Media Coverage and National Parliaments in EU Policy-Formulation

Debates on the EU Budget
in the Netherlands 1992-2005

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RECONSTITUTING DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE

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Abstract

This paper empirically investigates the relationship between media coverage of EU policy-formulation and the involvement of national parliaments in these processes. The literature has variously argued that the activity of national parliaments in EU policy-formulation is unrelated to media coverage, that media strengthen the hand of backbenchers and opposition, or that media reinforce executive dominance. However, the mechanisms underlying these expectations are not mutually exclusive. Using a mixed methodology research design for a longitudinal case study of debates on the EU budget in the Netherlands between 1992 and 2005, this paper presents evidence for all three conflicting mechanisms, but with clear variations over time. Although institutional arrangements clearly structure parliamentary involvement, its explanatory power decreases as the intensity of debate increases. Limited media coverage reinforces executive dominance whereas extensive media coverage provides a weapon of the weak and supports the involvement of parliaments in general, and opposition parties in particular.

Keywords

Introduction

Parliaments are key political institutions in the representative democracies of EU Member States. Their active involvement in policy-formulation is important to hold government accountable in the chain of delegation characteristic for representative parliamentary democracy (Strøm 2000). Furthermore, they are a central arena for political debate; vital for collective will-formation and for providing citizens with meaningful choices during elections (Eriksen and Fossum 2002; Lord and Beetham 2001). In the European Union (EU), national parliaments are 'cornerstones' on which to build the democratic legitimacy of the multi-level EU polity (Kiiver 2006; MacCarthaigh 2007; Maurer and Wessels 2001; Smith 1996). The consensus on their importance has been codified in the EU Treaties (European Union 2008: Art. 12 TEU and Protocol 1).

However, national parliaments in Western Europe have been in decline since the 1950s in relation to national governments (Auel 2005; Burns 1999; Goetz and Meyer-Sahling 2008: 6; Maurer and Wessels 2001; O'Brennan and Raunio 2007b; Raunio and Hix 2001). Put differently, national governments have increased their manouvring freedom at the cost of parliamentary control. Although some counter trends have been observed since the beginning of the 1990s, the importance of national parliaments has become undermined by several developments. Firstly, experts have become increasingly influential in legislating associetal problems have become more complicated (Burns 1999). Secondly, the connection between political parties and voters has weakened (Katz and Mair 1995), reducing the legitimacy of representatives in parliament and opening up possibilities for bypassing national parliaments in a direct relationship between voters and government (Strøm 2000). Thirdly, the progressing border-crossing nature of societal problems has left national institutions – including national parliaments –unable to solve these problems alone. The decline of parliaments is particularly strong in issues where the EU has strong competencies, as both the constitutional powers of national parliaments and their political options in these issue areas are limited (Raunio and Hix 2001).

Whereas the influence of parliaments is in decline, media have become increasingly prominent in the EU. The increasing distance between voters and their representatives has left citizens increasingly dependent on mass media for political communication. Technological progress and liberalisation of the media market have further contributed to what can be called the 'mediatisation' of western European democracies and of the European Union, where media increasingly affect the political agenda in EU member states, especially on EU issues (Altheide 2004; Trenz 2008; Van Noije et al. 2008).

Without denying that national politicians also influence media, this study focuses on whether and how media coverage on EU policy-formulation affects parliamentary activity during these processes. The existing literature provides conflicting insights, with some arguing there is no link between media coverage and parliamentary activity, some arguing media coverage facilitates parliamentary activity and some arguing media inhibits parliamentary activity. This paper outlines these three competing theoretical perspectives and tests their propositions with a longitudinal case study of debates in newspapers and the national parliamentin the Netherlands on the EU multi-annual budgets between 1992 and 2005.

Three competing hypotheses

The relationship between national parliaments and governments in EU policy-formulation can be described as a principal – agent relationship (Strøm 2000). Unlike presidential systems, the parliamentary democracies of Western Europe elect government from their midst. This creates a single chain of delegation from citizens to parliament, to government, and finally, to bureaucracy. Like any principal, parliament more or less explicitly mandates government to conduct negotiations on its behalf within the EU. It then faces the problem of giving government the leeway in negotiations to accomplish its goals on the one hand, and holding government accountable to make sure it represents parliament's interests adequately on the other hand (Kassim and Menon 2003; Pollack 1997). This principal – agent relationship between parliament and government is further complicated by the party political nature of parliamentary activity (King 1976). Government is dependent on the support of the majority of parliament, represented by the governing party or coalition and challenged by opposition. Understanding parliaments as constellations of political parties highlights the 'composite' nature of the principal. Safeguarding accountability requires procedures, in which the principal makes a regular effort to control government. In the principal – agent literature, these procedures are known as 'police-patrol mechanisms' (McCubbins et al. 1987; Pollack 1997). They stand in contrast to 'fire-alarm mechanisms', where external actors warn the principals of any possible misbehaviour of the agent, on an irregular basis. To what extent and how media may provide such a fire-alarm mechanism stands at the centre of theoretical debate on the linkage between media coverage and parliamentary activity in EU policy-formulation.

Most studies on the involvement of national parliaments in European integration focus on institutional adaptations made by parliaments to deal with the increasing relevance of EU decision-making (Auel 2005; Maurer and Wessels 2001; Norton 1996b). During the early years of integration, national parliaments were hardly interested in European integration (Norton 1996a; O'Brennan and Raunio 2007b). Following the first enlargement, many national parliaments created European Affairs Committees (EACs) to deal with EU legislative proposals. Since the Treaty of Maastricht, national parliaments are explicitly recognised as important institutions in the EU polity. Particularly, there have been improvements in making information timely available to facilitate scrutiny. Largely, these institutional adaptations are a direct response to the increasing importance and impact of European integration. However, there are strong national variations in both institutional arrangements and formal powers of parliaments. Parliaments in Member States with a strong tradition of parliamentary dominance generally are strong in European matters as well, and the inverse relationship also applies. In addition, a sceptic public opinion towards European integration is seen as strengthening national parliaments (Auel and Benz 2005; Bergman 1997; Raunio 2005; Saalfeld 2005). All these studies focus on formal institutional arrangements and restrict their focus to the *institutions* structuring national parliamentary behaviour in European integration, rather than the actual *activity* of national parliaments. A direct relationship between institutional structures and activity in specific policy-formulation processes is then assumed. Our first hypothesis is thus:

HYPOTHESIS 1: Parliamentary activity is structured by internal institutional arrangements, resulting in negligible influence of media coverage.

Studying the Austrian parliament, Pollak and Slominski (2003) criticised this institutional proposition for neglecting party political dynamics. Although, from a formal institutional point of view, the Austrian parliament should be at least as powerful as the Danish one, it is much weaker in practice. This is largely because Austria – unlike Denmark – has a long tradition of stable majority governments. Members of Parliament (MPs) of coalition parties are unwilling to bind their ministers to strict negotiation mandates which might embarrass them should they fail to achieve them. As these MPs control a majority in parliament and the EAC, they block the adoption of strict mandates, in effect reducing the credibility of these police-patrol mechanisms. Aside from a majority in parliament providing a restraining factor, parliamentary activity is further limited by information asymmetry (Holzhacker 2002; Raunio 2007: 79). MPs have less expertise, resources and knowledge of what is happening at the EU level than government. Often, MPs would receive information from government too late, or it would be too technical and too much to deal with effectively. In addition, MPs have to spread their limited resources on many different issues, and the EU is often not deemed salient enough to warrant much attention.

To the extent that media empower parliament, it can be argued to function as a 'weapon of the weak'. Firstly, media coverage increases the political salience of issues related to European integration, giving parties an incentive to profile themselves on these issues and signal their positions to voters. Secondly, media coverage and wider public debate may provide opposition and backbenchers with allies necessary to influence government: 'It is the weak who want to socialize conflict, i.e., to involve more and more people in the conflict until the balance of forces is changed.' (Schattschneider 1960: 40). Opposition parties can reach out to constituencies and actors outside the parliamentary arena by presenting their positions in the media. Thirdly, media provide MPs with feedback from the policy-formulation process, indicating what aspects are controversial, who the stakeholders are and what their positions are. This feedback can then be used to challenge government in parliament, in effect providing a fire-alarm mechanism. Thus, our next hypothesis is as follows:

HYPOTHESIS 2: Media coverage increases the influence of opposition and backbenchers in debates on EU-policy formulation as it provides them with an incentive, a platform and a resource to profile themselves on EU issues.

In order for this to function, the media would not only have to provide feedback on EU decision-making processes but also provide a platform for MPs to profile themselves in ways of their own choosing. This is problematic, according to the third theoretical proposition. Media follow standards of *news value* to determine what to report on and to what extent (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Pierron 2003: 170). One of the most important criteria determining news value is conflict, especially personalised conflict. Secondly, media pay more attention to actors who have a stronger say in policy-formulation. They are quite successful at picking out the most powerful actors within EU policy-formulation and focussing on them (Koopmans and Erbe 2004: 109). Combining these two factors, it is no surprise to find that media pay disproportional attention to European Council meetings when reporting on EU matters. These meetings are often characterised by (personal) conflict between Member States. In addition, media heavily rely on press releases by national governments for

information on EU decision-making (Meyer 1999: 630). The result is that media frame the EU as an arena of intergovernmental conflict in which national governments are the primary actors and natural defenders of mutually exclusive national interests. To paraphrase Schattschneider (1960: 35): the fire alarm provided by the media rings with a strong intergovernmental tone. This may reduce the incentives of MPs to challenge government, as they do not want to be portrayed as hurting the national interest (O'Brennan and Raunio 2007a: 280). Our third and final hypothesis is thus as follows:

HYPOTHESIS 3: Media provide a platform for national government to profile itself and frame EU policy-formulation as a conflict between Member State governments defending national interests, inhibiting the influence of national parliaments by discouraging domestic contestation.

In light of the second and third theoretical propositions, which focus on actor behaviour rather than formal institutions, it is surprising to find a lack of empirical case studies of policy-formulation processes. Rather, the literature portrays parliamentary activity and its explanatory factors as black boxes without interest in their inter-linkages. This study aims to contribute by providing a longitudinal case studywith an actor-centred approach, in which the mechanisms linking media coverage to parliamentary activity aretraced (Elster 2007).

The Case of the EU Budget and the Netherlands

Since 1988, the European Council adopts multiannual budgets called Financial Perspectives (FPs) based on a proposal by the Commission. These FPs are then renegotiated in a co-decision procedure resulting in an 'Interinstitutional Agreement' between Council, Commission and the European Parliament. Except for the first FP, the FPs determine the basics of the EU budget for periods of seven years, leaving only minimal space for adaptation in between. These package deals combine all expenditures of the EU and its revenues. Well known aspects of the EU budget include the Common Agricultural Policy, the Structural Funds, the British Rebate and the EU's 'own resources'. However, the budget is also relevant to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, research and development policy and nature preservation policy (Laffan 1997). Thus it includes a range of questions concerning both redistribution and the future trajectory of European integration in general. The EU budget provides a particularly rewarding case when studying the linkage between media and parliament for three reasons. Firstly, budgets are of instrinsic importance to the formation of political systems. Not only have budgets been one of the major tools of forging centralised nation states in the past, they have also been the topic of fierce contestation between kings and parliaments linking the raising of taxes to the principle of representation (Lindner 2006: 1). Secondly, the EU budget provides for a particularly rich case in terms of the possibilities for comparison across time, issues and space. The same set of issues representing a broad reflection of EU competencies is discussed in all Member States simultaniously, every seven years. Finally, due to its composite decision-making procedure – having both supranational and intergovernmental aspects – it involves all important actors in EU legislative processes. National parliaments have a chance to influence their government's behaviour taking the Commission's detailed proposal as

reference point and knowing that a decision has to be taken unanimously in the European Council. Due to practical limitations, this study focuses on the negotiations of the last three FPs. The periods under consideration start with the month in which the Commission formally proposes the new budget and end with the month in which it was adoptedby the European Council. Thus, the three periods under study are February 1992 – December 1992 on the FP called 'Delors II', July 1997 – March 1999 on 'Agenda 2000' and February 2004 – December 2005 on 'Financial Perspectives 2007-2013' (FP 07-13).

The Dutch parliament is officially a two chamber parliament. However, its lower chamber – the *Tweede Kamer* – is politically much more important than the senate, also in relation to scrutiny of EU legislation. Formally, the Dutch parliament is not as powerful as the Danish, Austrian, Swedish or Finnish parliaments, but stronger than the Belgian, Irish and Mediterranean parliaments in EU matters. Together with the UK, German and French parliaments, it ranks average in power (Kiiver 2006: 62; Raunio 2005). Its rules of procedure for dealing with EU legislation remained largely stable in the period of research (Hoetjes 2001). The relevant committees discuss Commission proposals and the Dutch position based on information provided by the government. After each European Council meeting, there is a plenary debate discussing the outcomes. The period of research saw only marginal changes. In 1994, the EAC was granted permanent status and from 1999 onwards, parliament held annual 'State of the European Union' debates which also feature Dutch Members of the European Parliament (Hoetjes 2001). Thus, if formal procedures structure parliamentary activity, we can expect stability, or perhaps a marginal increase between each budget period.

Data and method

This study conducts content analysis of newspaper articles and parliamentary debates. It builds on the method of *claims-making analysis* (Koopmans 2002; Koopmans and Statham 1999). Claims consist of WHERE and WHEN, WHO makes a claim, on WHAT, HOW, addressing WHOM, for/against WHOSE interests and WHY.We define a claim 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: 12; Vetters et al. 2006: 8). The main advantage of claims-making analysis is that it analyses units of analysis as a combination of values on a given set of variables, rather than providing a word search in which the relationship between words is lost in counting, or a discourse approach in which the findings cannot be quantitatively expressed.

The staged data collection and analysis in this study provide a mixed methodology research design. Newspaper articles and parliamentary documents were sampled using a quantitative search string in digitalised archives[1]. Two quality newspapers – one more left and one more right oriented – were included as well as a popular

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[1] The search string for both media and parliamentary documents consisted of three search terms: "EU budget" ("EC budget" in 1992) OR "European budget" OR "Delors II" / "Agenda 2000" / "Financial Perspectives". As each search term consists of a word combination, false hits were negligible.

newspaper[2]. For the qualitative coding, every fourth article in chronological order was picked; this also reflected a representative sample of the three newspapers. From the parliamentary documents, all transcripts of plenary debates and questions were selected[3]. These transcripts give the advantage of being literally transcribed debates or written by the actors themselves. This stands in contrast to the documentation of committee meetings which is irregular and only provides a summary of the discussion. Also, plenary sessions may be seen as the proverbial 'tip of the iceberg' in parliamentary activity for two reasons. Firstly, because only controversial issues make it to the floor after committees have first tried to resolve them. Secondly, they are more visible to the public as they are more often covered in the news and better documented. Plenary transcriptions not only include speeches and debates, but also written questions and answers, tabled resolutions and voting.

This study uses Atlas.ti software to code the articles and debates. Coding was done qualitatively in chronological order, thus providing a process-tracing exercise. Variables were operationalised as closed categorical variables allowing for later quantitative analysis, after exporting the results to statistical software tools. The following analysis thus builds on both qualitative impressions from the process-tracing exercise and quantitative analysis of the coding results. These methods are combined in a *hierarchical* way, where qualitative impressions are used to inform and illustrate quantitative findings (Read and Marsh 2002).

No effect, weapon of the weak or reinforcing executive dominance?

As indicated in Figure 1, there are remarkably strong differences in the intensity of the debates on the three FPs, even when taking into account that the debate on Delors II lasted only 11 months as opposed to 21 months for Agenda 2000 and 23 months for FP 07-13. Of particular notice is the reversed relationship in the intensity of the media and parliamentary debates when comparing Agenda 2000 to FP 07-13. This drop in media coverage from Agenda 2000 to FP 07-13 is, however, caused by contingent factors[4].

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[2] The newspapers included are *Trouw*, *NRC Handelsblad* and *Algemeen Dagblad*.

[3] The total sample for qualitative coding included 158 newspaper articles and 24 plenary parliamentary transcripts. A total of 1595 claims was subtracted.

[4] The popular newspaper in the selection – *Algemeen Dagblad* – tried unsuccessfully to become a quality newspaper between 1993 and 2004 (Bouwmeester 2006), resulting in more intensive coverage of Agenda 2000 than of the other two FPs. The change in policy of *Algemeen Dagblad* accounts fully for the higher absolute number of media claims on Agenda 2000 than on FP 07-13.
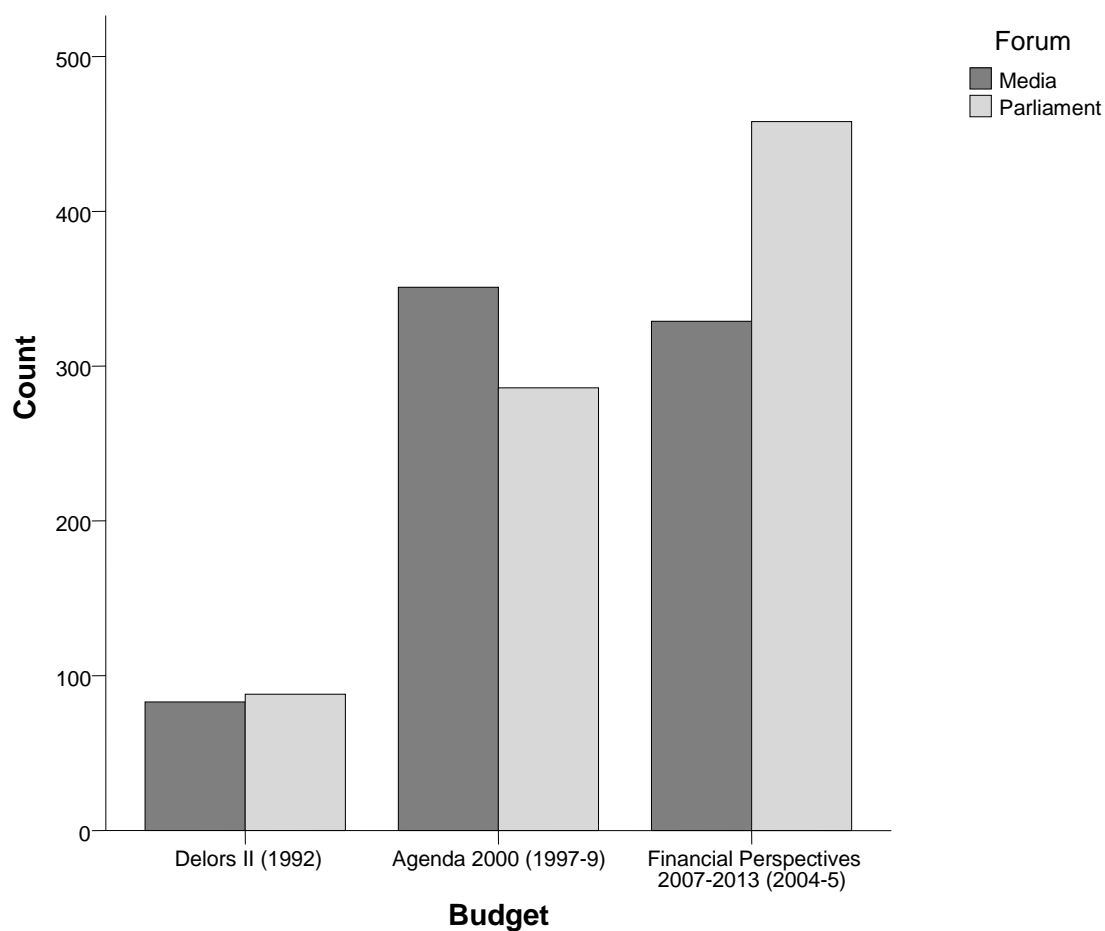
Figure 1   Claims in the media and parliament per budget period

The steep rise in number of claims poses a challenge to hypothesis 1. After all, one would predict stability of parliamentary activity in periods without institutional change following this hypothesis, but Figure 1 shows a remarkable increase in activity despite only marginal institutional adaptations. The apparent correlation between claims in the media and in parliament might be a spurious one. Two obvious candidates present themselves which may cause such a spurious relationship. First, both media and parliament may respond to a change in national interest, particularly the change the Netherlands went through from being a net-receiver of EU funds to being its largest pro-capita contributor. Secondly, the controversiality of the process at EU level may be an explanation for the larger debate. Time needed to reach agreement in the European Council is here seen as an indication of the controversiality at EU level. Although Figure 1 presents a challenge to the first hypothesis, it is far from conclusive evidence of a relationship between media coverage and parliamentary activity. We will therefore turn our attention to the mechanisms underlying the three hypotheses in more detail.

Institutional dynamics

Parliamentary proceedings are in general highly institutionalised. There are particular forums – like committee meetings and plenary sessions – that convene at preordained times and in predetermined settings. The proceedings within these forums are highly

regulated as well, ranging from a set speaking order and speaking time for each participant to rules for directing and phrasing interventions. Illustrating this, during the debate following the Edinburgh Council on 16 December 1992, Van Traa MP of PvdA (social-democrats) only got a few minutes to ask the government questions, as his colleague –Lonink MP – had already spoken for 11 minutes before, and each party was only allowed to speak for 10 minutes in total (Tweede Kamer 1992: 2829). Also, Vos MP of GroenLinks (greens) was denied the floor entirely on 11 February 1999 as she had not been present at the preceding committee meeting, thus forgoing her right to speak in the plenary (Tweede Kamer 1999). Finally, Wilders MP (radical right) was corrected by Parliament's president for violating proper courtesy norms, when he referred to foreign Minister Bot merely as 'that man' on 21 June 2005 (Tweede Kamer 2005: 5595).

Table 1 Claims by Dutch government and political parties in media and parliament per budget period

| | | Delors II (1992) | | | | Agenda 2000 (1997-9) | | | | Financial Perspectives 2007-2013 (2004-5) | | | |
| | | Media | | Parliament | | Media | | Parliament | | Media | | Parliament | |
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Claimant	National Government	3	21.4%			23	19.2%	4	1.4%	13	31.0%	4	.9%
	Prime Minister	1	7.1%	17	19.8%	11	9.2%	34	12.1%	8	19.0%	86	19.0%
	Foreign Minister					9	7.5%	5	1.8%	1	2.4%	9	2.0%
	Finance Minister	5	35.7%			28	23.3%	18	6.4%	11	26.2%	5	1.1%
	Agricultural Minister	1	7.1%			7	5.8%	10	3.5%	3	7.1%	3	.7%
	Europe Minister	2	14.3%	7	8.1%	12	10.0%	4	1.4%	1	2.4%	15	3.3%
	Other Minister	2	14.3%			2	1.7%	2	.7%				
	Subtotal	*14*	*100.0%*	*24*	*27.9%*	*92*	*76.7%*	*77*	*27.3%*	*37*	*88.1%*	*122*	*27.0%*
	Parliamentary Leader					1	.8%	16	5.7%			60	13.3%
	Member of Parliament			62	72.1%	24	20.0%	183	64.9%	3	7.1%	266	58.8%
	Political Party					3	2.5%	6	2.1%	2	4.8%	4	.9%
	Subtotal			*62*	*72.1%*	*28*	*23.3%*	*205*	*72.7%*	*5*	*11.9%*	*330*	*73.0%*
	Total	**14**	**100.0%**	**86**	**100.0%**	**120(b)**	**100.0%**	**282**	**100.0%**	**42**	**100.0%**	**452**	**100.0%**
Claimant Affiliation	Radical Left							12	4.3%			50	11.1%
	Green			2	2.3%	1	.8%	34	12.1%			46	10.2%
	Social Democrat	7(a)	50.0%	28	32.6%	25	19.8%	64	22.7%	2	3.2%	58	12.8%
	Christian Democrat	4	28.6%	43	50.0%	5	4.0%	46	16.3%	21	33.9%	130	28.8%
	Progresive Liberal			3	3.5%	21	16.7%	39	13.8%			36	8.0%
	Liberal			5	5.8%	50	39.7%	51	18.1%	16	25.8%	51	11.3%
	Orthodox Protestant			5	5.8%	1	.8%	31	11.0%			40	8.8%
	Radical Right											37	8.2%
	Other							1	.4%	2	3.2%		
	Coalition	3	21.4%			23	18.3%	4	1.4%	21	33.9%	4	.9%
	Total	**14**	**100.0%**	**86**	**100.0%**	**126**	**100.0%**	**282**	**100.0%**	**62**	**100.0%**	**452**	**100.0%**
Govern-ment	Coalition	14	100.0%	71	82.6%	119	94.4%	158	56.0%	58	93.5%	221	48.9%
	Opposition			15	17.4%	7	5.6%	124	44.0%	4	6.5%	231	51.1%
	Total	**14**	**100.0%**	**86**	**100.0%**	**126**	**100.0%**	**282**	**100.0%**	**62**	**100.0%**	**452**	**100.0%**

All three debates are clearly affected by these institutional rules. The fact that the majority of plenary claims are made in ex-post debates following European Council meetings is the strongest evidence for this. It is also clear that MPs let their claims be structured largely by documents provided by the government, particularly Council conclusions. This becomes apparent in the adherence to the same ranking order of topics and even in the literal reference by MPs to these conclusions. However, a minority of claims during Agenda 2000 and FP 07-13 were made outside this institutional arrangement. As the debate heated up, MPs increasingly made claims in various other outlets like weekly question hours, annual discussions of the state of the European Union, annual national budget negotiations or by means of written questions. For instance, on 11 February 1999, as the negotiations on Agenda 2000 neared an end, Atsma MP of the Christian-democrats in opposition, demanded a special plenary session to demand of government that it would safeguard the income of Dutch farmers, even though the same topic had been discussed in a committee meeting that morning (Tweede Kamer 1999). However, the overall explanatory power of institutional dynamics for parliamentary activity decreases as media coverage increases. The latter two budget debates saw parliamentary activity increasingly going beyond the preordained post European Council debates.

Weapon of the weak

To assess the extent to which media coverage provided a weapon for the weak by socializing conflict, we will look at references to the media by MPs in their claims. As Table 2 shows, claims in parliament are only rarely supported.

However, claims became more often supported as the debate intensified from Delors II to Agenda 2000 and FP 07-13. On two of the main topics that dominated the Dutch debate on FP 07-13 – the Dutch net contribution and the spending on Agricultural policy – the media documented conflicting statements by the government. Regarding net contributions, foreign Minister Bot gave away the official governmental negotiating position. Among others, Wilders MP challenged Foreign Minister Bot on 21 June 2005 as follows: 'In a newspaper this morning, Minister Bot said: "We are willing to remain the largest net-contributor." Has Mr. Bot completely lost his mind?! ' (Tweede Kamer 2005: 5578). Concerning spending on Agricultural policy, the official Dutch position was that spending should be reduced. However, the main governing party – the CDA (Christian-democrats) – remained ambiguous, having traditionally defended the interests of farmers. Agricultural Minister Veerman of the CDA threatened in the media to resign should the current ceiling on spending be lowered (NRC Handelsblad 2005). The government was heavily challenged over this proclamation by several parties in parliament, including the two liberal parties (VVD and D66) that were in the governing coalition together with CDA. With their help, parliament adopted a 'follow Tony resolution' – in reference to British Prime Minister Blair – forcing government to work with the British EU presidency in trying to find possibilities for reducing spending on agriculture in return for reducing the British rebate.

Opposition members are more likely to seek support for their claims than coalition members, particularly when they can embarrass government with it. What is particularly interesting is the difference in the location of the support, as shown in Table 2.

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Table 2 Supported claims by opposition and coalition in the Dutch parliament per budget period.

| | Delors II (1992) | | | | Agenda 2000 (1997-9) | | | | Financial Perspectives 2007-2013 (2004-5) | | | |
| | Coalition | | Opposition | | Coalition | | Opposition | | Coalition | | Opposition | |
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Support Claimant — National Government							1	.8%	1	.5%		
National Parliament					1	.6%	1	.8%	12	5.4%	3	1.3%
Prime Minister											2	.9%
Foreign Minister											1	.4%
Finance Minister					2	1.3%			3	1.4%	1	.4%
Agricultural Minister	2	2.8%							3	1.4%	4	1.7%
Europe Minister									1	.5%		
Parliamentary Leader					1	.6%			1	.5%	2	.9%
Member of Parliament	1	1.4%	1	6.7%			3	2.4%	4	1.8%	5	2.2%
Political Party							1	.8%	2	.9%	3	1.3%
Subtotal	*3*	*4.2%*	*1*	*6.7%*	*4*	*2.5%*	*6*	*4.8%*	*27*	*12.2%*	*21*	*9.1%*
EU (general)									1	.5%	1	.4%
EU Institutions (general)											1	.4%
European Commission							2	1.6%	4	1.8%	3	1.3%
European Council							1	.8%				
European Parliament							3	2.4%			1	.4%
Other Member State Government(s)					1	.6%			4	1.8%	8	3.5%
International Organisation									1	.5%	1	.4%
NGO / Social Movement											1	.4%
Media / Journalist					7	4.4%	8	6.5%	4	1.8%	10	4.3%
Famous People											1	.4%
Academics / Specialists					1	.6%	3	2.4%			1	.4%
Subtotal					*9*	*5.7%*	*17*	*13.7%*	*14*	*6.3%*	*28*	*12.1%*
None	68	95.8%	14	93.3%	145	91.8%	101	81.5%	180	81.4%	182	78.8%
Total	**71**	**100.0%**	**15**	**100.0%**	**158**	**100.0%**	**124**	**100.0%**	**221**	**100.0%**	**231**	**100.0%**

Whereas claims by the coalition are most often supported from within parliament or government, claims of the opposition find support largely outside the national political arena. This is most pronounced during the debate on FP 07-13, where 9,1% of claims by opposition members were supported from within the national political arena whereas 12,1% were supported outside the national political arena. For coalition members, the percentages are 12,2% and 6,3% respectively, showing almost the exact reversed relationship. Among sources for support outside the national political arena, media are the most prominent. These percentages provide clear support for the 'weapon of the weak' hypothesis, although these findings need to be confirmed in other cases. Moreover, it is likely that some of the outside support from other sources than the media is actually channelled through the media. For instance, media provide opposition members with information on the position of other Member States' governments, thus allowing them to present these governments as supporters of their claims.

The actual number of claims in parliament triggered by media coverage is larger than the percentages in Table 2 suggest. Firstly, Claims by MPs who base support for their claims in the media trigger responses from other politicians without explicit reference to the media. Secondly, government action as reported in the media triggered responses in parliament. MPs often addressed government's negotiation behaviour in Brussels in their claims. Finally, media's emphasis on government behaviour in intergovernmental behaviour and the national interest triggered counter-actions by some MPs. Notably, Karimi MP of GroenLinks (in opposition) with passive support from D66 (in government) charged government with 'narrow-minded nationalism', argued the common European interest was more important than net-contributions, and tabled a resolution asking government to support an EU tax to avoid tough intergovernmental bargaining in future (Tweede Kamer 2005: 5605). This stands in clear contrast to her predecessorin 1992 – Brouwer MP –who thought parliament should not be so preoccupied with 'the EC's internal affairs' (Tweede Kamer 1992: 2823).

All in all, increased media attention for the EU budget during Agenda 2000 and FP 07-13 in relation to the coverage of Delors II coincided with a much stronger presense of members of opposition parties in parliament in the latter two periods. Their share of claims increased from 17,4% during Delors II to 44,2% of the claims made during Agenda 2000 and 51,2% of claims during FP 07-13, as shown in Table 1.

Reinforcing executive dominance

In this section, we discuss the extent to which news value criteria structured the debate in the media and whether this resulted in an over representation of executive powers and a stress on intergovernmental conflict in the media and parliament.

As shown in Table 1, the relationship between executive and legislative actors in parliamentary debates is remarkably stable across the different negotiations. Government is responsible for between 27% and 28% of the claims by national politicians. However, in the media, executive actors are much more dominant, ranging from 100% percent of the claims during Delors II, 76% during Agenda 2000 and 88,1% during FP 07-13. Reporting by newspapers on the negotiations in Brussels and government's comments on this process are a prime example of this bias. On 15 September 1997, *NRC Handelsblad* reported on the opening phase of negotiations on Agenda 2000:

> 'Let's pound on it' is not usual diplomatic language you can expect from Dutch Ministers concerning the European Union. But finance Minister Zalm expressed himself in these words during the monthly meeting of European finance Ministers ... regarding the height of Dutch contributions to the European Union.
>
> (NRC Handelsblad 1997)

This quote eloquently illustrates the media's bias towards both executive actors and intergovernmental conflict. Although there is clear evidence of the expected effects of news value criteria,this bias diminishes as the debate intensifies as illustrated by the percentage of claims made by government in the media.

There is additional support for the hypothesis that media reinforce executive dominance when looking at framing, as displayed in table 3.

Table 3 Framing in the media and parliament per budget period

| | | Delors II (1992) | | | | Agenda 2000 (1997-9) | | | | Financial Perspectives 2007-2013 (2004-5) | | | |
| | | Media | | Parliament | | Media | | Parliament | | Media | | Parliament | |
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Frame Type	Intergovern-mental conflict	19	22.9	14	15.9	109	31.1	59	20.6	112	34.0	120	26.2
	Supranational conflict	5	6.0	4	4.5	18	5.1	5	1.7	12	3.6	10	2.2
	Domestic conflict	1	1.2	7	8.0	12	3.4	22	7.7	10	3.0	48	10.5
	Other conflict	3	3.6	3	3.4	15	4.3	5	1.7	10	3.0	5	1.1
	Subtotal	*28*	*33.7*	*28*	*31.8*	*154*	*43.9*	*91*	*31.8*	*144*	*43.8*	*183*	*40.0*
	Cooperation	30	36.1	50	56.8	132	37.6	143	50.0	150	45.6	218	47.6
	No frame	25	30.1	10	11.4	65	18.5	52	18.2	35	10.6	57	12.4
	Total	**83**	**100**	**88**	**100**	**351**	**100**	**286**	**100**	**329**	**100**	**458**	**100**

Claimants in the media frame the policy-formulation process more often as a case of intergovernmental conflict than claimants in parliament. In the opening phase of the Delors II debate, *Trouw* reported that:

> A tough battle between the richer EC Member States is about to ensue. Germany, for instance, thinks it's not unfair that the British have to start paying more to the EC ... Germany declines paying an unreasonable sum of money for the economic development of poorer Member States ...
>
> (Koele 1992)

Thus, media create the picture that the policy-formulation process on the EU budget is a question of intergovernmental bargaining, in which each Member State defends its national interest. The outcome is a compromise which is only reached after an intense and prolonged struggle. On 23 June 1998, Van den Akker MP (CDA) complained about this. In his words:

> What is more important to the citizen than peace, security, a well functioning economy, ... and a job? However, these topics do not dominate the news on Europe. No, what the European citizen reads in the newspaper and sees on television is the twisting and scheming ... [a]nd that the use of financial contributions is questioned.
>
> (Tweede Kamer 1998a: 6045)

The epitome claim of intergovernmental conflict concerning the EU budget; Thatcher's famous 'I want my money back', was regularly invoked throughout the period of research, even though that claim was made back in 1984 by a non-Dutch claimant. Moreover, as the intergovernmental frame became more dominant in the media and media coverage increases, so did it become more dominant in parliament. During Delors II, 22,9% of claims in the media and 15,9% of claims in parliament framed the EU budget as a case of intergovernmnetal conflict. These percentages increased to 31,1% and 20,6% during Agenda 2000 and 34,0% and 26,2% during FP 07-

13 respectively. Illustrating this type of framing, Belgium Prime Minister Dehaene's summary of the Vienna Council was quoted by Timmermans MP (PvdA) on 17 December 1998: 'No one wants to pay more, some want to pay less, no one wants to receive less and we all have to pay more for the enlargement. Go figure!' (Tweede Kamer 1998b: 2808). This lends support to the second aspect of hypothesis 2: that framing in the media biases towards intergovernmental conflict and that media coverage inhibits the scope of domestic conflict partially by affecting framing in parliament.

Thus, this study provides support for the hypothesis that media reinforce executive dominance. This is evident as the media disproportionally provide a platform for executive actors to profile themselves. Interestingly though, the overrepresentation of executive actors diminishes as media coverage intensifies. During the two most intense debates, the media provided a platform for legislative actors and members of opposition parties next to executive actors, even though this remained limited. Media remained continuously biased towards framing the policy-formulation process as a conflict between Member States in which the domestic government is the most important defender of the national interest. As media coverage increased, this framing also gained ground in parliamentary debates.

Conclusion

The present paper provides for a limited theory test only. It has looked at a limited number of EU-related issues, in a time frame covering 14 years only, in one single member state. Therefore, the conclusion is restricted to theoretical, rather than empirical generalisation. In other words, the results from this case study will be used to refine the hypotheses about the relationship between media coverage and parliamentary activity in EU policy-formulation, rather than to reach empirical conclusions. These hypotheses should be tested in further empirical research, including more cases across time, space and/or issues. Studying policy-formulation processes instead of general rules of parliamentary behaviour has pointed our attention to two factors that may create a spurious relationship between media coverage and parliamentary activity. First, the extent to which national interests are at stake may affect both factors. Increase in media coverage and parliamentary activity coincided with the Netherlands becoming the biggest net-contributor. Secondly, the controversiality of the policy-formulation process at the EU level may have this effect. There were strong differences in the length of the negotiations required to reach a compromise, with the longer periods being characterised by more intense debate. Further studies should try to control for these factors.

That being said, this study finds evidence of strong variation of Dutch parliamentary activity in policy-formulation on multiannual EU-budgets, which cannot be attributed to institutional dynamics alone. There is clear evidence that media provide a weapon of the weak in that it empowers opposition in parliament. However, news value logics reinforce executive dominance. Only when media coverage reaches certain levels of intensity is this mechanism losing explanatory force. We then find that legislative actors – especially members of opposition parties – gain a stronger voice in parliament, and to some extent in the media. We therefore hypothesise that institutional arrangements structure parliamentary debates, but cannot fully explain

its intensity or the composition of its participants. To explain the intensity of debates in parliament, we need to look at media effects. Limited media coverage of EU policy-formulation processes reinforces executive dominance whereas more intensive media coverage starts providing a weapon of the weak and increases the involvement of national parliaments.

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