-democrats *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA) and liberals *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD) have shifted positions between the 1950s and today, largely as a result of the preferences of party leaders. Both were generally pro-European in the 1950s, turned towards a more critical stance in the 1970s, became pro-European again up to the early 1990s, and finally turned more Eurosceptic again from the early 1990s onwards (Boer 2005; Koole and Raap 2005; Voerman 2005; Vollaard and Boer 2005b).

In recent years, several events and political mobilization surrounding these events have created a more Eurosceptic political climate in the Netherlands. For a long time, public opinion and civil society, including organised business and trade unions, have been strongly pro-European. Even when compared to the other five 'founding fathers' (Haas 2004; Thomassen 2005). More recent developments in European integration have, however, been received more negatively in the Netherlands. First, from the mid 1990s onwards, the Netherlands turned from a net recipient of EU funds to a net contributor. By the end of the century, the Netherlands was the biggest net contributor per capita to the EU budget. This was strongly opposed by the VVD party in the 1990s and by Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders more recently (Boer 2005; Petter and Griffiths 2005) and has lead to a 'reassertion of the nation state' in political discourse as the guiding constitutional basis of the EU polity (De Wilde 2009a). Second, the introduction of the Euro in 2002 and the loss of the Guilder as national currency were badly received and were perceived to cause inflation (Aarts and van der Kolk 2005). Thirdly, the 2004 Enlargement was perceived negatively – by the political left

especially – who feared that unfair competition from ‘Polish plumbers’ would put pressure on the Dutch welfare state. Partially in line with the resistance to the 2004 enlargement, there has been growing opposition to possible Turkish membership of the EU, particularly voiced by Geert Wilders and his *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) party. Finally, growing Euroscepticism among Dutch citizens should be understood as part of a more general decreasing trust in Dutch political elites (Aarts and van der Kolk 2006). This growing gap between elites and citizens eventually came to the fore in the rise of Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and through subsequent populist movements lead by Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders. Thus, the ‘no’ vote of June 2005 to the Constitutional Treaty has been understood as a belated no vote to the Euro and Enlargement as well as a more general denunciation of the political elite (Aarts and van der Kolk 2006).

The June 2005 referendum on the Constitutional Treaty undoubtedly forms the single most important event in recent history shaping Dutch public opinion, public discourse and party contestation concerning European integration. It has created the general consensus that a federal super state is not wanted by the Dutch people, something only the social-liberal D66 party is still openly in favour of. It has furthermore created clear ‘yes’ and ‘no’ parties in the political spectrum. Following the referendum, the ‘yes’ and ‘no’ question on the Constitutional Treaty during the referendum is increasingly seen as general positions on European integration. Thus, parties that advocated a ‘yes’ vote in the 2005 referendum are now seen as ‘pro-European’, whereas ‘no’ parties are considered Eurosceptic. The political mainstream of pragmatic pro-European parties is made up of CDA, PvdA and VVD (Pellikaan and Brandsma 2005). The Eurosceptic opposition consists of the socialist party SP on the left and SGP, ChristenUnie and PVV on the right. Perhaps unique in Europe is the existence of a pro-European opposition in the form of the green *GroenLinks* party and the social-liberal *D66*. In the subsequent national elections of 2007, however, the issue of European integration did not feature prominently. Although the parties that campaigned for a ‘yes’ vote in 2005 lost in relation to the previous European election, the vote percentage for ‘no’ parties collectively was much

lower than the 61% majority of voters in the referendum that rejected the Constitutional Treaty. The question therefore remains whether the 2005 election was a hic-up of Euroscepticism that faded away immediately afterwards or rather an important event in shaping longterm contestation and discourse on European integration within the Netherlands.

The European Parliament elections of 2009 are an ideal moment to study the remnants of the referendum and Dutch discourse on European integration more generally. We may expect these elections to be 'second order elections' (Reif and Schmitt 1980) and reflect national issues largely. That is, European Parliament elections are generally found to be fought over domestic issues by national party leaders, rather than over EU policy issues or institutional questions of European integration. Partially, because questions of more or less integration are not formally on the table during European Parliament elections as the European Parliament does not decide on such issues. On the other hand, the elections took place at a time when the Lisbon Treaty was still in the process of ratification, which may have presented an opportunity to turn the EP elections into a pseudo referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. There was thus also an opportunity to 'relive' the 2005 referendum as the Lisbon Treaty is considered by many Dutch citizens to be the Constitutional Treaty in disguise. There are thus two research questions guiding this Chapter. First, highlighting specificities of the Dutch case, this Chapter asks: to what extent did the online debate during the 2009 European Parliament election campaign resemble the campaign debate for the 2005 referendum on the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe in terms of issues raised by participants in the debate, justifications provided to substantiate arguments and difference of opinion between political elites and citizens. Secondly, in light of the more general focus of this project, this Chapter asks how Dutch discourse evaluating the project of European integration and the EU polity is structured and how it relates to the discourse expressed in the online campaigns of other Member States included in this study.

Data

This section discusses the five websites included in this case-study. A more elaborate discussion on the general methodology of the project is presented in the methodology chapter. Based on the ranking of Alexa.com the three most visited professional journalism websites in the Netherlands were selected (Nu.nl, Telegraaf.nl and NOS.nl). Also, the two most visited political blogs were included in the sample (GeenStijl.nl and Marokko.nl).

As the eighth most visited website from ip-addresses in the Netherlands (Computers located in the Netherlands), Nu.nl is clearly the most important political news site in the Netherlands. Founded in 1998, it fields a wide range of news items, ranging from domestic and foreign news, to sports and entertainment. Since the majority and most popular stories come from a national press agency without a clear political profile, it can also be argued that the political profile of Nu.nl is rather neutral. Nu.nl is owned by the Ilse Media Group. An internet company that also owns other websites, including a search engine (Ilse.nl), consumer site (Kieskeurig.nl) and – recently – a German version of Nu.nl, called Dnews.de. The second website, Telegraaf.nl, is the internet portal of the largest Dutch national newspaper *De Telegraaf*. This newspaper is known for its relative conservative political stance on the right of the political spectrum. Unlike countries like the UK or Germany, the Netherlands does not have clear tabloid newspapers like *The Sun*, or *Bild Zeitung*, nor newspapers particularly aimed at sports reporting, like many southern European countries have. Rather, *De Telegraaf* and its main rival *Algemeen Dagblad* are generally characterized as ‘popular’ newspapers (Bakker and Scholten 2005), somewhere in between the quality press and sensational tabloid press known from other countries. Besides sensationalist news, *De Telegraaf* is known for its excellent economics section and wide coverage of sports. The site is owned by De Telegraaf Media Groep BV, which owns several more newspapers and magazines in both the Netherlands and other countries. The third site belongs to the Dutch broadcasting company NOS (Nederlandse Omroep Stichting). The NOS website provides news in both text and images, as well as blogs featuring stories by both

permanent correspondents and guest bloggers. Although it has no clear political profile, the NOS is generally considered to provide news to the higher educated segment of Dutch society and has been criticized by the late Pim Fortuyn and his followers as being elitist and leftist (*"De linkse kerk"*), blamed for ignoring 'regular people' and demonizing Pim Fortuyn, and even considered an accomplice to Fortuyn's murder by his followers. In the populist blog GeenStijl.nl – which will be discussed below – the NOS political news is regularly referred to as the *"SStaatSS Hoernaal"* or *"NOSS Hoernaal"*. Although hard to translate accurately, these terms carry references to state propaganda, the Nazi paramilitary organization Schutzstaffel (SS), and prostitution. Partially as a result of the Pim Fortuyn revolt against the political elite and the *Linkse Kerk* of elitist and leftist media, the political blog of GeenStijl.nl has become the most prominent blog in the Dutch online political communication sphere. The blog – whose name can be translated as 'no style', or 'without class' – features easy to consume news commentaries by the employed staff of the site. The lack of any seriousness, politically 'unacceptable' language, and discussion of political taboos are trademarks of this site. It can be seen as highly populist, right wing, and aimed at the younger generations. 70% of its visitors are male, between 25 and 35 years old, highly educated, above average income, with privately owned home and car (Van Stegeren 2006). The site is now owned by the Telegraaf Media Groep, but remains editorially independent. The final and fifth site in our sample, Marokko.nl, is a blog particularly aimed at young Dutch and Flemish people of Moroccan decent. According to Van Stegeren (2007), virtually all Dutch Moroccans between 15 and 25 years old visit this website more or less often. Although it carries the name of a country of origin, the main uniting theme is Islam and being a young Muslim in a Western country, rather than Morocco. As such, it is not purely a political news site, as it also features social exchange, event calendars, sports, digital meeting places and advice of a religious nature. Although it has a very clear segment of society as target group, it doesn't have a clear political profile, and certainly not a very radical one (Amouch 2006). Rather, it claims to be aimed at furthering understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands and

providing young people with a sense of identity. In the words of the website owners, Morocco Media: *"Morocco Media wants to amuse and inform young Moroccans as well as stimulate them to think about society and social relations within the Netherlands."*¹.

From the period of the European Parliament Election Campaign selected for sampling – 18 May 2009 through 10 June 2009 – 50 threads were selected for qualitative sampling. From these, 120 messages were coded using the project's codebook (De Wilde et al. 2009). See the methodology chapter for a more elaborate discussion.

General Nature of the Debate

European Parliament elections are often considered 'second order' elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980). That is, in most of the EU Member States, these elections have so far generally been about domestic policy issues, with domestic politicians dominating the campaigns. Such a campaign may be labeled 'ignorant' as the European dimension and policy questions at European level – which the elections are actually about – are hardly discussed. Alternatively, the debate surrounding the campaign could be either 'existential' or 'substantial'. Based on our discourse interest (Trenz and De Wilde 2009), an existential debate would prominently feature contestation about European integration. That is, many questions central in the campaign would be about more or less integration, increasing or decreasing the powers and reach of supranational institutions and/or about membership in the EU or Eurozone of one's own member state, other member states, or applicant countries. Such a debate could be labeled 'existential' as it concerns the existence of the EU as polity and its possible form and shape. Alternatively, the campaign could be 'substantial' in which case central issues in the campaign would be policy issues decided at EU level in which the European Parliament has a say. In such a debate, the nature and design of the EU polity would not be at the heart of contestation, with controversy

¹ Original Dutch: "Marokko Media wil Marokkaanse jongeren amuseren, informeren en tot denken zetten over maatschappelijke en sociale verhoudingen binnen de Nederlandse samenleving."

targeting the policies conducted at EU level instead. Arguably, only the third type of debate would be normatively defensible as a substantial campaign would inform voters about the issues at stake in the elections and allow them a meaningful choice where their votes have direct impact (De Wilde 2009b).

Three indicators serve the purpose of determining the general nature of the Dutch online debate. First, we may consider the topics of the threads analyzed. Secondly, we can compare the amount of messages with those made in other Member States. Finally, these numbers need illustration with qualitative findings in order to locate their broader relevance and meaning as well as compare coded messages (inherently of existential nature) with other non-coded text in the sampled threads which might indicate ignorant or substantial debates.

Table 1: Topics in Dutch debates

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Domestic Party Politics	21	42.0	42.0	42.0
	Other Member State Party Politics	7	14.0	14.0	56.0
	European Party Politics	4	8.0	8.0	64.0
	European Economy	1	2.0	2.0	66.0
	European Integration	4	8.0	8.0	74.0
	Membership / Enlargement	1	2.0	2.0	76.0
	Democracy	7	14.0	14.0	90.0
	Other	5	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

As Table 1 clearly demonstrates, the most frequent topic of the sampled threads was 'Domestic Party Politics'. Of the fifty coded threads, 21 (or 42%) fell into this category. These threads largely reported on the horse race between parties during the campaign as reflected in opinion polls as well as the

election results and their implication for domestic politics, with a particular focus on the success of Geert Wilders' PVV party (Telegraaf.nl 2009c; 2009d). This provides support for the notion that campaigns as reflected in online political media reflect second order elections or ignorant debates just like offline campaigns do. Furthermore, several threads reported on foreign party politics. For instance, there was reporting on the success of the Swedish Pirate Party (Telegraaf.nl 2009e), the fact that a Basque separatist party was allowed to participate in Spain (Telegraaf.nl 2009a), and the disappointing election results for Silvio Berlusconi in Italy (Nu.nl 2009a). However, compared to the other cases in our study, there is relatively more attention for European issues, particularly of an 'existential' nature. These issues often reflected issues from the 2005 referendum. For instance, the leading candidate for D66 argued in favour of removing Member State veto powers in the Council of Ministers (Nu.nl 2009e), and her PvdA counterpart argued in favour of EU-wide referenda on future Treaty revisions (Nu.nl 2009c). Finally, there was attention for the financial costs of EU membership and more general support among the Dutch population for European integration (Nu.nl 2009d; Telegraaf.nl 2009b). The election results were interpreted as a victory for parties with a clear Eurosceptic or pro-European profile, at the cost of more pragmatic parties (GeenStijl.nl 2009c; NOS.nl 2009c; Nu.nl 2009f) as well as a punishment for the Dutch governing coalition at the time (GeenStijl.nl 2009b; Telegraaf.nl 2009d). The existential aspect of the debate is further substantiated if we look at the amount of messages made in the Dutch debate. The total of 120 messages in the 50 coded threads ranks among the highest of the online debates in twelve countries involved in this study. In absolute terms, based on the distribution of topics, we may conclude that the Dutch online debate was ignorant in line with the expectations of the 'second order elections' thesis. In comparative perspective, however, the Dutch debate may better be labeled as an existential debate. The nature of the debate will be further explored in the next section, that focuses on the particular messages made, the actors making the messages and justifications provided for evaluations of EU polity worth.

Dimensions of Euroscepticism

Interestingly, the content of evaluations of European integration made in the Dutch debate differs from that of existential debates in other Member States. Central in the Dutch debate were questions of how much of a federal ‘superstate’ the EU is and should become, how much cooperation between European countries is needed in such controversial issues as Foreign Policy and Justice and Home Affairs, and how the balance of power between EU Member States and between EU institutions ensures accountability, democracy and political equality in the EU polity. In sharp contrast to for instance the British debate, Dutch online debates do not focus on the question of membership. Whereas many UK citizens are still not sure whether or not they want to be a part of the EU polity, there is a clear consensus on this issue in the Netherlands. No messages were found actively arguing in favour of the Netherlands leaving the EU or abolishing the EU altogether, with the exception of one who argued in favour of leaving the Union should Turkey become a Member (Nu.nl 2009g). On the other hand, the membership of other countries was to a certain extent contested. For instance, some argued the New Member States (countries of Eastern and Central Europe that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007) should not have been allowed to join the EU. Also, the question of possible future Turkish membership remains highly contested.

Table 2: Evaluations of the Principle of Integration

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Positive	28	16.5	23.3	23.3
	Negative	12	7.1	10.0	33.3
	N/A	80	47.1	66.7	100.0
	Total	120	70.6	100.0	
Missing	System	50	29.4		
Total		170	100.0		

Analysing the first dimension of integration, we may conclude that only a minority of one third of all messages made in the Dutch online debate contained evaluations of the principle of integration. Secondly, a majority of evaluations made are positive. A good example of a positive evaluation of the principle of integration is provided by “DrWouter” commenting on a thread in nu.nl in which Dutch public opinion concerning European integration was the central topic. He stated: *“[Geert] Wilders wants to go back to the good old times before the EU existed? The last time I checked my history books, that was a period full of war. A Europe torn by conflict and ruled by hunger. Again and again, the Benelux countries got sucked into wars we didn’t ask for by our powerful neighbours. Be wise and vote for a pro-Europe party.”*² (Nu.nl 2009d). Although citizens opposing the principle of integration are still deemed a minority, NOS reporter Chris Ostendorf assessed their influence would increase in years to come: *“There are a lot of people who don’t believe in Project Europe and they promise to become more vocal in Strassbourg and Brussels in the years to come”*³. In general though, there is broad consensus within the Netherlands that some form of collaboration between European nation-states is required and desired given border-crossing policy challenges, and that the Netherlands should be somehow involved in this cooperation.

Criticism focuses much more on the current form this collaboration has taken in the EU and its component institutions and their powers. This is demonstrated by the large majority of negative evaluations concerning the EU polity, as shown in Table 3.

² Wilders wil terug naar de good 'ol times voordat de EU bestond? De laatste keer dat ik mijn geschiedenisboek raadpleegde was dat een periode vol met oorlogsgeweld... een Europa verscheurd door conflicten waar hongersnood heerste. Een Benelux die steeds maar weer in oorlogen waar wij niet om gevraagd hadden werd meegesleurd door onze machtige burens. Wees verstandig en stem voor een pro-Europa partij.

³ Er zijn ook veel mensen die niet geloven in het project Europa en zij beloven zich de komende jaren te laten horen in Straatsburg en Brussel.

Table 3: Evaluations of the EU Polity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Level - Positive	8	4.7	6.7	6.7
	Level - Negative	31	18.2	25.8	32.5
	Scope - Positive	4	2.4	3.3	35.8
	Scope - Negative	4	2.4	3.3	39.2
	Inclusiveness - Positive	5	2.9	4.2	43.3
	Inclusiveness - Negative	18	10.6	15.0	58.3
	N/A	50	29.4	41.7	100.0
	Total	120	70.6	100.0	
Missing	System	50	29.4		
Total		170	100.0		

Of all messages in the Dutch debate, 25.8% contain negative evaluations of the powers of EU institutions over Member States (Level – Negative) and 15% contain negative evaluations of either the influence of the Netherlands in the EU, the influence of ordinary citizens over the EU, or of membership of the new Member States (Inclusiveness – Negative). After the elections, NOS editor Hans Laroes evaluated the coverage of NOS of the European elections after criticism voiced by politicians that the media had not paid enough attention. He argued the NOS had made a major effort to report on the elections. This evoked the following response from “Marcel”: *“I have some more work for you and your colleague journalists. Go check how much of our legislation here in the Netherlands has its origin in laws/rules/directives/etc... of the EU. And please use the same method used by the German Ministry of Justice over the period 1998-2004. I would be surprised if the percentage of 84% hasn’t risen further.”*⁴(NOS.nl 2009a). Responding to a guest column by PvdA

⁴ Ik heb nog wel werk voor u en uw collega journalisten. Ga eens het percentage na van onze wetgeving hier in Nederland die zijn basis heeft in handelen of wetten/regels/directieven/etc... van de EU. En dan graag

Minister for European Affairs Frans Timmermans' on NOS.nl for more collaboration at European level, "Douwina" argued: *"The lack of responsibility of this government is 'Zum Kotzen'. As long as the world economy, and with it the Dutch one, is governed by greedy criminals and gambling addicts who are allowed to do as they please while their criminal behaviour causes millions of victims world wide, Europe has no meaning for me whatsoever. I will not vote for the Devourers of Europe."*⁵ (NOS.nl 2009b). A nice example of criticism on the current inclusiveness of ordinary citizens is provided by "Liesvan88": *"My opinion is that the EU should become more democratic [...]. And at this stage, Members of the European Parliament don't have enough power. Too much is being decided by unelected people."*⁶ (Nu.nl 2009d). Also, the influence of small member states versus big member states is criticised: *"In the European Union, you have hard working countries that pay a lot of money, and you have those who profit. The Netherlands is a contributor and doesn't have shit to say. The member states that profit are the largest ones and they have all the power."*⁷ (Nu.nl 2009e). A bit later in the same thread, "Upperstream" argued: *"Reinstate the Guilder, close the borders. No more*

berekenen op dezelfde wijze als het Duitse ministerie van Justitie dat deed over de periode 1998-2004. Het zou mij verbazen als dat percentage van 84% inmiddels niet gestegen was.

⁵ De vrijblijvendheid van deze regering is "Zum Kotzen" Zolang de wereldeconomie, en daarmee ook de Nederlandse, geregiseerd wordt door graaiende criminelen en gokverslaafden, die ongestoord en straffeloos hun gang kunnen gaan, terwijl hun criminele gedrag wereldwijd miljoenen slachtoffers eist, heeft Europa voor mij geen enkele betekenis. Ik stem dus niet op de Opvreter van Europa.

⁶ Ik vind dat Brussel democratischer moet [...]. En op dit moment hebben Europarlementariërs te weinig macht, teveel wordt geregeld door mensen die niet gekozen zijn.

⁷ Binnen de Europese Unie heb je hardwerkende landen die heeeel veel betalen, en je hebt profiteurs. Nederland is een betaler en heeft geen flikker te vertellen. De lidstaten die profiteren zijn het grootst en hebben het voor het zeggen.

*nuisances caused by criminals from the East. Didn't the EEC work just fine?"*⁸. With regards to the current EU polity, the majority of arguments made is targeted at political integration. Thus, those negatively evaluating the level of integration in the EU polity, often argue in favour of returning to pre-Maastricht European Communities or limiting European cooperation to trade agreements. Negative evaluations of the inclusiveness of the EU polity specifically argued 'ordinary citizens' do not have sufficient influence or that the Netherlands as country has insufficient influence.

In the third dimension of evaluation, the target is possible future extensions of integration. This includes increasing the powers of the European Parliament, but also possible enlargement of Turkey. As Table 4 shows, the level of integration and its inclusiveness are more often topic of debate than the scope of integration. That is, actors evaluating the EU in the Netherlands are more concerned with the powers of supranational institutions and the extent to which citizens, member states and different societal groups have influence on them, than they are concerned with the policy fields in which the EU does or does not have influence. Furthermore, evaluations of level and inclusiveness are predominantly negative, whereas evaluations of scope are predominantly positive. In short, Dutch debaters online want the EU to become less powerful and stop further enlargement, but they also want the EU to take up responsibilities in more policy fields than it addresses now, particularly in the field of Justice and Home Affairs.

A call for expansion of the policy fields under EU jurisdiction was made by Hans van Baalen, leading candidate for the EP elections of the conservative-liberal VVD party. As Nu.nl reports: *"Hans van Baalen argued [...] that the free market is vital for the Netherlands. 'We are merchants and not scared. A free market means open borders. That demands close European cooperation among police*

⁸ Terug naar de gulden, grenzen weer dicht. Ook geen last meer van al die criminelen uit het oostblok. De EEG werkte toch prima?

and judicial powers. That demands one single European asylum and immigration policy', according to Van Baalen." ⁹(Nu.nl 2009b).

Table 4: Evaluations of the Project of Integration

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Level - Positive	10	5.9	8.3	8.3
	Level - Negative	16	9.4	13.3	21.7
	Scope - Positive	8	4.7	6.7	28.3
	Scope - Negative	1	.6	.8	29.2
	Inclusiveness - Positive	7	4.1	5.8	35.0
	Inclusiveness - Negative	14	8.2	11.7	46.7
	N/A	64	37.6	53.3	100.0
	Total	120	70.6	100.0	
Missing	System	50	29.4		
Total		170	100.0		

A positive evaluation of the project level is provided by another party politician. Reporting an interview with Sophie in 't Veld, the European leader of the Dutch social-liberal party D66, Nu.nl stated: *"Everyone thinks that veto powers provide power, but it only provides the power to block things. Only criminals profit if Europe is unable to provide adequate answers.' According to the D66 leader, it is therefore necessary to remove [member state] veto powers as soon as possible. She argues Europe must be strengthened to ensure prosperity, a clean environment and safety."*¹⁰(Nu.nl

⁹ Hans van Baalen zei in Rosmalen dat de vrije markt voor Nederland van levensbelang is: "Wij zijn kooplieden en geen bange mensen. Een vrije markt betekent open grenzen. Dat vraagt om nauwe Europese samenwerking tussen politie en justitie. Dat vraagt om één Europees asiel- en immigratiebeleid", aldus Van Baalen.

¹⁰ "Iedereen denkt dat je met veto's macht hebt, maar je kan enkel dingen blokkeren. Alleen criminelen hebben er baat bij dat Europa geen adequaat antwoord kan geven." Volgens de D66'er is het daarom noodzakelijk dat

2009e). It earned her generally negative comments from readers, like “100days”: *“Yet another attempt to further shape the super state. D66 = 66 x STUPID.”*¹¹. Considerations of how the European Parliament elections might affect the future of integration were taken into the ballot box, as demonstrated by “brutus68”: *“Have just voted. A solid vote against a big Europe. Hopefully, Madlener [leading European candidate of Geert Wilders’ PVV party] will wreak some havoc over there shortly.”*¹²(GeenStijl.nl 2009a).

This points us to the important question of whether party politicians evaluate Europe differently from citizens. The present study is uniquely qualified to address this question as the evaluations of party politicians (often made or reported in the main text of the threads) are directly and voluntarily commented upon by citizens in the commenting function. Citizens, further, enter into debate with each other in the commenting function following party politicians’ statements in the main threads. Table 5 compares evaluations made by Dutch citizens with those made by Dutch party politicians. As Table 5 shows, the gap between citizens and elites is not as pronounced as it was during the 2005 referendum as reflected in the 61% citizen vote against the Constitutional Treaty as opposed to the 85% elected party politician vote in favour. Citizens tend to focus their comments more on the current EU polity, whereas party politicians more evenly address all three dimensions of evaluation.

de veto's zo snel mogelijk worden afgeschaft. Ze stelt dat een versterking van Europa nodig om welvaart, een schoon milieu en veiligheid te kunnen garanderen.

¹¹ Wederom een poging om de superstaat verder vorm te geven. D66 = 66 x DOM!

¹² Net ook mijn stem uitgebracht. Een keiharde stem tegen een groot Europa. Hopelijk gaat Madlener flink schoppen daar straks!

Table 5: Dutch Citizens and party politicians evaluating Europe online

		Actor			
		Citizen(s)		Party Actor	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Principle of Integration	Positive	20	24.1%	6	23.1%
	Negative	5	6.0%	5	19.2%
	N/A	58	69.9%	15	57.7%
EU Polity	Level - Positive	6	7.2%	2	7.7%
	Level - Negative	25	30.1%	5	19.2%
	Scope - Positive	2	2.4%	2	7.7%
	Scope - Negative	4	4.8%	0	.0%
	Inclusiveness - Positive	4	4.8%	0	.0%
	Inclusiveness - Negative	16	19.3%	1	3.8%
	N/A	26	31.3%	16	61.5%
Project of Integration	Level - Positive	5	6.0%	2	7.7%
	Level - Negative	15	18.1%	1	3.8%
	Scope - Positive	5	6.0%	2	7.7%
	Scope - Negative	1	1.2%	0	.0%
	Inclusiveness - Positive	3	3.6%	3	11.5%
	Inclusiveness - Negative	9	10.8%	5	19.2%
	N/A	45	54.2%	13	50.0%

Citizens are also more negative of the level and inclusiveness of the current EU polity, whereas party politicians are more negative of inclusiveness in future (particularly enlargement with Turkey is a main issue challenged by Geert Wilders). In a limited sample like the current one with an unequal number of evaluations made by citizens compared to party politicians, there are invariably quantitative differences in percentages. These should therefore not be overestimated. In light of this, the gap between citizens and elites over Europe, so strongly apparent in the 2005 referendum, appears to have become less pronounced in the 2009 European elections campaign.

Justifications

As discussed above, with the exception of a few politicians and the early 1990s political consensus, the Dutch approach to European integration has generally been pragmatic. Politicians and citizens are in favour of integration in light of economic benefits and the recognition that the Netherlands is too small and too open to deal with certain policy challenges alone. Table 6 provides an overview of all justifications used. Interestingly, the two justifications expected to dominate the debate in light of traditional Dutch discourse on European integration – necessity and economic prosperity – feature prominently, but not as prominently as the ‘democracy’ argument. Also, the justification of safety is nearly absent, despite safeguarding peace in Europe being a dominant argument in favour of integration throughout the EU, including in the Netherlands.

Table 6: Justifications

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Democracy	36	21.2	30.0	30.0
	Culture	5	2.9	4.2	34.2
	Necessity	18	10.6	15.0	49.2
	Economic Prosperity	14	8.2	11.7	60.8
	Safety	2	1.2	1.7	62.5
	Other	1	.6	.8	63.3
	N/A	44	25.9	36.7	100.0
	Total	120	70.6	100.0	
Missing	System	50	29.4		
Total		170	100.0		

To study the relationship between different evaluations of European integration and the justification – if any – provided for it, Table 7 presents a cross-tabulation of evaluation and justifications. Only the

three most prominent justifications and evaluations without justifications are included to preserve parsimony.

Table 7: Justifications provided for different evaluations of European integration

		Justification of Worth							
		Democracy		Necessity		Economic Prosperity		N/A	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Principle of Integration	Positive	10	40.0%	4	16.0%	4	16.0%	7	28.0%
	Negative	4	33.3%	1	8.3%	0	.0%	7	58.3%
	N/A	22	29.3%	13	17.3%	10	13.3%	30	40.0%
EU Polity	Level - Positive	4	50.0%	1	12.5%	1	12.5%	2	25.0%
	Level - Negative	10	33.3%	5	16.7%	3	10.0%	12	40.0%
	Scope - Positive	0	.0%	3	75.0%	1	25.0%	0	.0%
	Scope - Negative	0	.0%	2	66.7%	1	33.3%	0	.0%
	Inclusiveness - Positive	1	20.0%	0	.0%	1	20.0%	3	60.0%
	Inclusiveness - Negative	10	58.8%	3	17.6%	2	11.8%	2	11.8%
	N/A	11	24.4%	4	8.9%	5	11.1%	25	55.6%
Project of Integration	Level - Positive	1	10.0%	2	20.0%	3	30.0%	4	40.0%
	Level - Negative	11	68.8%	3	18.8%	0	.0%	2	12.5%
	Scope - Positive	0	.0%	4	66.7%	1	16.7%	1	16.7%
	Scope - Negative	0	.0%	0	.0%	1	100.0%	0	.0%
	Inclusiveness - Positive	1	16.7%	1	16.7%	1	16.7%	3	50.0%
	Inclusiveness - Negative	2	16.7%	0	.0%	2	16.7%	8	66.7%
	N/A	21	34.4%	8	13.1%	6	9.8%	26	42.6%

As shown in Table 6, 'democracy' is often used as an argument to negatively evaluate the inclusiveness of the current polity (58,8%) and plans to increase the level of integration (68,8%). On

the other hand, evaluations of the scope of both the EU polity and the project of integration are more often substantiated with justifications of necessity or prosperity. There is thus a deliberative disconnect in the Dutch online debate between evaluating the level and inclusiveness of integration on the one hand, and the scope on the other hand. This can be considered a problem since, in practice, we can assume that increasing the scope of integration will have direct repercussions on the level of integration (Börzel 2005; Lindberg and Scheingold 1970). In other words, it is difficult for the EU to conduct effective policy in a certain area without empowering supranational institutions to initiate and monitor such policy. This linkage is, however, not clearly recognized in the Dutch online debate during the European Parliament elections campaign of 2009.

Conclusion

Although the Netherlands has contributed strongly to European integration after the Second World War as one of the European Union's founding fathers, its Europeanism has mostly been pragmatic. European integration was seen by the majority of Dutch citizens and politicians as economically beneficial and unavoidable in light of a need to collaborate internationally to address border crossing policy challenges. In general, European integration can hardly be called a controversial issue up until the mid 1990s. However, since then, issues like the introduction of the Euro, Eastern enlargement of 2004 and 2007, troubles with the Growth and Stability Pact, and the development towards becoming the largest per capita net contributor to the EU budget have made the Netherlands a markedly more Eurosceptic country. Euroscepticism has furthermore been fostered by a growing disillusionment in the established political elites, where populist parties on both the left and right side of the political spectrum have folded the issue of European integration into their more general criticism of 'The Hague' and its ruling political elites. All this came to a head in the June 2005 referendum on the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe which was defeated by a majority of 61% of the voters despite a majority of 85% of Dutch parliamentarians arguing in favour of the Treaty.

This Chapter has studied Dutch debates on European integration in online political websites during the campaign period of the European Parliament elections of 2009. Included in the study are 50 threads from the most visited professional journalism websites in the Netherlands (Nu.nl, Telegraaf.nl and NOS.nl) as well as the two most visited political blogs (GeenStijl.nl and Marokko.nl). The findings presented in this study are four fold.

First, the 2005 referendum has clearly left its mark on Dutch politics concerning European integration. All major political parties are now clearly recognised by citizens as either 'yes' parties or 'no' parties. Rather than a specific stance on the Treaty in question, these positions are now generally understood as positions concerning the entire project of European integration. Aside from having created clear profiles, the 2005 referendum also resonates in terms of themes. The Dutch debate might be characterised as 'existential', especially in comparison to the other countries involved in this study. A significant part of the debate addressed the institutional setup of the EU, the powers of its different institutions, the extent to which citizens and the Netherlands as country are able to influence what happens in Brussels, and whether other countries (Eastern European countries and Turkey) should be allowed to be(come) members of the Union. Firstly, this contradicts the 'second order elections' thesis that European parliament elections are about domestic politics. Secondly, it stands in contrast to 'substantial' debates about what the elections should actually be about: EU policies in which the European Parliament has a meaningful say. Finally, it is different from existential debates in for instance the UK, where the question of one's own membership is central. No one in the Dutch debate argued in favour of a withdrawal of the Netherlands from the EU.

Second, thanks to the new and thoroughly developed conceptualization of dimensions of evaluation and justifications employed by this study, a disconnect in the Dutch discourse on European integration has been identified. On the one hand, the level and inclusiveness of integration tend to be evaluated in terms of democracy. That is, actors evaluate both the powers of EU institutions currently as well as possible institutional changes in the future through the prism of

standards of democracy. On the other hand, discussions on the scope of integration – which policy fields fall under EU competence – are dominated by justifications of necessity and economic prosperity. Both pro-Europeans and Eurosceptics thus discuss the level and inclusiveness of integration on different terms than they do the scope of integration. It stands to reason, however, that the level, scope, and inclusiveness of integration can not be seen as independent from each other. In other words, increasing cooperation within EU framework on policies like Foreign Policy and Justice and Home Affairs might be considered necessary from the perspective of effective governance and/or maximizing economic benefits, but it will in all likelihood also require increased powers of EU institutions to inform and enforce decisions and decrease the say of the Netherlands and Dutch citizens on such issues. Neither pro-Europeans nor Eurosceptics fully recognize this linkage in the online debates studied.

Finally, we find that both party politicians and citizens address multiple aspects of European integration in their evaluations and provide both pro-European and Eurosceptic arguments. There was, in other words, a lively and diverse debate on European integration online during the 2009 European Parliament elections campaign. Although party politicians in general still make more positive evaluations of European integration than citizens do, the huge gap apparent in the 2005 referendum seems to have been reduced. That is, Eurosceptic party politicians are more vocal in the online debate in 2009 than they were present in the Dutch parliament in 2005. Also, citizens engage with each other in the commenting functions of websites on all kinds of aspects of European integration, including both highly informed and clearly misfounded arguments, well argued statements as well as unreasoned outcries, polite comments and distasteful ones, pro-European and Eurosceptic arguments.

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