

THE PUBLIC SPHERE AND DEBATES ABOUT EUROPE IN BRITAIN

Internalized and conflict driven?

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This article undertakes an analysis of British public debates on European integration by recourse to an original data set on political claims-making. The public sphere is conceptualized as a space where citizens interact through their acts of public communication. Such public communications are an important source of the Europe-building process, because they potentially provide public inputs to the elite-led processes of European political institutional integration. Our empirical findings show that British public debates are internalized within the nation-state rather than creating links to supra- or transnational European polities. In addition, we find relatively low levels of civil society engagement compared to that of political elites, and a high level of political competition between the two major political parties, Labour and Conservative. Overall, we argue that elite ambivalence to Britain's position within the European Union has created this climate of uncertainty and political competition over Europe.

Introduction

The participatory capacity of the European Union's politics has been considered problematic for a long time. At the heart of the EU's 'democratic deficit' is the discrepancy between its increasing competences over the lives of Europeans, and the continuing dominance of national politics as the space for public debates and as the source of collective identities. Since the early 1990s, several related developments have made this discrepancy more acute: the erosion of the 'permissive consensus' on EU integration; the decline of public trust in EU institutions; the decline of voter participation in European elections; and 're-nationalization' tendencies, such as the upsurge of xenophobic and anti-European political parties and groups. The paradox is that Europe is increasingly visible in everyday life, for example in people's familiarity with the euro currency, but at the same time, there is a deficiency in the access that publics have to the EU. This fraught relationship is at a crucial juncture following the announcements by several EU states that they intend to hold referendums on the European Constitution, which will have the effect of opening an important issue relating to European integration to a popular vote, thus putting the gap between the EU and its citizens to test.

In the wake of enlargement, the EU has embarked on an ambitious phase of institutional reform in its political integration project by attempting to establish a Constitution. Faced by this prospect, the British Labour government has adopted the strategy of a popular referendum which it sees as a necessary step to legitimate the

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proposed constitutional change. Opinion polls regularly show that the British public is both more Eurosceptic and has lower levels of knowledge of the EU than other European publics, and despite the British tradition for strong executive power, Labour has chosen not to risk acting without a clear public mandate, although it has been prepared to do so on other contentious issues, such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The decision to hold a referendum has sparked a new phase of contentious politics over Britain's relationship to Europe, between political parties, opposed campaign groups, and in the press. This raises questions about the nature of British public debates about Europe: are they different from those in other European countries? Do they allow space for public constituencies to participate in the emerging supra- and transnational politics of the EU? What role does political party competition play in the conflict lines over Europe?

In this article, we address these questions by recourse to empirical evidence. Our conceptual approach refers to the *public sphere*, that is, the public acts of political communication through which collective actors create an interactive medium and space of relationships among political institutions and citizens on issues of European integration. In light of the EU's 'democratic deficit', it becomes particularly important to consider the forums in which European integration issues are publicly discussed, since the public sphere constitutes the principal space for communicative connections between the EU and the citizens of its Member States. Here we follow authors such as Habermas (2002) and Calhoun (2003), who argue that such processes of 'Europeanization' through public communications are at least as important as political institutional developments and individual perceptions in their potential for constituting a common Europe.

Our aim is to arrive at a better understanding of the structure and content of British public debates about Europe. We want to assess the participatory capacity of the British public sphere by examining the patterns of political communication on Europe that visibly exist. Our focus on the public sphere is thus restricted to an examination of the visible political communication carried by the mass media. Of course, not all political demands reach the media, but it is precisely this publicly visible field of communication which is important for gauging the nature of public debates on Europe, because it is only through visibility in the mass media that mobilized political positions have the potential to impact on public perceptions and policy decision making. This makes the mass media the most relevant source of the public sphere for our particular research enquiry.

Specifically, we consider that it is important to answer three related questions regarding public communication on Europe. First, we examine whether, overall, the British public sphere exhibits similarities or differences to a country which has been engaged more deeply and longer in the European integration process, namely France. Here we aim to see to what extent public acts of communication produce links to politics beyond the nation-state, both supranationally with the EU and transnationally with other EU countries, or, alternatively, whether their effect is to produce internalized national debates about Europe. Second, we ask to what extent there is evidence for participatory action by civil society actors in political debates about Europe. Third, we address to what extent there is party competition by the Labour and Conservative Parties over Europe, and whether their pro-European and Eurosceptic stances are based on political (e.g. sovereignty), economic (e.g. cost–benefit), or cultural-historical (e.g. national identity) framing strategies. Through

these related questions, we provide evidence on British public debates about Europe regarding the overall macro-picture, the cleavages between different types of actors, and the qualitative micro-contents of specific pro-European and Eurosceptic modes of argumentation. In the conclusion, we draw together the findings and interpret them through reference to the contemporary British political context.

Europeanization and the Public Sphere

Academic debates about the advancement of political integration in Europe have long held assumptions about the impact that such institutional developments have on the behaviour of political actors and the citizenry. A 'founding father' of integration theory, Ernst Haas (1961, p. 196), saw European integration as 'the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new political centre'. Although this functionalist vision of a European consensus on ideas, principles and interests now appears as outdated idealism (Schmitter, 2000), many of today's scholars, although applying different approaches—neo-institutionalism (Stone Sweet *et al.*, 2001), multi-level governance (Marks *et al.*, 1996) and network governance (Kohler-Koch & Eising, 1999)—still consider that as the locus of political power shifts to the European level, domestic political actors will have to adapt themselves to this new playing field. Here the important questions are: to what extent does politics now spread across the borders of Europe's nation-states, which actors are able to adapt and benefit most from these new opportunities, and which arguments do actors apply when positioning themselves strategically within these changing relationships?

To address these questions, we focus on public acts of communication that take place in, and thereby help to create, a space of relations among political actors, institutions and citizens, namely a *public sphere*. Previously, Habermas (1989) demonstrated that the emergence of the nation-state as the predominant unit of political space, superseding the local and regional levels of political organization, was not just a question of institution-building from above, or an outcome of pre-existing identifications among the citizenry, but depended crucially on the development of a civic public sphere, as an interactive field which increasingly involves citizens in national public debates. Following these seminal insights, several authors emphasize that public communication and the construction of a public sphere is an essential prerequisite for a meaningful process of European integration. For example, Calhoun (2003, p. 243) states: 'If Europe is not merely a place but a space in which distinctively European relations are forged and European visions of the future enacted, then it depends on communication in public, as much as on a distinctively European culture, or political institution, or economy, or social networks.' Furthermore, on the European Constitution, Habermas (2002) points out that the 'inducing function' of the construction of a 'demos' within Europe, with incentives for institutions, associations and citizens to mobilize, may be the end product rather than the starting point of this interactive and dynamic process.

It needs underlining that this basic idea is not functionalist, i.e. that an active participatory public sphere will occur automatically in response to the European

integration of political institutions. On the contrary, to the extent that it emerges at all, a European public sphere will build itself, and be built, through the interactions of actors who engage in European issues between and within different levels of polities. In addition, this intermediary public sphere of political communication bridging the gap between European institutions and the European citizenry will be essential to any resolution of the EU's 'democratic deficit'. Often the 'democratic deficit' is seen as a problem of institutional design of the European polity, or alternatively, as a problem of European citizens' lack of identification with Europe. Although such factors are important, we consider that the 'democratic deficit' is likely to be resolved more effectively by an increasing engagement of intermediary actors, such as political parties and civil society actors, in acts of political communication. Such interaction will build communicative linkages between EU elites and the citizenry, which in turn may then help create a European political process with better political institutional arrangements and stronger forms of citizenry identification.

So far, contributions on this subject have tended to be speculative, normative and theoretical, perhaps due to a lack of empirical evidence within which to ground them (for exceptions, see Gerhards, 1992; Eder & Trenz, 2002). Nonetheless, most scholars agree that whatever form 'Europeanization' of the public sphere takes, it will *not* simply replicate the experience of the nation-state at the supranational level, to form a supranational European public sphere. In the virtual absence of a transnational Europe-wide mass media and the predominance of national ones, the most likely location for 'Europeanization' trends will be within national public spheres (Schlesinger, 1995). In this article, we attempt to empirically map the public communication about Europe which occurs in the British public sphere. Our aim is to reach a better understanding of the emergent paths of Europeanization trends, the transformation of relationships between political actors which is occurring, and the framing strategies which are carrying such stances. We now provide more details on the political claims-making approach that we use to map public communication over Europe.

Claims-making in the Public Sphere¹

To retrieve evidence on the interactive dimension of political communication that constitutes the public sphere, we refer to acts of claims-making. We define an instance of political claims-making as a unit of strategic action in the public sphere that consists of *the purposive and public articulation of political demands, 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* (see Koopmans *et al.*, forthcoming 2005). Political decisions and policy implementations are also included, as are protest events (even in cases where there is no verbal claim, such as a violent act). This claims-making approach is an extension of 'protest event analysis' (see, for example, Tarrow, 1989; Kriesi *et al.*, 1995) in social movement research, but focuses on a broader range of actors and provides more detail on the discursive contents of their strategic mobilizations. This broader range makes it possible to retrieve the dimension of the public sphere which is constructed by the claims-making of collective actors and that successfully reaches the mass media. In addition, we

are able to place specific actors according to their standpoints over contentious political issues within the public debates. Through claims-making analysis, we investigate public communication as a primary source for what social movement scholars refer to as 'contentious politics', i.e. processes of interaction between actors, and the coalitions, alliances and networks, and conflict lines, which connect and relate different types of collective actors in a multi-organizational field (McAdam *et al.*, 2001). Such claims and actors' positions mobilized in the mass media are important, because this is the dimension of the public sphere which is visible to citizens, and thereby open to processes of resonance and legitimacy among wider public constituencies.

Research in this tradition has already addressed transnational developments including the extent of 'post-national' and 'transnational' forms of claims-making by migrants (Koopmans & Statham, 1999a, 2003), and protests over Europe (Imig & Tarrow, 2001). Here we use a claims-making approach to assess another form of political globalization, the evidence for 'Europeanization' trends in the active public sphere.

To make the step towards analysis, it is necessary to see claims-making acts as *interactive communicative links*. Claims-making acts communicatively link different political levels (EU supranational, EU foreign, national domestic) and different types of actors (e.g. elites/civil society; left/right political parties) and express different purposeful views on European integration (pro-/anti-) which may be framed in different ways (political, economic, cultural). Taking this view enables us to realize our empirical-descriptive aim, which is to identify the structure of claims-making, i.e. the political demands and expectations which citizens and their political representatives mobilize about the EU. First, we look at the chain of communicative linkages between different levels of political institutions (EU, trans-European, foreign EU, national domestic). By comparing the structures of claims-making in two European countries, our contrast is between France, a founding member of the European project, and Britain, a latecomer, which has not joined integrative projects, such as the abolition of border controls by the EU's Schengen group and monetary union. We wish to examine whether the deeper institutional engagement of France in European political integration compared to Britain has led to differences in the two national patterns of political communication. Second, we focus more closely on the dynamics of actor relationships within public communication in Britain, by looking at the types of cleavages (elite versus civil society; left versus right political party), the relationships between actors (competitive/consensual, opponents/allies) and their positions on European integration (pro-European versus Eurosceptic). In a third step, we examine the discursive content of actors' political claims in order to identify how the arguments which they use frame the relationship of Britain to Europe (in political, economic, or cultural terms).

Before the analysis, we first provide more detail on our methodological approach.

Method²

To address our questions we use media-based data on public claims-making. We are fully aware that newspaper coverage is not an undistorted and complete mirror of reality. From the multitude of claims made on a daily basis by a variety of groups in liberal

democracies, only a few are actually reported in the media. However, it is precisely this publicly visible aspect of claims-making that is of interest here, because this has the potential to impact on public perceptions or on policy making. Since our focus is on the public debates about European integration that are available to citizens through the mass media, claims-making that does not mobilize any media attention may be considered invisible and incapable of having any public impact. Our explicit aim is to explain the pattern of those claims that actually reach the mass media and which have the opportunity to become part of the processes of public debate and policy deliberation.

To investigate claims-making, we use data drawn from content analyses of national daily newspapers. In contrast to many media content analyses, we are not primarily interested in the way that the media frame events. Our focus is on the news coverage of public statements and other forms of claims-making by non-media actors. Taking a cue from 'protest event' analysis in social movement research (Tarrow, 1989; Rucht *et al.*, 1998), our unit of analysis is not an article but an individual instance of claims-making. Claims are broken down into seven elements, for each of which a number of variables are coded:

- (1) Location of claim in time and space (when and where is the claim made?)
- (2) Actor making claim (who makes the claim?)
- (3) Form of claim (how is the claim inserted in the public sphere?)
- (4) Addressee of claim (at whom is the claim directed?)
- (5) Substantive issue of claim (what is the claim about?)
- (6) Object actor: who would be affected by the claim if it were realized (for/against whom?)
- (7) Justification for claim—frame (why should this action be undertaken?)

Our data include all claims-making acts relating to European integration, as well as those referring to Europe which appeared in six policy fields. This selection of policy fields was strategic to cover a representative range of political involvement by EU institutions: we chose two policy fields where EU competences had extended furthest (monetary, agriculture), two intermediary (immigration, troop deployment) and two where nation-states retain autonomous control (retirement/pensions, education). Acts were included if they involved demands, criticisms, or proposals related to the regulation or evaluation of events in relation to European integration. Regarding territorial criteria, we included acts in the UK (and France, respectively, for the comparative case) and those in the EU/EEC, even if they were made by foreign or supranational actors or addressed to foreign or supranational authorities.

We use data drawn from a sample of editions of *The Guardian* and *The Times* (and *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* for the French comparative case).³ These papers were chosen because they are newspapers of public record with an encompassing coverage of the specific issues of interest. When using newspapers as a source, one has to deal with the problem of selection (not all events that occur receive coverage) and description bias (events may get covered in a distorted way) (McCarthy *et al.*, 1998). We have tried to minimize the problem of description bias by explicitly basing the coding only on the factual coverage of statements and events, leaving out any comments and evaluations

made by reporters or editors. Second, that our interest is in *public* claims-making makes selection bias less problematic than in other contexts, because acts of claims-making become relevant, and potentially controversial, only when they reach the public sphere. Nonetheless, we have used two newspapers per country with different (left/right) political affiliations as sources to control for possible bias in the selection of reported events.

Our sample is taken from five years: 1990, 1995, 2000, 2001 and 2002. We decided to retrieve our cases of claims-making from a sample determined by specific days that were selected in advance at regular time intervals within each year.⁴ This retrieval strategy was considered to be preferable to sampling around key events of European debate, for example the controversy around Haider in Austria. Our findings thus have more chance of representing general trends regarding the Europeanization of political claims-making in the public sphere, instead of telling us about specific event-driven occurrences whose importance, though significant, may be limited within a specific policy field or event, or within a contingent time period.⁵

The Overall Pattern of Claims-making: Britain and France

The first step of our analysis was to determine whether the overall patterns of political communication that appear in the British public sphere are similar to or different from those in France, a country with a deeper and longer involvement in European integration.⁶ Here, we compared public debates by looking at how the political claims mobilized by collective actors communicatively link across the different levels of polities (supranational, foreign national, domestic national). A prime concern was the extent to which claims extend beyond the geopolitical boundaries of a nation-state.

With regard to links across different levels of polity, hypothetically a claims-making act may construct a *vertical* relationship between the domestic nation-state and the supranational European institutions, for example when a Prime Minister or pressure group makes a demand on EU institutions with respect to a concern about European policy, or, alternatively, when a European institution demands that a national government change its policy with respect to a European issue. Second, a claims-making act may constitute a *horizontal* relationship between actors within different EU Member States, for example when the French government criticizes the British for their lack of commitment to the European Constitution. Another form of claims-making remains *national*, comprising those demands about Europe which are between national actors and remain within the boundaries of the nation-state. Here, for example, the British Conservative Party may criticize the Labour Party over its pro-European stance, or alternatively, British farmers may demand that their national government protect their subsidies in European negotiations.

Claims-making acts which link different levels of polities are important carriers of Europeanization processes for national public spheres. By aggregating the different types of claims-making found it becomes possible to see what the more prominent types are and directions of flows of information in political exchanges with regard to Europe. Here we map and compare the *communicative links* between different polities that are produced by claims-making in the two national public spheres.

Five possible types of claims-making involving national actors are:

- (a) *Top-down vertical claims-making by EU/EEC institutions on national actors*—supranational European political institutions are the driving force behind Europeanization by calling for a political response from national domestic actors on issues of European integration. This creates a top-down vertical Europeanizing relationship from the supranational to the national domestic polity.
- (b) *Bottom-up vertical claims-making by national domestic actors on EU/EEC institutions*—this is the reverse of (a), where political claims-making by national actors calls on EU/EEC supranational institutions to respond to demands over Europe.
- (c) *Horizontal claims-making by foreign actors from European Member States on domestic actors*—here, actors from other EU members enter national domestic politics to demand responses over European issues from national domestic actors. This contributes to Europeanization by linking two or more national polities.
- (d) *Horizontal claims-making by national actors on other EU Member States*—this is the reverse of (c). Demands are mobilized by national actors on actors from other EU Member States on European issues. These horizontal types of claims-making ((c) and (d)) depict a Europe of nation-states whose politics are being more closely communicatively interwoven with one another by conflict over or collaboration within the European project.
- (e) *National claims-making over Europe*—here, national actors mobilize demands over European issues on other national actors. This is evidence of ‘internalized’ national political debates on European issues, including contestation, as a form of Europeanization.

Each of the possible types of claims-making represents a relationship between actors that constitutes a specific form of Europeanized political communication. This means that by aggregating the cases of claims-making across the different types we are able to draw up an overall picture of the patterns of communicative relationships in a national public sphere. Of the five possible relationships, horizontal and vertical claims-making carries forms of Europeanized communication which creates links between the domestic nation-state and polities that are beyond national borders and at the supranational level, respectively. Such forms of communication across borders and levels of polities can be considered to be a more purely *open* variant of Europeanized communication. In such cases, the public sphere visibly presents direct supranational and transnational interactions between actors across EU, foreign Member State and national domestic polities. By comparison, national claims-making over Europe is a more *closed* variant, where Europe becomes a topic for political contestation only between actors within the national domestic political framework, without any direct transnational links being represented.

This closed variant of claims-making on Europe is still Europeanized communication, and following those historians who emphasize conflict in the formation of the nation-state (Tilly, 1978) one could even argue that contestation within a country, and the increasing references to Europe it brings, might in the future contribute to European integration processes. From our point of view, however, the crucial difference is that ‘nationalized’ communication on Europe—as it presently *is*, not what it may arguably bring in the future—constitutes, and makes visible in the public sphere, a less direct communicative engagement with the supranational EU institutions (vertical) and with other foreign

politics (horizontal). This means, for example, that if the EU is not visibly seen to make political demands, or have demands directed on it, then European institutions are not actually being 'opened up' in the public sphere to the citizenry for processes of scrutiny, accountability and responsibility. Instead, the link between the EU and its citizens becomes less visible and explicit, and is indirect and mediated only by competition between actors with stakes in national politics.

Table 1 shows distributions across the five types for claims-making for Britain and France.⁷ In addition to the share of each claims-making type, we indicate a score for 'position' on European integration which ranges from -1 to $+1$. A score of -1 is attributed to a claim against a deepening of the European integration process, or implies restrictions in the rights and position of European institutions and regulations (or a rejection of improvements). Conversely, a score of $+1$ stands for a claim in favour of deepening European integration, or for the extension of the rights and positions of European institutions and regulations (or a rejection of restrictions). Third, a score of 0 indicates neutral or ambivalent claims. The position is reached by aggregating the mean from the position scores of all claims of that type. By comparing the mean positions of different claims-making types we show a first qualitative indicator for whether specific types of claims-making are generally in favour of or against European integration.

Starting with top-down 'vertical' claims-making, where EU supranational actors make demands on British and French actors (a), we find relatively modest amounts in both countries (Britain 8.7%, France 5.3%). This indicates the limited penetration of European institutions as a visible and 'active' actor, even in the field of claims about European integration. The EU/EEC appears to be a poor communicator within national public spheres, though it could also be the case that the media are poor in picking up EU/EEC demands. Overall, however, the effect is the same in both countries; there are relatively few opportunities for the citizens to see the EU as an initiator of political demands, although it is a powerful institutional actor. This supports the idea of a 'democratic deficit', where the EU does not appear visibly as a driver of European integration processes to the extent that it clearly is. Not surprisingly, when it does reach national public spheres, it is a strong advocate of European integration (Britain $+0.50$, France $+0.58$).

TABLE 1

Shares and positions of types of claims-making over Europe

	Britain		France	
	Share (%)	Position	Share (%)	Position
(a) Top-down vertical claims-making by EU/EEC	8.7	+0.50	5.3	+0.58
(b) Bottom-up vertical claims-making on EU/EEC	30.1	-0.13	56.4	+0.29
(c) Horizontal claims-making by foreign EU	5.3	+0.39	4.9	+0.27
(d) Horizontal claims-making on foreign EU	2.0	N/A	6.7	+0.40
(e) 'Internal' national claims-making over Europe	53.9	+0.07	26.7	+0.39
Total	100.0		100.0	
N	343		229	

N/A = fewer than five cases.

Conversely, when we look at the claims made by national actors on EU institutions to do something with regard to European integration (b), we find this bottom-up way of linking the EU to public debate three times more prevalent in Britain (30.1%), and 10 times more so in France (56.4%), than the top-down type. This shows that the EU is brought into debate as an addressee and criticized actor more than it puts itself forward by making claims. Another important observation is the striking cross-national difference. This type of bottom-up, vertical claims-making accounts for less than a third of claims-making in Britain and puts forward a strong Eurosceptic position (-0.13). In contrast, more than half of French claims-making is actually directed towards EU institutions and evaluates European integration more positively than the British ($+0.29$). This shows that French actors have produced a channel of communication that directly addresses European institutions, more than their British counterparts have. Such direct links upwards to the EU polity are also made visible and open to scrutiny by the French public. This development indicates the emergence of a public sphere where French national actors open up the EU for deliberation on issues of European integration, and where the public have more of an opportunity to actually see the EU as a powerful institutional actor.

Regarding the possible development of political communication across borders between EU Member States on European integration (c) and (d), we find relatively small amounts in both countries (taken together: Britain 7.3%, France 11.6%). So far it appears that there is little transnational communication that would be indicative of an EU of interacting nation-states.

Another observation is that the positions in the French public sphere are generally more pro-European than those in the British, with the exception of horizontal claims-making by actors from foreign EU states (c). This shows that a more favourable stance toward European integration is expressed in France compared to Britain. Indeed, when we look at the impact of foreign EU actors in national public spheres, we see that the British debate is more pro-European in part as a result of French actors' claims-making (which account for 27.9% in this category with a position of $+0.35$), and that the French debate is made more Eurosceptic as an effect of the impact of British actors' claims-making (18.8%, -0.35). This gives further support to the finding that British claims-makers take an overall more Eurosceptic stance than their French counterparts.

Lastly, we turn to the more 'closed' type of claims-making that communicates neither upwards supranationally, nor across EU borders, but remains internalized within the nation-state. This type of claims-making accounts for half of British claims-making (53.9%) compared to only a quarter in France (26.7%). This provides evidence that internal conflict and competition between national actors is a defining characteristic of Britain's political communication on Europe. Europe is an issue within national politics, with links upwards to EU institutions especially underdeveloped relative to France. Thus, compared to their French counterparts, the British public has fewer opportunities to see the EU institutions directly addressed by problems and issues relating to European integration. Instead, European politics is made visible to them in the public domain as a national issue, mobilized by British actors addressing British actors. To a certain extent this precludes opportunities for citizens to see themselves having a direct relationship to EU institutions,

and for seeing the EU as an influential actor in its own right, rather than as an epiphenomenon of national politics.

The comparison with France, a country which has been a driver of European institutional integration, has served to demonstrate that overall British debates about European integration have emerged as being more nationally 'closed' and engaging less directly and transnationally with the EU as a political actor. In the remainder of the article we attempt to unpack the internal characteristics of British debates on Europe further by looking at the actors making demands, and the contents of those demands.

State versus Civil Society Cleavages?

One way of examining British public debates on Europe in more detail is to look at which types of actors mobilize political demands, and what their positions are relative to one another with respect to European integration. This makes it possible to identify the potential cleavage lines between actors with regard to Europe, and which actors are allies and opponents in this contentious field of politics.

The first two columns in Table 2 show shares and positions of claims-making by British actors on Europe.⁸

A first point is that state and political party actors account for three-quarters of claims-making on Europe (73.0%). Of course, one would expect more resourceful state and political party actors to have a greater presence within public debates, but the question is one of degree. Previous research using the same method showed that state and political party actors accounted for 39.8% of public debates on unemployment and 46.0% of public debates on racism and discrimination in Britain (Koopmans & Statham, 2000; Statham, 2003). Compared to such political fields, European integration appears to be an especially elite-dominated public debate. In addition, we see that state and civil society actors hold similar positions on European integration (state and political party -0.01 , civil

TABLE 2

Share and position of state and civil society actors in claims-making over Europe

	Claims-making by British actors over Europe	
	Share (%)	Position
British state actors	73.0	-0.01
Government	43.1	+0.08
Legislative, politicians and political parties	25.4	-0.18
Other state actors	4.5	+0.12
British civil society	27.0	+0.05
Employers and businesses	5.9	+0.21
Unions	2.5	+0.14
Scientific and research experts	3.2	+0.17
Economic experts	3.8	0.00
Pro- and anti-European campaign organizations	8.1	-0.11
Other national civil society	3.4	+0.05
All British national actors	100.0	+0.01
Number of cases (<i>N</i>)	555	

society +0.05). This shows that the cleavages concerning Europe appear to cross-cut institutional actors and civil society actors and are not based on a cleavage between elites on one side, versus civil society actors on the other. Legislative and political party actors (-0.18) are the most opposed to European integration and their aggregated impact is to provide a Eurosceptic stance. Government actors ($+0.08$) themselves hold a position that is only neutral or ambivalent regarding the merits of European integration. Given the dominance of state and political party actors in the debates, we examine the differences between such actors along party political cleavages. First, however, we wish to comment on our evidence with regard to civil society organizations.

The ambivalent and negative stance of political elites significantly shapes the opportunities available for claims-making by civil society actors. First, we see that the civil society actors who make claims about European integration are largely of an institutionalized and technocratic type: employers and trade unions, economic actors and experts from the scientific community. The only exception is the civil society mobilization on European politics from a campaign sector, which has an overall impact which is strongly anti-European (8.1%, -0.11). There is very little evidence for citizens' initiatives or participation by NGOs that could lead to the building of a European 'demos'.⁹ The campaign sector provides further evidence for competition between national organizations on Europe as an issue within the British debate. The most prominent campaign organizations were 'Britain in Europe' (2.3%) on the pro-European side, and 'Business for Sterling' and its successor the 'No Campaign' (2.2%) on the Eurosceptic side.¹⁰ Many of these organizations' claims were made regarding the prospects of the euro currency. For example, Britain in Europe argues that: 'Britain cannot stand like a latter-day King Canute, holding back the tide. Whether we like it or not, the euro exists and British companies are being forced to deal with it.' A characteristic counter-claim by Business for Sterling is that '2000 is the 10th anniversary of Britain joining the ERM, which cost 100,000 business bankruptcies, 1.75 m homes in negative equity and a doubling of unemployment.' The Labour government's decision, like its Conservative predecessor, not to make a definitive policy or timetable for joining the monetary union created a climate of uncertainty which has facilitated the emerging political competition over Europe within civil society.

Political Party Cleavages?

We have depicted British public debates on Europe as internally focused, elite dominated, and driven by competition, mostly between political elites but also between campaign organizations in civil society. Since cleavages over Europe were not substantially found along the classic social movement fault-line between state and civil society, we now ask to what extent they follow left versus right party political lines. Table 3 shows the shares and positions of political party actors across the time intervals of our period.

Overall, we find clear evidence for a left/right cleavage between the two main political parties with regard to Europe, Labour (49.1%, $+0.21$) and the Conservatives (47.4%, -0.26). The Conservatives as the party of government moved from ambivalence (1990) to an anti-European position (1995) which it has maintained as the party of opposition (2000, 2001, 2002). As a party of opposition (1990, 1995), Labour was rather

TABLE 3
Share and position of political parties in claims-making over Europe

	All		1990		1995		2000		2001		2002	
	Share	Pos.	Share	Pos.	Share	Pos.	Share	Pos.	Share	Pos.	Share	Pos.
Conservative	47.4	-0.26	66.7	0.00	95.2	-0.35	30.6	-0.42	36.8	-0.21	21.8	-0.29
Labour	49.1	+0.21	25.4	+0.06	4.8	0.00	66.7	+0.36	63.2	+0.04	73.1	+0.14
Liberal Democrat	3.1	+0.55	7.9	+0.80	-	-	1.9	+0.50	-	-	5.1	+0.25
Other parties	0.3	N/A	-	-	-	-	0.9	N/A	-	-	-	-
N	350		63		63		108		38		78	

silent and neutral towards Europe, but as a party of government (2000, 2001, 2002) was publicly pro-European in 2000 with positive claims regarding the single currency and the Nice Treaty, but then drifted back to a more ambivalent stance.

We now address the contents of this party political cleavage by analysing how Conservative and Labour Party actors constructed their arguments on European integration. When political actors make claims they give meaning to Britain's relationship to Europe by focusing on certain aspects of that relationship and excluding others. In doing so, they give a specific interpretation of the situation, in an attempt to convince other political actors of their claim's validity, and to mobilize public support for their cause. Actors' framing attempts try 'to make their definition into a public definition of the problem, to convince as many groups and people as possible by their framing of the situation, to create support for their cause, and to motivate others to participate' (Klandermans, 1988, p. 174).

Here we identify three conceptual lenses through which political actors may hypothetically construct the relationship of Britain to Europe in their claims-making: *political*, *economic*, and *cultural-historical*. When actors frame Britain's relation to Europe as a political concern they emphasize key political elements of the relationship, for instance by referring to the British traditions of parliamentary democracy and sovereignty as reasons to oppose further European integration. Other actors selectively construct Britain's relationship to Europe as a matter of economics, for example making the case for European integration by claiming that Britain's future depends on strengthening economic ties with Europe. Third, political actors may elect to frame Britain's relationship to Europe by referring to cultural identities and historical precedents, for instance by arguing that eastward enlargement will benefit Britain by reuniting Europe across the Cold War divide.

Table 4 shows two dimensions of 'framing': across the two main political parties (Labour versus Conservative); and between positions over Europe (Eurosceptic versus pro-European).¹¹

Conservative politicians made the bulk of Eurosceptic claims, with only a few by Labour claims-makers. Of the Conservative claims, three-fifths (60.3%) framed Europe on political grounds, and the ratio of Eurosceptic to pro-European was almost 4:1. These constructions focused on issues of sovereignty, federalism, democracy and EU centralization. Typical examples include Shadow Foreign Secretary Francis Maude's claim in December 2000 that the proposed 2004 Inter-governmental Conference was 'yet another staging post on the route to a European super-state', or Defence Secretary Michael Portillo's speech to the Tory Conference in October 1995, when he accused Labour of endorsing 'withdrawal, retreat and surrender to European federalism'.

While Eurosceptic Conservatives have concentrated heavily on political arguments, pro-Europeans from both parties have tended to make an economic case for Europe. Half the pro-European claims by Labour framed European integration in economic terms, in particular on grounds that EMU would lead to economic stability and growth and attract foreign investment. For example, Trade and Industry Secretary Stephen Byers claimed in July 2000 that not joining the euro 'puts at risk investment in the United Kingdom'. Some pro-Europeans from both parties have also stressed the political case for Europe, with

TABLE 4
Framing by Conservative and Labour Parties in claims-making over Europe

	Conservative				Labour			
	Pro-European	Neutral/ambiv.	Eurosceptic	Total	Pro-European	Neutral/ambiv.	Eurosceptic	Total
Type of frame								
Political	8.8	19.1	32.4	60.3	16.1	14.3	1.8	32.1
Economic	11.8	2.9	5.9	20.6	25.0	16.1	3.6	44.6
Cultural-historical	7.4	2.9	7.4	17.6	7.1	10.7	1.8	19.6
Other/ general	0.0	1.5	0.0	1.5	1.8	1.8	0.0	3.6
Total (%)	27.9	26.5	45.6	100.0	50.0	42.9	7.1	100.0
<i>N</i>	19	18	31	68	28	24	4	56

Labour often framing this by referring to the greater international political influence Britain could gain as a fully engaged EU member. For example, in a speech in November 2000, Tony Blair argued that 'it is part of our interests to be a key partner in the world's major alliances' such as the EU. Many claims made by pro-European Conservatives regarding the political nature of European integration have been attempts to refute Eurosceptics' claims, such as Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd's argument in June 1990 that European foreign policy is 'not eroding sovereignty, it is using it'. Despite these counter-framing efforts, Eurosceptic actors have used political arguments against Europe to a much greater extent than pro-European actors have managed to make a case for British political participation in the EU. A final point is that only a modest number of party politicians (about a fifth) on either side of the debate attempt to construct Europe in terms of its cultural or historical meanings, which to a certain extent supports Wallace's claim (1997, p. 685) that the 'symbolic dimensions' of European integration, much-debated in France and Germany, are not prominent in the British debate.

Pro-European politicians appear to face a more difficult task in communicating to the public about Europe than their Eurosceptic counterparts. First, the political arguments which are most likely to resonate powerfully in the public imagination are the Eurosceptic ones, because they evoke ideas of national political belonging and community—sovereignty, independence and national control. In contrast, the pro-European political arguments, such as increased British influence in world affairs as an EU member, do not have such strong popular appeal and cultural resonance. Second, it is arguably difficult to win public hearts and minds on the basis of 'cost–benefit' economic arguments, which is what the pro-Europeans have principally sought to do. Furthermore, such pro-European economic arguments have suffered from low credibility in recent times due to the success of the British economy in comparison to Eurozone countries, despite Britain's non-participation in EMU.

These differences hold significant implications at a time when contention over Europe in Britain has moved firmly onto the deeply political issue of the European Constitution. While Eurosceptics have been making political arguments against Europe for years, pro-Europeans have not provided political justifications for European integration to the same extent. Pro-Europeans are likely to struggle to win a battle on political territory, a field where Eurosceptics have been relatively unchallenged in the past, and where their views have already struck a chord in the public imagination.

Conclusion

For us the location of any perceived or real European 'democratic deficit' is to be found in the public sphere, the space of relations among political actors, institutions and citizens, which is both created by, and the medium for, their public acts of communication on European issues. We have made a first empirical attempt to address some questions regarding the political communication which appears in the British intermediary public sphere on European integration. Our substantive findings deserve underlining.

First, our comparison with France demonstrated that the two countries have distinct patterns of communication about Europe. French debates are more 'supranationalized'

than British ones. They exhibit a stronger channelling of vertical linkages to the European supranational polity, a relationship that is largely produced by the 'bottom-up' demands by French actors on the EU. By contrast, British debates are characterized by national 'internalization', a type of communication that is indicative of internal competitive relationships towards Europe. Compared to France, the EU is rendered accountable for its actions only *indirectly* in the British public sphere. British debates are more about the EU as a topic than open for participatory exchanges with the EU as a powerful institutional actor. As a consequence, EU politics is made visible to British citizens primarily as a national affair.

Second, we examined claims-making by actor type. This served to show that British debates on Europe are dominated by elites, compared to debates on other issues such as migration and ethnic relations, or unemployment. Our findings with regard to the possible emergence of a participatory civil society on European integration were largely negative. In fact, the only exception to this was a sector of campaign organizations dedicated to the issue of Europe. However, these had an overall impact that was relatively Eurosceptic and communicated in a way that was competitive and nationally internalized. Contrary to the image of new possibilities being opened up for civil society engagement by the emergence of supranational polities, for example through European human rights discourses (e.g. Kastoryano, 2003), British civil society does not appear to have transformed its political engagement to any great extent, nor does it appear to be particularly enthusiastic about any potential benefits that may accrue from Europeanization. Overall, British civil society actors appear to see Europe as an issue of national concern to be dealt through the normal channels of interaction with the national government, rather than as a new relationship or a new opportunity to engage with a supranational polity.

Perhaps our most important finding concerned party political competition over Europe, which has structured British debates on European integration to a significant extent. Here we were able to show a clear left/right divide; whereas the Labour Party has shifted between positions of ambivalence to modest support for the benefits of European integration, the Conservatives have been consistently and strongly more Eurosceptic. Regarding the ways in which political parties frame Britain's relationship to the project of European Union, we found that pro-European stances of both parties were more likely to appeal to an economic reasoning than a political or cultural one. Conversely, Eurosceptic claims, largely the preserve of Conservative actors, were pitched predominantly as political arguments. Here it seems that the mostly Labour pro-European arguments about the potential economic benefits compete against Conservative ones which focus on European integration as a potential loss of national political community and sovereignty. In June 2004, Gordon Brown became the longest serving Chancellor, having presided over an unprecedented sustained period of economic growth. This economic success has been achieved while Britain has remained outside the euro. Such a climate has not been favourable for Labour's attempts under Tony Blair to frame the pro-European stance and convince the public through economic arguments. Unless the Labour Party develops a pro-European rhetoric that engages on the political territory of issues of sovereignty and national political belonging, it is difficult to see how a convincing case can be made for a 'yes' vote in the proposed referendum on the European Constitution, which after all is an explicitly political and non-economic issue. That is, if the Labour government wishes to

support a 'yes' vote, it will have to engage on political territory where Conservative Euroscepticism currently holds court.

Overall, a lack of political consensus among British elites over the benefits of European integration appears not only to have resulted in limited institutional European integration but has also impacted upon political communication on European integration, with the effect that Europe has become a highly contested party political issue. In a sense, we would suggest that Britain's position on Europe has become 'path dependent' (see Pierson, 2000). Elite divisions are strong, publicly expressed, and party politicized, but overall remain enclosed within a range from ambivalence to outright Euroscepticism. Such conditions have provided very few resources of legitimacy for standpoints by public actors that could potentially construct a more interactive and engaged political relationship to the EU instead of questioning the value of European integration per se. As the new debates shift from economics (the euro) to politics (a referendum on the Constitution), we consider it will be difficult for public actors, including Labour, to make the political case for Europe. This is because, first, the opt-out and non-committed stance of previous governments on European integration has legitimated political Euroscepticism, and second, pro-European stances have so far made significantly fewer attempts to frame their arguments on this political terrain than their Eurosceptic opponents.

NOTES

1. This British study draws on insights from a cross-national comparative project, EuroPub.com, funded by an award within the EU's Framework Five Programme (award HPSE-CT2000-00046). So far, this project is still in its developmental stages of analysis, especially with regard to the cross-national comparison. Texts produced within this collaborative endeavour include Koopmans and Statham (2001), Koopmans and Pfetsch (2003) and Statham and Guiraudon (2004). For more information, visit <http://europub.wz-berlin.de>. The authors wish to acknowledge the intellectual input of Julie Firmstone at EurPolCom, Leeds, for the British project.
2. For more detail, see Koopmans *et al.* (forthcoming 2005) and Koopmans and Statham (1999b).
3. Data were coded from Lexis-Nexis versions of the newspapers by trained coding assistants using a standardized codebook. All articles in the home news section were checked for relevant acts, i.e. the search was not limited to articles containing certain key words. For some variables (actors, addressees, aims, etc.) open category lists were used. This allowed us to retain considerable detail from the original reports. Copies of articles were stored to allow us to go back to original reports if information was needed that had not been captured by the categories included in the codebook. Conventional inter-coder reliability tests were undertaken for article selection and coding.
4. In total we selected a sample from 52 days for 1990 and 1995, and 104 days for 2000, 2001 and 2002. Thus, the opportunities for claims were over-represented for the more recent years of our data set 2000, 2001 and 2002, compared to 1990 and 1995, by a ratio of 2:1. Note that we have not adjusted the tables to account for this bias, but this should nonetheless be borne in mind when reading them. We decided to include claims with a

European scope from six policy fields, so that our sample did not focus simply on issues in the narrower field of European integration and institutional change.

5. For an example of an alternative strategy, see Risse and Van de Steeg (2003), whose case study of the Haider affair attempts to make general statements about Europeanization on the basis of a contingent and policy-specific event.
6. The comparison with France draws in part from a previous preliminary collaboration (Statham & Guiraudon, 2004).
7. The French data are available only for three years 1990, 1995, and 2000, but analysis (Statham & Guiraudon, 2004) shows that there are no significant differences in the British distributions for five compared to three years. In Table 1 we include only cases where there was both a claims-maker and an addressee, as this constitutes an actor relationship. For this table, where claims-making acts did not have an addressee, these cases were excluded.
8. The sample in Table 2 includes cases of claims-making acts where no addressee was specified.
9. For a more detailed analysis of the campaign group sector in the case of mobilization on the euro currency, see Gray (2003).
10. Other Eurosceptics were: New Europe, Labour Common Market Safeguards Campaign, the European Foundation, the European Research Group, the Conservative European Reform Group, the Bruges Group, the Metric Martyrs, and Subjects Against the Nice Treaty (Sanity). Other pro-European organizations: Business in Europe, the Action Centre for Europe, Positive Europe Group, and the Conservative Group for Europe.
11. Not all acts of claims-making contain frames. Often actors make an argument, claim or demand without elaborating explicitly the basis (reasoning devices, symbolic packages) for such a claim. Table 4 includes only those cases where there was sufficient information to code a frame used to convey a claim about European integration. For a similar analytic approach on framing, see Gamson and Modigliani (1989).

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