

## ***Talking Europe, Using Europe - The EU's role in Parliamentary Competition in Italy and Spain (1986-2006)***

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### *Abstract*

The EU's influence, pressure for adaptation exercised on domestic political institutions and actors, has been studied in different and complementary ways. Regarding political parties and party competition, the analyses have been mainly centred on electoral competition, while studies on parliaments have focused more on institutional adaptation, the development of European committees and other control mechanisms. However, in addition to this more technical role, parliament also plays an important role as an institution for debating political and policy alternatives. The relevance of the parliamentary arena is even more important when dealing with the EU and how parties and leaders 'domesticate' and use European opportunities and constraints. The increasing European competences and their growing relevance for an increasing number of policy domains means that references to EU's processes and decisions have become almost unavoidable for presenting coherent and feasible political and policy proposals, which is a crucial and distinctive aspect of the parliamentary arena.

In this article, rather than focusing on specific European issues (such as treaty ratifications or government conclusions on Council meetings) the analysis will be centred on general policy debates analysing the role that the EU plays in parties' and leaders' discourses. This approach can be useful in different ways. First, in contrast to elections, some parliamentary debates are held annually, which is crucial when dealing with a time sensitive issue such as integration and its policies. Second, strategies and issues may vary between the electoral and the parliamentary arena, where certain debates may be unavoidable and parties have to take a more or less clear position. Third, parties' and leaders' strategies may vary depending on their role on the system and whether they are in government, in opposition or supporting the incumbent party. Thus, political competition dynamics, the role of "Europe" on parties' and leaders' discourses and the way they conceptualise it vis-à-vis the citizens can be different than in electoral competition, providing us with new and complementary insights in the ways parties adapt and react to integration. The article therefore analyses the usages of "Europe" in parliamentary debates in the two largest Southern European countries Italy and Spain, including 13 parties/coalitions covering the whole political spectrum. Two broad and relevant types of debates have been selected, investiture debates and budget debates covering a long time span (1987-2006). The comparative research design, analysing different parties and debates in a 20 year period, allows us to observe whether the EU is gaining importance over time (or not), the impact of Europe on parliamentary competition,

the evolution of parties' position towards the EU and, more generally, the consequences of integration for parties and citizens.

## 1. Introduction

The European Union's (EU) influence, pressure or impact on domestic political institutions and actors has been studied in different and complementary ways. Regarding political parties and political competition, the analyses have normally been centred on the electoral arena, while studies on parliaments have focused more on institutional adaptation, the development of European committees and other control mechanisms. However, EU's importance for political competition is not just restricted to elections, as parties also compete in the parliamentary arena. The Parliament's role regarding the EU and its policies is not limited to the more technical scrutiny role within specific commissions or debates on European issues, as it plays an important part for understanding how the EU plays a role in domestic systems. For understanding the EU's relevance we should move from specific and technical debates to those with a more general scope, especially debates with a high salience and impact on public opinion, normally broadcasted and with a wide newspaper coverage. The relevance of the parliamentary arena is even more important when analysing how parties and leaders internalise and use European opportunities and constraints. With the growing European competences, their "objective" relevance is increasing in a wider range of policy domains, which are becoming more communitarised. This implies that references to EU processes and decisions are almost unavoidable for presenting coherent and feasible proposals in almost all domestic policies. In contrast to elections, where parties can strategically downplay certain issues, the parliamentary arena does not, in many aspects, allow avoiding, crucial issues, especially if parties want to present feasible policy proposals.

The aim of this article is to analyse the importance and usages parties make of the European context and its policies in parliamentary debates. To do so, this article is focused on the most important national-based debates for observing the relevance, usages and interiorisation of European opportunities and constraints in domestic political competition, Investiture and Budget debates. The former presents the government programme for the legislature, while the latter concerns what is probably the most important law approved by the Parliament each year and makes reference to economic policy. Both debates have a very high salience in public opinion and the media. Furthermore, as the scope is to analyse how parties internalise the EU and its policies and why they stress these during parliamentary debates, I will use a comparative research design analysing the two biggest Southern European countries, Italy and Spain, and 11 parties over a broad time period (1986-2006)<sup>1</sup>. This research design allows both a synchronic and diachronic analysis and can provide a wide range of cases for analysing parties' usage of Europe.

The focus on the usages of Europe in parliamentary debates in two countries and for several different parties can provide us with new and alternate insights in the way parties stress the European issue, how they internalise it and why they do it. In addition, this focus helps us to understand the ways parties' adapt and react to European integration and its consequences for domestic political competition. In undertaking such analysis, this article is structured as follows. The following section contains a brief account of the different theories for understanding the relation between European

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<sup>1</sup> Contrary to elections, where, since 2001, parties are present under coalition labels presenting a unique electoral programme (Casa della Libertà and L'Ulivo), in the parliamentary arena each party has its own parliamentary group, helping to disentangle the different positions of each party of the coalition.

integration, domestic political competition and the role of national parliaments. Then, the case selection and methodology will be dealt with. Following this, the empirical analysis will be done in two steps, the first one focusing on the importance of Europe in both types of debates and the second on the usages of Europe. The final section discusses the findings and concludes.

## **2. Political competition, parties and the EU: New insights from a different perspective**

Without denying the importance of elections, campaigns or manifestoes, parliamentary competition provides, in a certain way, a far more realistic, clear and constant position of political parties. Is more realistic because parties have to present and explain specific policies, to defend their ideas and position on issues that are sometimes impossible to downplay. Equally, as the debates almost always include a final vote, parties have to explain the direction of their vote in a clear way. Finally, this position has to be sustained over a certain period of time, being therefore more constant. Consequently, the analysis of the parliamentary arena provides different insights on how parties and leaders react to, interiorize and use Europe in domestic political competition. Moreover it can help to overcome some of the problems that arise if we just focus on the electoral arena. Notably, three main problems are important: declared salience, because parties emphasise positive and cohesive issues during elections; dissent, minimised within the party during campaigns; and timing, as elections are held only every four or five years, which is especially relevant in a time-sensitive issue such as European integration (Marks et al. 2007). The analysis of parliamentary competition helps to reduce these problems, and provides new perspectives for analysing the impact of, reaction to and interiorisation of Europe by political parties.

In the analyses of Europeanisation of political competition, scholars have normally focused on direct impacts. However, this perspective implies certain limitations and some scholars have pointed out the existence of indirect impacts, such as the reduction of policy decidability or the disempowerment of election and voters (Mair 2001, Hix and Lord 2001, Bartolini 2005), but few empirical analyses have been conducted to demonstrate them. For the purpose of this article, the focus on indirect impacts is crucial and the notion of usage is fundamental.

For analysing the usages of Europe, different theories and concepts need to be addressed. In the first place, the way the European environment is conceptualised is relevant. Normally, studies on Europeanisation tend to conceptualise European integration as a fixed and given exogenous environment. However, in this article this environment is assumed to be endogenous, that is, parties and leaders help to construct it for adapting the European context to match their values, strategies and preferences. The idea that parties help to shape their environment has been a matter of discussion between party politics scholars (Panebianco 1988; Deschouwer 1992; Harmel and Janda 1994). The nature of the environment in which parties operate is crucial when dealing with the consequences of European integration because, as some scholars have correctly argued, domestic institutional settings and context are essential to understanding how parties react to the external environment (Garret 1998; Rosamond 1999; Hay and Rosamond 2002; Hay and Smith 2005). As Garret claimed in his analysis of the relationship between partisan politics and globalisation “one cannot accurately delineate the impact of market integration on the political economy of the industrial democracies by assuming that globalization has been a process that has affected all markets and all countries equally” (Garret 1998: 24). Indeed, domestic political actors can enact these external factors in different ways and use them for different means, shaping the environment in which they act. This argument is

consistent with the idea that European integration is not an external and uniform constraint for all Member States, and therefore “[t]he question of intentionality is here crucial. It is important, at the outset, that we differentiate between the internalization of a discourse of globalization as an accurate representation of the relevant ‘material’ constraints and the more intentional, reflexive and strategic choice of such a discourse as a convenient justification for policies pursued for altogether different reasons (Hay and Rosamond 2002:150, cursive in the original). Again, domestic political actors can use these external factors in different ways and for different purposes. As Hay and Rosamond argue, in many EU countries, European integration acted as a substitute for Globalisation as the cause for ‘painful’ economic and social reforms. Consequently, the integration process is not an external and uniform context that affects all countries and all parties in the same way. Indeed, institutional, economic, social and cultural factors play a role in the conceptualisation of European opportunities and constraints. That is why “there is no single unifying discourse of globalisation and/or European integration; rather such notions are appealed to in different ways in different contexts. This highlights the need to map and compare the appeals to discourses of globalisation and European integration in different national settings” (Hay and Smith 2005: 125). Thus, European integration cannot be considered as an objective and uncontested exogenous process.

This idea is relevant in understanding the importance of the usage political actors can make of perceived opportunities and constraints, making it necessary to turn our focus to the notion of usages. This concept derives from sociological institutionalism, because parties are actors and institutions that operate in the domestic political system. New institutionalism offers certain insights (Hall and Taylor 1996) but, with some limitations for explaining how, why and when parties internalise the new European polity as they deal more with continuity rather than change (Blyth 1997, 2002, Schmidt 2002). In this debate, some scholars turned to ideas for explaining change. In this sense, Schmidt considers that communication is the missing link because just with discourse alone, defined as “whatever policy actors say to one another and to the public in their efforts to generate and legitimize a policy programme” (Schmidt 2002:210), change is sometimes possible to explain. And, as discourse is elaborated within certain institutional patterns, she speaks of discursive institutionalism (Schmidt 2002; Schmidt and Radaelli 2004). It is in this sense, as argued above, that the notion of usage is crucial. Jacquot and Woll (2003: 4) define usage as “practices and political interactions which adjust and redefine themselves by seizing the European Union as a set of opportunities, be they institutional, ideological, political or organisational”. It has to be intentional, they continue, because “whatever might be the nature of specific opportunity [...] actors need to seize them in order to transform them into political practices. The whole process of transforming resources or constraints into political practices constitutes a usage” (ib: 4). So, to sum up, “political usage describes the mediation done by an actor to transform a material or immaterial resource provided by the European institutions into a political action”. (ib: 6).

Finally, Jacquot and Woll (2003) elaborate a classification of usage according to their functionality: a) Strategic Usage, b) Cognitive Usage, and c) Legitimising Usage. The first type of usage, strategic, is the most common and implies the transformation of certain resources into political practices to pursue a specific and clearly identifiable goal. Cognitive usage is more related to public policy interpretation and persuasion and makes reference to the diffusion of ideas to understand and deliberate over certain policy issues. In this case, policy discussions may lead to the adoption or the rejection of new policy interpretations or definitions. The final type of usage, legitimising, is closely related to the political process and basically “the reference to Europe as a way of legitimising national public

policies” (Jacquot and Woll 2003: 7). It is specifically used by governments to stress the opportunities and constraints derived from European integration (in similar ways as discussed by Rosamond 1999; Hay and Rosamond 2002; Hay and Smith 2005). Based on this definition and the different interpretation and perception of opportunities and constraints offered by the European context, some possible usages of Europe have been selected. Europe can be conceptualised as an incentive or constraint for action, for legitimising some policy options, for evaluating positively or negatively some European policies or simply for using Europe as a frame of reference to compare policy performance. Equally, and as European policy outcomes are not ideologically-neutral, different parties with different ideologies, in government or in opposition, may use Europe and its policies in different ways and, so, the politicization of Europe and its policies can play a role in parliamentary competition. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on political parties, their relation with European integration and their own competition strategies.

According to Bartolini (2005), national political parties face serious challenges when dealing with European integration. On the one hand, with the growing visibility of the EU, anti-EU positions can be a common denominator in discontent parties. On the other hand, national parties and elites are less able to meet these new challenges posed by European integration than when the frame of reference was a clearly bounded national territory. Thus, some issues are no longer under national control. Domestic political elites are less proactive in dealing with integration issues and in incorporating them within their programmatic profiles and competition. Thus, they tend to collude and to neglect those issues that are not under national control (Bartolini 2005: 319-320). In this sense, Bartolini distinguishes four main models for analysing national parties’ attitudes towards the EU: a) The Geopolitical Model; b) The Institutional Model; c) The Partisan Model; and d) The Genetic Model. As he argues, all these models have some truth even if the partisan and genetic approaches are the ones used to explain the difficult relationship between national parties and European integration.

The *Geopolitical Model* “assumes that support/opposition is mainly determined by national specific features or geopolitical interests”, including state formation, contestation of national unification, the existence of centre-periphery conflicts and different cultural factors. (Bartolini 2005: 321). In this case, differences in support/opposition among national parties should be less significant than the differences across nations. Some clear examples support this approach, for instance Great Britain’s and France’s ‘national independence’ position, as well as the generally supportive position of countries such as Germany or Italy due to their problematic national unification, and finally, Southern European countries’ support for integration due to their peripheral status.

The *Institutional Model* “explains attitudes to the EU as a function of the parties being in government and opposition at the national (and therefore European) level” (Bartolini 2005: 321). This model suggests that parties in government are generally more supportive of European integration than those in opposition, and that those parties, whether in government or in opposition, that belong to the EU-level coalition tend to be more supportive. An institutional factor can identify ‘pre-post’ membership attitudes or national alliance change of attitude while in government.

The *Partisan Model* “interprets orientation to the EU of national parties on the basis of the main dimension of competition prevalent at the national level” (Bartolini 2005: 321), such as left-right, libertarian/authoritarian or materialist/post-materialist. In this model, in contrast to the geopolitical one,

variation within a party family in different European countries should be reduced, while variation among different national parties' families should be much higher.

Finally, the *Genetic Model* "interprets party orientation towards European integration as shaped by or related to their original national cleavage position. Mapping parties according to their genetic cleavage produces hypotheses about the level of internal tensions that the integration process creates within them" (Bartolini 2005:321). A strict Genetic Model approach starts from an objective definition of the main EU features (Centralisation, bureaucratisation, economicism/national regional independence, resistance to market economy and globalisation) and then relates them to domestic cleavages. The problem is clear: opposition lines that were historically bridged and integrated successfully at the national level by party organisations, may become the source of internal problems in relation to the integration process. This is because some combinations that are compatible at the national level (liberal pro-market non-urban or rural and right wing) are incompatible at the European level as pro-market is positive and rural negative in support towards European Integration (Bartolini: 324-325).

For our purposes, Bartolini's models can help us trace some important variables for our analysis, such as the relevance of domestic consensus on the benefits of EU's membership, the relevance of government/opposition status or the importance of ideology for understanding the way parties conceptualise, internalise and use EU's outcomes on parliamentary competition.

Consequently, one last aspect has to be addressed, that of parties' strategies. Shifting the focus on how parties compete stresses the relevance on how parties frame the European context with different cultural, institutional and ideological factors and how they adapt their strategies for their own purposes and goals. Normally, political competition is explained by theorising parties' strategies at the electoral level. However, if we consider that parties compete in the parliamentary arena as well, we can also translate these strategies to this level. Firstly, it is useful to consider the distinction between vote-seeking, office-seeking, policy seeking and cohesion-seeking strategies and their relevance in the parliamentary arena (Strøm 1990; Steenbergen and Scott 2004). Vote-seeking strategies consider that parties try to maximise their votes, and therefore we can assume that these parties follow the median voter theory and present broader (and, in some sense) less clearly ideological policy positions. The second possible strategy, derived from coalition studies, considers parties' aim to control office, rather than votes. The third focuses on those strategies aimed to maximise their effect on public policy and the fourth strategy, especially relevant for our purposes, comprises cohesion-seeking approaches. In this case, party leadership may downplay some issues to avoid party splits. Hence, the usage of Europe may be influenced by the strategy a party aims to pursue: if Europe or notably some policy outcomes are negative for a specific country or group (and leaders perceived constraints that may affect their domestic performance), the issue can be politicized by one party. Furthermore, Europe and its goals, especially in intense periods of integration building, can be a cohesive objective that helps to build political coalitions (as was the case, in Italy and Spain, with the creation of the EMU and the launch of the Euro) or, conversely, a problem for intra-party or intra-coalition consensus.

Secondly, another set of strategies is relevant when shifting to the European level whilst maintaining influence in the domestic one. In this sense, some scholars have adapted the notions of Exit, Voice and Loyalty (Cotta 2005). The first and most drastic option is exit. While total exit has never occurred, partial exit from a specific policy or opting out from a new one is quite common and has its domestic benefits (keeping control of certain policy tools) even though some problems may be present. The

second option available is Voice, which consists of defending domestic interests and claims at the European level and of trying to influence European policy outcomes in order to have favourable domestic effects. It can have some benefits, that are impossible to achieve at the national level, but also come with costs, as agreements may imply different trade-offs that can be used by domestic oppositions. The last option, Loyalty, instead of being a proper strategy, emphasises the relations between leaders and the EU. Loyalty strategies imply adopting European policies even if they do not represent domestic elites' preferences, therefore demonstrating a high degree of pro-Europeanism even where the consequences may be negative. At the domestic level, these three strategies can produce different usages of Europe. If a party or leader follows an 'exit' strategy, they will demand to opt-out from a specific European policy emphasising constraints or negative effects for Europe. If parties use Voice, this implies a mixed account of positive as well as negative references. Finally, if leaders follow a Loyalty strategy, they will use Europe for legitimating certain policy decisions at the domestic level, even if they have some possible negative consequences.

From the previous discussion we can affirm that the interiorisation of the European environment relies on different, although interrelated, factors such as national characteristics, domestic institutional factors (government/opposition status; majority/minority relationship), the type of party system and the relationships within the system, especially the relevance of the predominant cleavage, the position of the party on the overall political system (mainstream/non-mainstream position), and internal party features such as ideology, party position towards European integration, party strategies and the role of leaders in adapting and constructing their discourse. Hence, the European dimension can be subsumed in domestic political competition, allowing us to analyse the impacts of Europe, whether direct or indirect. Therefore, we can elaborate the following working hypotheses:

H1. The EU's importance and relevance in domestic debates should increase with time, due to the growing European policy competencies. In addition, European integration timing will be important.

H1.1 The political and economic context, perceived differently by each country, should have an impact on the way European opportunities and constraints are perceived. In countries with high economic growth, European outcomes should be less contested than in countries with low or inexistent growth.

As hypothesised, the increasing EU's competencies in growing policy domains make the European issue increasingly relevant for domestic politics. This rising importance is even more relevant due to the different political and economic contexts, making European incentives and constraints, different in each country.

H2. Usages of Europe vary depending on the type of party.

H2.1 Parties in government, that are also part of the European majority, present more positive usages than parties in opposition. In turn, opposition parties can present negative accounts of European developments and policies and use the EU as another tool for criticising the government.

H2.2 Larger parties with vote-seeking strategies use Europe in a more positive way than smaller and policy seeking parties, who will use more negative accounts. Furthermore, in two mainly pro-European countries, larger parties tend to be pro-European while smaller ones can present a more critical position on integration.

H3. Indirect impacts: The EU, reduces policy decidability for those policies that are substantially communitarised.

These hypotheses deal with the different incentives parties have for stressing European outcomes in a more positive or negative way such as institutional factors, ideology or position in the party system.

### 3. Case Selection and Methodology

Three aspects are especially relevant in this analysis: country, parties and debates selection. In this project, two countries, Italy and Spain, and eleven parties have been selected.

This selection has been made for a variety of reasons. Firstly, Italy and Spain joined the EU in different periods. Italy was a founding member while Spain entered in the third enlargement round, and some scholars agree that the longer a country is an EU member, the more 'Europeanised' it should be (Pennings 2006). Secondly, their party systems are different, with diverse institutional settings, party system dynamics, and effective number of parties or degree of polarisation. Equally interesting, both countries experienced a reconstruction of their party system. On the one hand, Spain reconstructed and consolidated its party system after almost 40 years of authoritarian rule, while Italy suffered a major party system change in the beginning of the 1990s. In both cases, the European Union was already a developed political entity, and may have played a role in the redefinition the new parties' policy priorities. Thirdly, Spain and Italy are the two biggest Southern European countries, with similar European interests and where Europe has been traditionally conceptualised as an opportunity for modernisation in order to overcome domestic constraints. However, over the past years and related to the growing policy competences of the EU, European integrations has started to become politicised, showing potentially negative effects and an end to the traditional permissive consensus, especially among parties and certain sectors of the electorate. Hence, unlike other major European countries, where the EU was already a contested issue, Spain and Italy's problematisation may be starting now, as the consequences of further integration are increasingly perceived as negative by relevant sectors of society, resulting in greater incentives for some parties to politicise it. Therefore, change in the conceptualisation of the EU seems to be taking place. Finally, both countries differ regarding economic performance. Even though Italy and Spain faced serious constraints and pressures to adapt their economy to fulfil the Maastricht criteria, only Spain was successful, taking advantage of the new opportunities offered by the Single Market, while Italy seemed to be struggling with its adaptation, as statistics in economic growth and public debt control demonstrate<sup>2</sup>. This different success in their adaptation to European policies is also interesting for analysing the perceived consequences and usage of Europe in national political parties and competition.

As mentioned above, party systems are different. To cover the broadest examples, different parties have been selected, including both government and opposition parties, vote- and policy-seeking ones and parties that represent the different cleavages at work, especially the ideological and centre-periphery ones and those with a different position towards integration including more Eurosceptic ones (see Table 1 below). Interestingly, whereas in Spain there are only one-party governments, in Italy the governments are supported by electoral coalitions that include both in their centre-right and centre-left governments, Eurosceptic parties.

Finally, the selection of the debates is crucial. Taking into account the purpose of this article, two prominent types of debates have been selected. The first are Investiture debates, where the new government presents its political programme for the entire legislature. The second are Budget debates, which produce the most important law approved each year as well as Economic policies that

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Economic growth, measured by real GDP growth rate shows that in the period 1992-2007, Spanish mean growth was 3,24 while Italian was 1,41. Since the adoption of the Euro (1999) to 2007 the mean rate has been 3,74 and 1,46 for Spain and Italy respectively.

are increasingly influenced by the EU, notably by the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the European Central Bank's (ECB) role in monetary policy. Consequently, there is a possible reduction on the policy tools available for governments. Both debates are transversal, presenting a great number of political issues. Due to their relevance, interventions are usually made by the party leader. For this analysis, the first intervention of each party's representative has been selected and, in the Italian case, the vote declaration of the most prominent political leaders. Each intervention comprises the unit of analysis and has been codified following a specific codebook that includes different variables. Due to the purpose of this article, the time span is also relevant. As we want to study the evolution and interiorisation of the EU and its policies, we have considered the Maastricht Treaty as a "critical juncture" in the process of European integration<sup>3</sup>. Hence, the selection of investiture debates starts in 1986 for Spain and 1987 for Italy, while the analysed Budget debates cover a period from 1990 to 2006.

This leads to the final aspect regarding methodology. A specific codebook has been built to track down different usages of Europe in domestic debates. On the one hand, it provides structural information (party, year, government status, party family). On the other hand, the following specific variables and usages have been selected: a) Importance of Europe, that is, if Europe is important or not in each intervention; b) Impact of Europe on domestic politics, where specific European policy outcomes can be considered either as opportunities (with positive domestic consequences), constraints (with negative ones), mixed accounts, and no references; c) Domestic action, implying that the European context and debates can be conceived as incentives (for helping to foster domestic action), constraints (representing different limitations for domestic political action), mixed accounts or no references; d) Legitimation, with or without mention of Europe, that legitimises political action (or non-action) or that shows the importance of implementing a certain policy; and e) Evaluation of European policies, where leaders evaluate European policies as either positive (stressing the benefits of certain EU's policies for the country), negative (where the stress is related to the negative impacts of European policies for domestic interests), use mixed accounts or make no references.

**Table 1: Parties' and Parliamentary Debates' Selection**

<b>PARTIES</b>	<b>ITALY</b>	<b>SPAIN</b>
<b>Left</b>	Rifondazione Comunista (RC)	Izquierda Unida (IU)
<b>Centre-Left</b>	Democratici di Sinistra (DS)	Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE)
<b>Centre</b>	Democrazia Cristiana (DC), La Margherita	
<b>Centre-Right</b>	Forza Italia (FI)	Partido Popular (PP)
<b>Right</b>	Alleanza Nazionale (AN)	
<b>Ethoregionalist</b>	Lega Nord (LN)	Convergència i Unió (CIU), Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV)
<b>PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (number of debates analysed)</b>		
<b>Investiture Debates</b>	91 (1986, 1989, 1993, 1996, 2000,	30 (1987, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1992,

<sup>3</sup> Scholars agree about the importance of the Maastricht treaty as a qualitative step forward in the integration process, with growing European competences in key policies (see Hix 2005: 20-21). However, some scholars consider the Single European Act as the critical point (Ladrech 2002: 393)

<b>(Years)</b>	2004)	1994, 1995, 1996, 1998,1999, 2000, 2001, 2006)
<b>Budget Debates (years)</b>	108 (yearly since 1990 to 2006)	80 (yearly since 1990 to 2006)

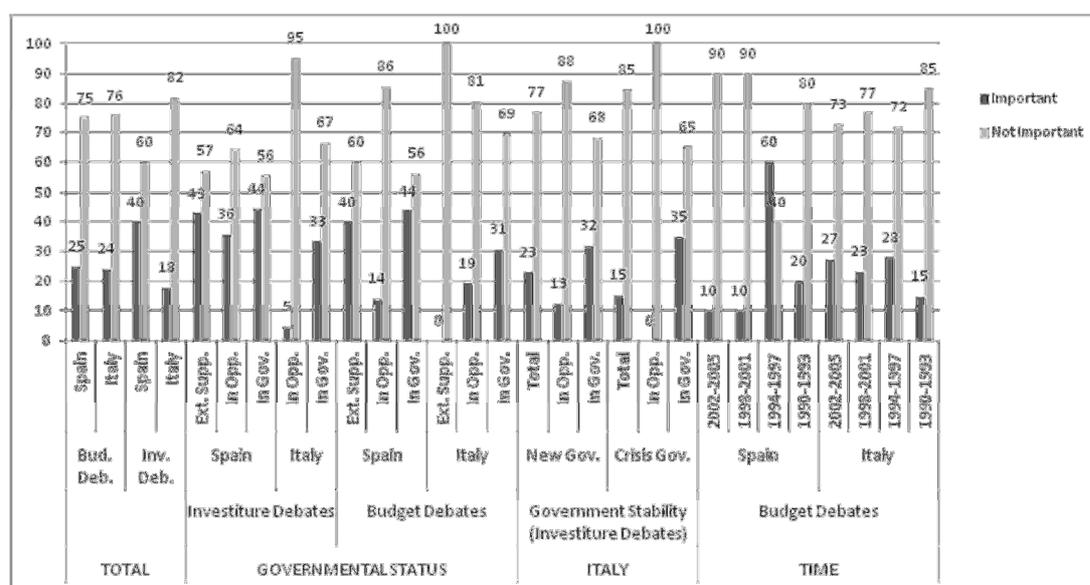
To sum up, the selection of two countries, a wide range of parties and two prominent parliamentary debates, as well as a focus on usages and internalisation of European policies, can provide new insights into the role of Europe in domestic political competition and its effects on parties' proposals, and shed more light on the relationship between the European and the national arena and the role of domestic parliamentary competition in this relationship.

## 5. The importance of Europe on Investiture and Budget Debates

Before looking at the way in which parties' and leaders' use and internalise the European context, it is central to analyse the importance attributed to Europe, (understood in very broad terms including integration, policies, regulations, institutions such as the ECB, etc.), in leaders' political discourse. Is it relevant or marginal? Furthermore, do all leaders stress it in the same way or do some relevant factors play a role, such as governmental status or timing?

The following graph provides data on the relevance of Europe in domestic debates highlights certain factors: the difference between countries and debates, the relevance of governmental status and the importance of the timing of European integration.

**Graph 1: Importance of Europe in Investiture and Budget Debates<sup>4</sup>**



<sup>4</sup> All the data, in this and the following graphs, present the percentage of interventions that are included in each category.

Looking at the data, we can observe the varying importance of Europe depending on the country and the debates. Even though Italy joined the EU well before Spain, Europe is, generally speaking, more important in Spain than in Italy, especially regarding Investiture debates (in 40% of the Spanish interventions, Europe is important while it is important in only 18% of the interventions in Italy) while regarding Budget Debates, the importance of Europe is similar in both countries (25% and 24% for Spain and Italy respectively). In the latter case, the difference can be due to the diverse nature of both debates. This is because European relevance is less stable in the more concrete economic domain, whereas opposition parties have a nationally based strategy, making the government itself responsible for possible dysfunctions, rather than blaming the EU or other international factors. This makes the EU's issue less appealing for competition. However, while the importance of Europe is similar in Budget debates, it is very different during Investiture debates.

Why is there this huge difference? In this case, we have to take into account certain systemic factors such as the type of party system and the way parliaments work. Regarding the party system, Spain can be conceptualised as an example of "imperfect" bipartisanship, with an electoral law that benefits the two largest parties, while in Italy the effective number of parties (both electoral and parliamentary) is much higher.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, certain aspects of the Spanish electoral law, especially the blocked-list system, grants great powers to the party in central office, making party cohesion almost "perfect". Meanwhile, Italy, with its diverse electoral formulas (both majoritarian and proportional), open lists, weak institutionalised parties, parties splits, electoral coalitions but different parliamentary groups (with a de facto two party system, Bardi 2006), has less cohesive parties. Consequently, Spanish governments are stronger and more stable than Italian ones. Indeed, while Spanish governments tend to fulfil their terms or anticipate elections for strategic reasons<sup>6</sup>, Italy is probably one of the clearest examples of government instability. In the period under analysis (1987-2006), there have been 6 elections and 13 governments, including the all-time longest government (Berlusconi II, 2001-2006). So, governmental strength can be an important factor for explaining the importance of Europe in investiture debates. This is because Europe is much more relevant in debates held after elections than in those held in the middle of the legislature, after a governmental crisis. Why is this so? In the case of a new government being invested after winning the election, its electoral legitimacy marks the type of debate, and so can present a coherent and broad political programme for the entire legislature. In contrast, Investiture debates held after a political crisis are normally focused on the legitimacy of the specific government that does not have an explicit electoral support. In such cases, governmental and opposition parties face the debate in a different way and with different strategies and incentives. In the case of opposition parties, their interventions are focused more on systemic issues (the working of the political system) and on the governments' legitimacy (government cohesion and other related issues). In Berlusconi's words, after the 1998 centre-left new government led by D'Alema:

(...) a government that births not from the votes but from the fear of the vote, does not have democratic legitimacy, and can be defined just as the usual cheat. 'Cheat, again' was the title of the Times. (Berlusconi 1998)

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<sup>5</sup> The effective number of parliamentary parties in Spain goes from 2, 85 (in 1989 elections) to 2, 53 (in 2004 ones) while in Italy is stable around 5,77 (in the 1992 elections) to 5, 06 (in 2006 ones). Source, Michael Gallagher. Available at [http://www.tcd.ie/Political\\_Science/Staff/Michael.Gallagher/EISystems/Docts/ElectionIndices.pdf](http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/Staff/Michael.Gallagher/EISystems/Docts/ElectionIndices.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Even with minority governments as it was the case in González IV (1993-1996), Aznar I (1996-2000), Rodríguez Zapatero I and II (2004-2008 and since 2008).

Hence, the importance of Europe diminishes, indeed it disappears in opposition parties (where Europe is important in 0% of their interventions) as their main focus is not on the government's political programme but rather on its legitimacy and the necessity to call new elections. Consequently, European issues (among others) are completely downplayed in their interventions. However, while opposition parties tend to completely neglect the European issue when a new government is formed in the middle of the legislature, the incentives are different for the new government. As shown by the data, the importance of Europe in government interventions is higher in this situation, rising to 35%, compared with the mean importance of Europe in these debates (24%). How can we explain this increasing importance? Again, the incentives are different, and for governmental parties the EU legitimises their incumbency by providing different arguments for the need of a new government and their political programme. As D'Alema (DS) claimed in his programmatic declaration in the 1999 Investiture debate:

I have never thought that the alternative advocated with strength by the opposition of Polo della Libertà, to call new elections, was unacceptable. It is evident that, in the case that there was not a majority in this Parliament, it should have been compulsory. But in the current Italian situation it is not convenient. Not because of formal prejudices, but for concrete and substantial reasons, starting with a fundamental one: new elections, as it is known, would have prevented from approving a new Budget law [...] with negative repercussions not just on our country's image and credit but also, in a period in which the introduction of the Euro is approaching, for the concrete interests of millions of Italians. This fundamental worry [...] has pushed for an alternative and political solution, as an act of responsibility towards our country and its interests. (D'Alema 1998: 7)

So, current European developments, such as the creation of the Euro, create a structure of opportunity for the new government, as there is no time for calling elections and, indeed, a strong government is needed. This leads directly to governmental status, which is a second important factor for explaining Europe's importance. Parties in government, both in Italy and Spain and in both debates, accord Europe a higher importance than opposition parties. This is due to different reasons. Notably, the incumbent Prime Minister presents the government's political programme, and Europe is important in two ways. On the one hand, it is relevant as an issue per se, referring to the process of European integration. As Felipe González claimed in his 1993 Investiture debate:

"...the programmatic offer that I present is centered along four main axes: the first one, to overcome the economic crisis and to impulse the economy; the second, the democratic impulse; the third, the regional development; the fourth, foreign policy and the impulse towards the European Union". (González 1993: 2)

This issue is common to all governmental parties, as European integration will be a relevant aspect of their government priorities. Equally, as I will show below, the EU, its policies and timing represent an opportunity for justifying domestic governmental action. For example, it helps to explain why Europe is indeed important in the Italian Prime Minister's programmatic declaration after a governmental crisis, as it helps to justify the need for a new government and their political action for fulfilling European policies and deadlines, while opposition parties are merely focused on the new government's lack of legitimacy, completely neglecting the European issue. Equally, governments benefit of their key role at the European level, having more information on key European policy debates, while opposition parties are less active and represented in key European institutions, such as the European Council, making

their strategy and discourse more nationally based and consequently downplaying European importance. The Spanish case shows another interesting factor related to the fact that Spanish governments have always been a one-party government. In the case of minority governments, they rely on the external support of smaller parties, notably the ethno-regionalist ones (CIU and PNV) that supported, in different periods, both Socialist and Conservative governments. Indeed, it seems that Europe plays a key role in their support, both in Investiture and Budget debates (European issues are important in 43% and 40% of their interventions, respectively). It seems that the process of European integration has helped to construct stable governments and that Europe is used to justify that support. The analysis of usages will provide a more in-depth investigation of this possible “coalition-building effect”.

A final important aspect is European integration timing. While elections are held every four or five years, Budget debates are held annually and so leaders’ reaction to European issues is quicker. In this case, the European integration’s timing is important for understanding its salience in domestic debates. The period under analysis was characterised by the approval and implementation of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the adoption of the Euro. As a result of the Maastricht Treaty (1991-1993), governments faced the need to adapt and implement different reforms to comply with the so-called Maastricht criteria (on budget deficit, government deficit and inflation) and with a clear deadline of 1999. These reforms were difficult and unpopular in both countries, implying privatisations, public expenditure cuts, the “freezing” of public servants’ wages and other reforms affecting the welfare system. Thus, we should expect a high importance of Europe during the crucial years of EMU’s implementation, between 1994 and 1999. As Graph 1 shows, the importance of Europe in Budget debates is indeed higher in the 1994-1997 period (60% in Spain and 28% in Italy). The EMU played a key role, especially for governmental parties, as they had to implement difficult policies, not only due to European opportunities but also to constraints, in a short period of time. However, Spain and Italy differ in the importance attributed to Europe after the introduction of the Euro. While its saliency sharply declined in Spain (10% importance in the 2002-2005 period), in Italy its importance was sustained over time and even increased in the last period, almost to the levels of the crucial 1994-1997 years. What explains this divergence? In this case, we have to take into account the fact that the political context and, notably, economic performance, vary greatly between both countries. While Spain was considered as a successful case in the adaptation to the Euro, which was accompanied by strong economic growth during the 1995-2007 period, the Italian economy was characterized by high public debt and slow economic growth<sup>7</sup>. Again, the opportunities and constraints posed by European policies did not affect the two countries (and its parties) in the same way. This helps to explain why the salience of the EMU issue declined in Spain, while it grew in Italy. Perception of political and economic constraints aroused not only opposition and minoritarian parties in Italy, but also governmental ones, as they were forced to accept suboptimal performances at the domestic level (Cotta 2005).

In short, the importance of Europe in Investiture and Parliamentary debates relies on four factors: a) country; b) type of debate, c) governmental status; and d) timing of European integration. However, the analyses focusing only on the salience of Europe, shows some limitations. Therefore, it is

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<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, ECB monetary policy, limited to inflation control, suited Spanish economic needs while penalized Italian need of economic growth with low inflation. See footnote 2 for GDP growth during and after Euro implementation.

necessary to turn to the idea of usages. How do parties conceive European opportunities and constraints? Why do they conceptualise EU policies in a certain way?

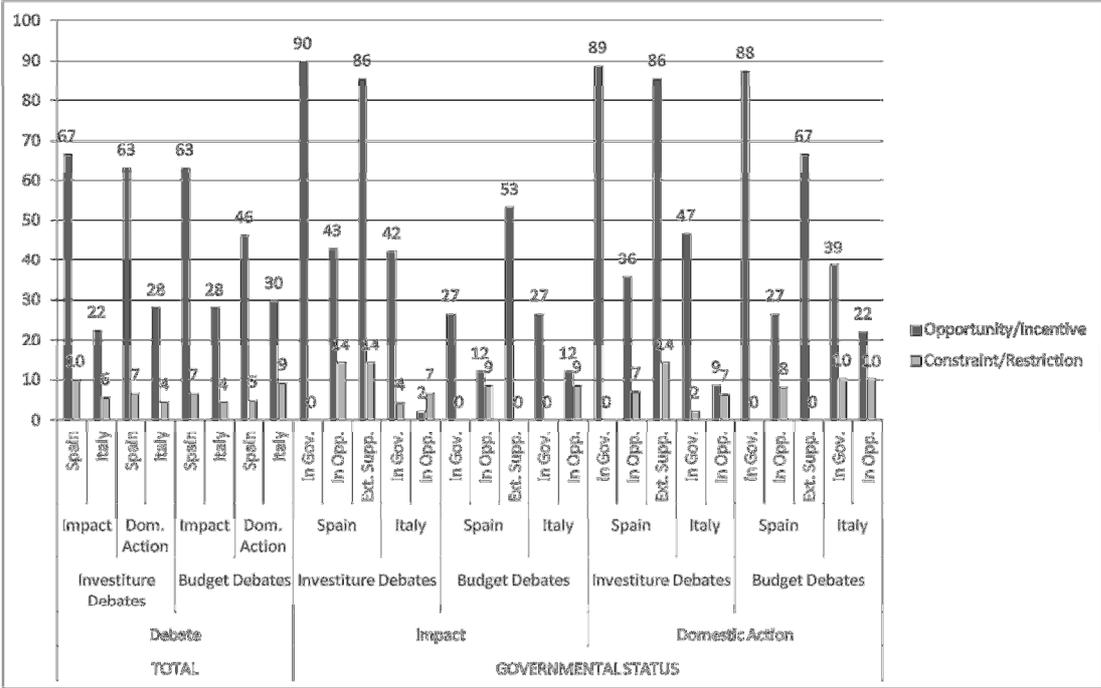
## **5. Using Europe in domestic debates**

For a deeper understanding of the EU's influence on parliamentary and political competition at large, we have to turn to the idea of usages. What are the usages parties make of the European environment? Factors such as country, context and governmental status are obviously important, but other ones, such as ideology, come into play, because, as argued above, European opportunities and constraints do not affect all countries in the same way. Some European policies, like the EMU, are closer to some parties' ideas than to others. Hence, the perception of opportunities, constraints, evaluation, and so on, should also be dependent on parties' ideologies.

### *5.1 A general overview: Positive or negative usages?*

As we have seen in the previous section, the importance of Europe depends on different factors. However, when it is important, what kind of conceptualisation do parties and leaders have of European opportunities and constraints? Is it positive or negative? Generally, we can observe that both countries present a clearly positive conceptualisation of the European arena and policies as fostering political action or as an incentive for the adoption of certain policies, both in Investiture and Budget debates. As we can see in Graph 2, usages of Europe are mainly positive, while we find fairly few negative accounts. Europe is conceptualised as an opportunity (67% and 63% of interventions in Investiture and Budget debates in Spain and 22% and 28% in Italy) rather than as a constraint (10% and 7% in Spain and 6% and 4% in Italy). In a similar way, Europe is internalised as an incentive for domestic political action (63% and 46% in Spain and 28% and 30% in Italy). Furthermore, the EU and its policies are conceived as a source to legitimise certain policy preferences in both Investiture and Budget debates (respectively, 60% and 50% in Spain and 34% and 31% in Italy). In addition, the evaluation of European policies at the domestic level is mainly positive (60% and 39% in Investiture and Budget debates in Spain and 22% and 17% in Italy), while a negative evaluation is still rare. Logically, due to the higher importance of Europe in the Spanish case, these usages are higher than in Italy. And not surprisingly, due to the pro-European position of most parties under analysis, the negative usages are less relevant. However, a more in-depth analysis qualifies this general picture, showing the increasing relevance of negative, and especially mixed, accounts on the effects of European policies on domestic competition. This is true for opposition parties, in particular, especially in Italy, where governmental parties are starting to criticise some European outcomes and limitations. Hence, we can see a loyalty strategy being partly transformed into one of voice.

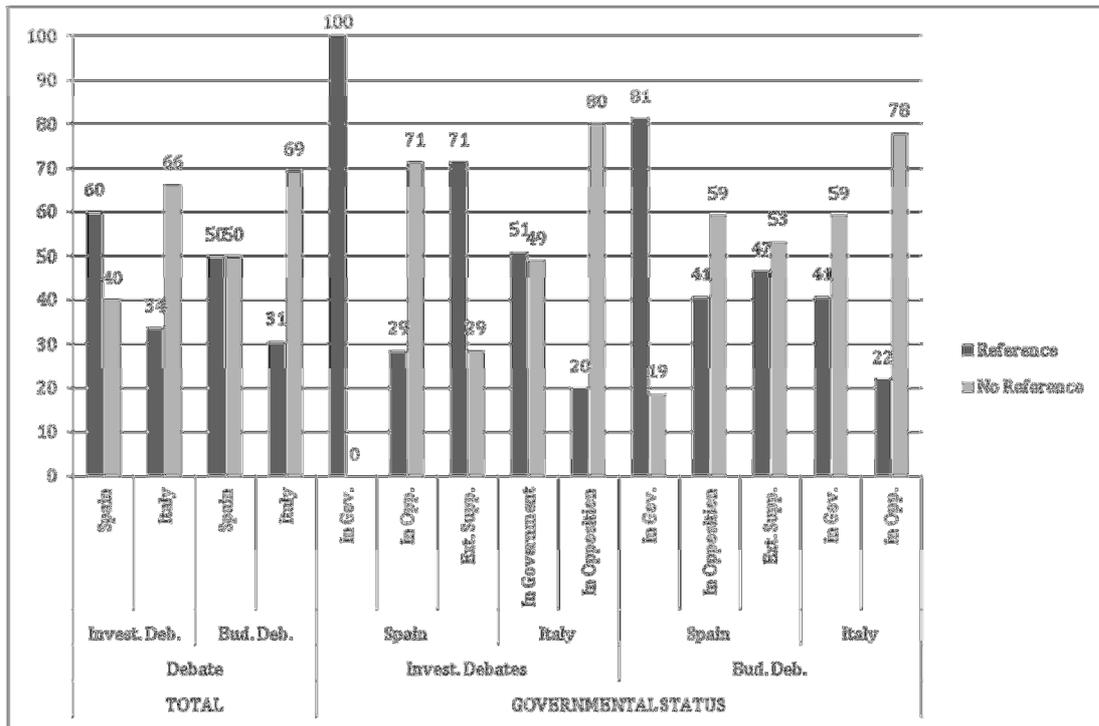
**Graph 2: Impact and Domestic Action and Reaction to Europe<sup>8,9</sup>**



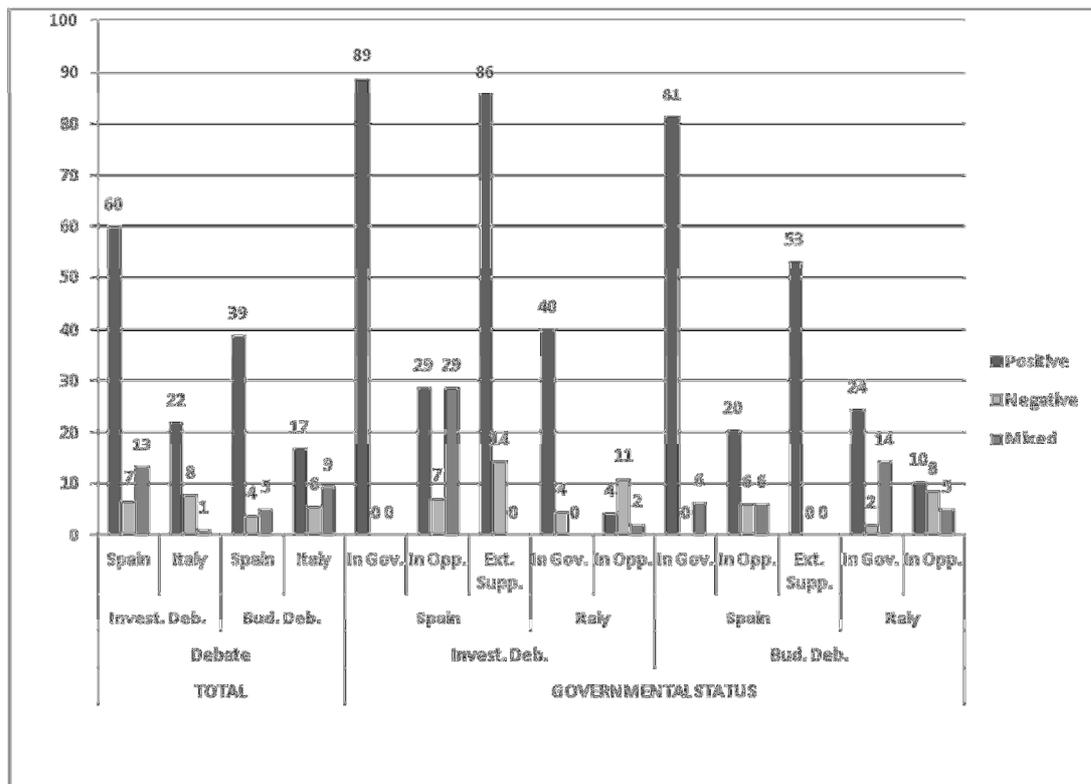
<sup>8</sup> The two categories do not sum 100%. For clarity in the presentation of the data, “Mixed” and “No Reference” categories have been omitted. Most of the missing data belong to the “No Reference” category. In just two cases (in Budget Debates - In Government in both Italy and Spain) the percentage the “Mixed” category is over 10%.

<sup>9</sup> For Impact of Europe, the classification is Opportunity or Constraint. Meanwhile, for the usage of Domestic Action and Restriction, the classification is Incentive for Action and Restriction.

**Graph 3: Europe as Legitimation**



**Graph 4. Evaluation of European policies**



*5.2 Government Status and the perception of European opportunities*

Governmental parties place more stress on the opportunities derived from the EU (90% and 27% in Investiture and Budget debates in Spain and 42% and 27% in Italy) and, even more interestingly, no negative perceptions are present (see Graph 2). This positive position is reinforced by the widespread use of Europe as a source for legitimising policy decisions. This is especially clear in the Spanish case (in Investiture and Budget debates, with 60% and 50% respectively) and more so in governmental parties (100% of cases in Spain and 51% in Italy in Investiture debates), although we can observe an important difference regarding Budget debates (81% in Spain but just 41% in Italy). The logic seems clear. Governments are part of the European consensus participating with other European governments in specific negotiations in different Councils. Then those regulations approved at the EU level are subsequently adopted or inspire domestic ones. So, EU regulations are conceived as a positive impact, fostering domestic action with legitimating effects. Finally, governmental parties have more information on European issues, implying a better knowledge of European process than opposition parties (Raunio 2002). Consequently, it will be very difficult to vote a European law and then reject it at home. This would imply a lack of credibility both at the domestic as well as the European level. As a result, governmental parties pursue a loyalty strategy, reinforced by the widespread pro-European consensus in each country. Opposition to European regulations and consequences is mainly left to opposition parties. In both countries, these parties monopolise the negative perceptions of European outcomes. In Spain, a mere minority of interventions criticise the EU, however, while in Italy criticism is much more evident in both debates. Another interesting aspect is shown by the positive conceptualisation of Europe by external supporters to the Spanish governments, especially the PNV and CIU. Does Europe play a role in explaining these parties support of the government? Which parties criticise Europe and in what ways? And, even more importantly, are negative perceptions of Europe evolving from the politics of opposition to parties in government? In answering these questions, we have to focus on an analysis of each party.

### *5.3 Parties' ideology and position in the party system*

This poses the question of how Spanish and Italian parties use Europe? In the Spanish case, we can observe that all parties analysed, except the United Left, present positive usages and furthermore do not, with few exceptions, have negative usages. Whether in government, in opposition or acting as external supporters, negative accounts are not present. The two vote-seeking parties, PP and PSOE, are part of the European coalition and play an active role at the EU level. In both cases, Europe is used for legitimising their policy options and for stressing the positive impacts and incentives for action that European policies imply. Indeed, they do not present any negative perception of Europe, either in government or opposition<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, they have been able to adapt their proposals (especially in economic policy) to make them coherent with European policies, facilitating their implementation and reducing potential stress between EU policies and their domestic proposals. Equally, CIU and PNV have played an active role in this implementation, acting as external supporters for the socialist and conservative governments<sup>11</sup>. As we can observe in our data, external supporters to the government (in our case, mostly CIU and PNV) show this positive position in our different usages<sup>12</sup>. The fear of Spain

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<sup>10</sup> The data of parties in government reflect their position, as all Spanish governments have been single-party governments, both from the Socialists (1982-1996 and 2004-2008) and Conservatives (1996-2004) regardless they had an absolute majority or just a relative majority of seats.

<sup>11</sup> CIU supported the Socialist government during the 1993-1995 period and CIU and PNV, with other minor parties, the conservative government in the 1996-2000 legislature.

<sup>12</sup> For example, they conceptualise Europe, as external supporters to the government, as a positive impact in Investiture and Budget Debates (86% and 53% respectively), as an incentive for domestic action (86% and 67%), or evaluate, positively,

not being able to join the Euro helped the possibility of supporting the Socialist party, as the CIU did in the 1993-95 period. In that last debate, the PSOE minority government was not able to get the new budget approved. The CIU speaker was clear:

We understand, Mr. Minister, and we share your demands for 1996 not to be a lost year in the process towards the EMU. It is true that from this year depends, in a good measure, the fact that Spain may be able to join in 1999 the third phase of the Monetary Union. But, do you really think, Mr. Minister that you have to remind it to us that, for that powerful reason and against our parliamentary custom [...] we have supported your Government's budget during the last two years? (Molins 1995: 9522).

Using similar terms, the PNV justified their support for the first Aznar government (1996-2000):

Facing this situation, no country that aims to be in the single currency in 1999 can allow to rule without a budget, nor bear the situation of incertitude that will provoke in the international markets this situation. Even if we consider that this budget law [...] can be improved, we think that political responsibility and the common good of all the citizens of this State demands an effort by political forces to give preference to this rather than partisan or strategic issues. (Zabalia Lezamiz 1996: 1401).

Therefore, the process towards the single currency downplayed parties' strategic positioning in political competition. We can observe how parties took into account national interests, rather than mere partisan ones, when deciding to support minority governments in achieving political and governmental stability during this crucial period. In this case, the positive position of both parties towards the EMU fostered this support. If we take into account their positive stance towards this specific European policy, as shown in their budget interventions as external supporters (see Graph 4), the clear objectives stated by the Stability and Growth Pact along with the consequent reduction of policy instruments and manoeuvrability, it can be expected to lead to a collusion between parties on their economic policy proposals. This is clearer in the speaker interventions, such as that of the PP's Minister of Economy Rodrigo Rato:

[...] there is no doubt that we are all conscious that during the last year an important consensus has been adopted, an important convergence in the position related to political economy; on the one hand, with a wide majority of this Chamber supporting European integration, since the process started in 1986, the Single Market, and afterwards, the processes of convergence derived from the European Union Treaty. (Rato 1996: 1320).

Or the socialist speaker, Josep Borrell, who demonstrated this common understanding of economic policy priorities:

Hon. Member, I will like to be clear with the Government that we agree with the macroeconomic objectives of inflation reduction and the deficit you are proposing. They were also our objectives. They are ambitious and difficult to obtain, but they are necessary. (Borrell 1996: 1333).

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European policies, 53% in budget debates (and no negative account) showing their positive stance on the EMU. As the PP and PSOE, they do not have almost any negative or mixed perception of European impacts.

Therefore, some European policies, especially those that are more communitarised, such as monetary policy, reduce governments' policy manoeuvrability and policy instruments, resulting in a decrease in decidability, especially with the main opposition party. The consequences are manifold. Firstly, the reduction of policy options produces less variety in policy proposals and as a consequence, a disempowerment of voters (Mair 2001; Bartolini 2005). Secondly, the collusion of mainstream parties leaves opposition to the EMU to policy-seeking parties that may, however, play a role in governmental stability as external supporters (such as in 1993, 1996 and 2004). Thirdly, and taking into account the equally positive interiorisation of European opportunities by the two leading ethno-regionalist parties, we can conclude that the EMU has facilitated the stability of governments.

Thus, the IU is the only party analysed that presents negative and mixed conceptualisations of the impacts, constraints and consequences of European policies. Indeed, with very few exceptions, all the negative usages in our data reflect the IU's position. For example, the IU's speaker in the budget debates stressed the negative impact, the restriction of action, and a negative evaluation of the EMU during the crucial years of the Euro implementation (1994-1997). This position, rather than being labelled as mere Eurosceptic, is more of a principled criticism, not against the process of integration per se but based on the democratic deficit, the mainly economic approach and lack of social policies produced by the Union. As the IU's leader, Julio Anguita, claimed in the 1996 Budget debate:

In other words, do the Spanish people, through their Members of Parliament's debate, have sovereignty to discuss about economy? Or that sovereignty has already been given? One part of it is already outside national frontiers. In other words, for what is useful this debate? Do we have decision powers after the vote if there are some criteria and deadlines of Maastricht convergence that influence this debate we are having? We will celebrate the debate of national sovereignty or we will hold the debate of something that comes from outside? And naturally, and who is speaking to you, in name of the federal group, supports European construction. But, Hon. Members, if the convergence criteria mark the limits of this debate, the political force I am representing in this moment does not agree with the content and the instruments that the Government is handling, nor with the objectives that the Socialist party shares with this political force. We, opposite, do not share the objectives or the instruments, we do it from an alternative philosophy, from another view of European integration. (Anguita 1996)

In this intervention we can observe the relevance of ideology in understanding the way parties conceptualise European opportunities and constraints and the way in which parties internalise European policies.

The Italian case differs slightly from the Spanish one. As we claimed above, for governmental parties Europe is conceived more as an incentive for action, where positive impacts are stressed together with a positive evaluation of European policies. On the other hand, opposition parties tend to neglect Europe in their interventions, enhancing the idea of the de-politicization of the European issue (Mair 2001). For example, opposition parties do not use Europe for legitimising their positions in 80% of Investiture debates or 78% of Budget ones (see Graph 3). However, we can observe a new and different trend. As Graph 1 shows, in Spain the importance of the European issue declined once the country joined the Euro, whereas in Italy the opposite occurred. For Italy, the period 2002-2005

presents almost the same percentage of interventions where Europe is important as that during the crucial years of the Euro's creation (27% and 28% respectively, see Graph 1). This could be due to the perceived negative consequences and limitations for domestic performance that the Euro implied for Italy and its economic performance. As a consequence, more parties, notably governmental parties and even the main party of the centre-right, present mixed or clearly negative positions and accounts of European policies. This is clear in our data, especially in Budget debates. As Graph 2 shows 10% of their interventions in these debates consider Europe as a restriction for domestic action or, in Graph 4, 14% of their interventions present a mixed evaluation of European policies, that is, both positive but also negative accounts, implying a growing perception of constraints and limitations rather than opportunities and incentives for action. So two questions now arise: Is the loyalty strategy of governmental parties changing, due to the perceived negative consequences of the increasing European competences for Italy, especially in the economic domain? What are the specific usages of Italian parties in the specific debates? In trying to answer these two questions, we must now turn to the analysis of single parties.

Regarding the two largest parties, we can observe a clear difference between the DS and FI. The DS, together with the once predominant DC, has a very positive conceptualisation of Europe, with no negative references to Europe in either budget or investiture debates. Therefore, in their evolution from the PCI, the DS seems to have internalised Europe as an incentive for action and a legitimising factor, which helps to adopt unpopular decisions, especially for a centre-left party. As Morgando's budget debate intervention clearly shows, there is a link between Europe and domestic reform:

If we want to consolidate our European perspective we have to start a period of reforms that reshapes our Welfare state. (Morgando 1996: 4).

On the other hand, FI has a more critical and ambivalent position due to different factors, such as the perception of European constraints, their coalition partners (with contrasting and even very negative European positions), and other political factors. The latter is especially relevant. Italy joined the Euro, against all expectations, under Prodi's and D'Alema's centre-left coalition governments. Hence, for the centre-left it was a major political success and a political asset. Indeed, in the 1996-2001 period, when they were in government, they evaluated European policies positively (when they went back into opposition, they made no reference in their interventions). However, it was FI and the centre-right coalition that gained office when the Euro was adopted in 2001 and experienced its policy limitations. Consequently, their position is different to the centre-left one. Then, even if the usages of Europe in Investiture Debates are neglected or a loyalty strategy is adopted, the focus should be on the possible benefits rather than criticising any possible negative effects. In Budget debates the position is much clearer, showing how European economic constraints and domestic suboptimal performance are present<sup>13</sup>. As Gianfranco Conte claims:

We do not have to forget that, while we, as government and as country, are trying to follow the commitments adopted in the European Union, countries economically much stronger than us, such as France and Germany, have remarkable problems to maintain the stability pact and many support that, finally, something has to be revised. (Conte 2001: 4).

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<sup>13</sup> With 3, 7% of mixed impacts of Europe, 2, 8 % of restriction for action and 4, 6% of mixed evaluations.

Therefore, from the idea shared in the 1990's, where it was a matter of national interest to be part of the EMU, the strict measures of the Stability and Growth Pact posed a limitation on government performance, implying a more critical vision and demand to reform it, fostering a strategy of voice. As Guido Crosetto (FI) said in the 2004 budget debate:

In fact it is undeniable that, after the adoption of the Euro, the limits and the structural weakness of our economic system are now manifest with evidence never seen before. The Italian economy has not the instrument of competitive devaluation, very used in the past, precisely when the competition challenge, often disloyal, of some emerging countries is more obvious. (Crosetto 2004: 43).

A second interesting aspect concerns the number and type of parties with negative perceptions of Europe: AN, LN and RC, all with different ideologies, share a more negative account of Europe and its policies. The RC offers a good example of a negative position towards the EU's current developments, and how ideology plays an important role in explaining their position. After the Euro implementation, it conceives the EU and the Maastricht Criteria as a negative impact, especially evident in their Speaker's Budget debate speeches during the 2001-2003 period. Notably, they criticise Europe on the same grounds as the Spanish IU, showing the relevance of the Partisan model<sup>14</sup>. As Russo Spenna (RC) claimed in the 2001 Budget debate:

Not by case our primary objective, our amendments to this budget law tend to break down the European Stability Pact, straightjacket I think, against the proletariat, against the demands of the society for creating a macroeconomic context favouring a qualified expansive policy. This is the philosophy of our alternative project regarding the budget law proposed by the Government. We try to operate, through our amendments, a great redistributive operation that we also propose to the centre-left. (Russo Spenna 2001: 29)

In the case of the conservative, post-fascist Alleanza Nazionale, the most interesting fact is the way the European issue is constantly neglected. In parliamentary debates the importance and role of Europe in the AN's interventions is minimal with none of the 14 interventions under analysis presenting an assessment of European policies. The ethno-regionalist Lega Nord, offers us a good example of an evolution from Functional Europeanism to a soft or even hard Eurosceptic position (Conti and Verzichelli 2003). Until the mid 1990s, LN's support for Europe and the EMU was based on their idea that only Northern Italy could fulfil the Euro criteria and hence, a consensual division of Italy should be possible, with the rich North joining the Euro without the South. This idea coincided with the party's goals, and thus the Euro and the necessary reforms had the LN's complete support:

The best laws approved by the Parliament in the last years have been those that have taken in European directives and the great opportunities we have missed refer to the missed reception of European principles. (Pagliarini 1996: 5084).

Even more clearly, Pagliarini argued:

The monetary union will give a great contribute to the feeling of belonging, of being part of a unique entity of European citizens [...]. Surely the participation in the single currency means to definitively lose the possibility

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<sup>14</sup> No positive references and 2, 8 % of impact of Europe as a constraint and restriction for action and 3, 7% of negative evaluations of European policies.

of currency devaluation, but it also means, above all, to eliminate the risk of value change and the differential interest rates. (Pagliarini 1996: 5085).

The idea of the Italian division in joining the Euro is clearly stated in the same debate:

[...] is necessary to save Southern Italy and to face the unemployment problem. Well, the only way to achieve this objective is to make a consensual split-up. In Padania we will use the Euro as currency, because we will use the European currency, while our fellow European citizens of Southern Italy will use the European single currency only some years later: before they will have to improve their economic, productive and financial system. (Pagliarini 1996: 5087).

The Euro provided the perfect opportunity for pursuing the party's final goal, to divide Italy into two autonomous entities. Therefore, once Italy as a country joined the Euro, the incentives for supporting Europe disappeared, and so did the LN's positive European policy. In contrast to other explanations of this U-turn offered in the literature, the LN's change in this policy is not due to office seeking motivations but due to their functional support of European integration<sup>15</sup>. Thus, as soon as there were no incentives for support, they completely changed their position. As Giancarlo Giorgetti explained in the 1999 debate, once Italy was part of the Euro, what had been best for the Italian economy three years prior had now become a problem:

The choice of the Euro has been, for us, in a certain way conditional. Today, a posteriori, we are able to understand how have been paid [...]. To whom observes the acquisition of the big credit and assurance groups, of some national air company, he will not miss that the interlocutors are part of those countries that at the time put a lot of obstacles to the entrance of the lira in the Euro and that miraculously have changed idea. [...] Now the problem, joining the green grassland of the Euro, is the one of a global economy in which, paradoxically, goes in contradiction with an economic system based in the small enterprises, but also of big enterprises that, at least in the domestic market, were the masters; now, even these enterprises are too small in the global scenario and the whole mechanism by which the fragile Italian economy relied risks to enter in a crisis. (Giorgetti 1999: p. 26-27).

The LN clearly exemplified the idea of Functional Europeanism until 1998, and then moved to a Eurosceptic position once the EU was not functional anymore (Conti and Verzichelli 2003). Considering the more critical position of FI, the AN's low European usages and some mixed accounts, along with the positive position of the UDC, we can get a good idea of how Europe can be a divisive issue within the CDL coalition. Furthermore, it helps the DS-Ulivo strategy as their main rivals from the right and left have a more negative and/or conflicting position.

## **6. Using Europe in the Parliament – Some conclusions**

The analysis of the usages of Europe in parliamentary competition has proved useful and has provided us with complementary insights into the analyses of salience. Furthermore, this analysis has given empirical backing to some of the consequences theorised by scholars, especially those regarding impacts. This article has analysed the usages parties make of the EU and its outcomes. So, why do parties use Europe and what can we learn by focusing on the parliamentary arena?

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<sup>15</sup> For a contrasting view see Chari, Iltanen and Kritzing (2004).

In the first place, it is important to take into account that European opportunities and constraints are not the same for countries and parties. Thus, the European context is not an exogenous environment that provides equal pressures or opportunities, but is, in a way, endogenous, as each party can pick those parts that better suit their ideology, interests or political needs. Hence, depending on the political and economic context, party position in the party system, governmental or oppositional status and party ideology help us to understand how and why parties consider the European arena important and internalise it in the way that they do. Italy and Spain provide two divergent examples of economic performance. While Spain adapted, joined and implemented the Euro in a period of high economic growth, Italy did so during a period of low growth. As a consequence, the two biggest parties in Spain did not have any incentive to stress the EMU's possible constraints (especially the loss of monetary policy and the role of the ECB), whereas in Italy the issue gained salience, as those constraints were clear and influenced government performance. Therefore, in the Italian case we are starting to observe a growing politicisation of European outcomes and, remarkably, not only in policy-seeking and small parties but also in governmental and larger parties, such as Forza Italia. Mixed and negative usages, focusing on policy constraints and limitation for action, are starting to become present in the political discourse, and criticism of the EU is starting to arise.

Secondly, government status plays a key role in showing the importance of the Institutional Model (Bartolini 2005). When government parties do not criticise the EU and its outcomes, they present a loyalty strategy stressing opportunities, incentives and positive evaluations and use Europe to legitimise their political and policy decisions. Meanwhile, parties with a more critical position towards European integration - when in government - downplay the issue in their interventions. However, as shown above, this is starting to change.

Therefore, we have observed that party ideology is important in understanding the different ways in which parties conceptualise the EU. In the two strongest parties with larger parliamentary groups, the position tends to be positive, stressing incentives for action, legitimation and the positive evaluation of European policies. Where the position is negative, usage of Europe tends to be mixed. This makes sense because they are the parties that, when in government, participate in the European decision-making process, and presenting opposing discourses at the European and at the national level is difficult to maintain. Thus, real opposition to European outcomes comes from smaller parties that, however, may still play a role in government formation, especially in Italy. The role of ideology is especially evident for communist parties, both in Italy and Spain. Their political discourse is remarkably similar, showing the importance of ideology for conceptualising the European environment as well as the value of the Partisan Model (Bartolini 2005). The Lega Nord case shows us two further important aspects. Firstly, it demonstrates the way in which the EU can be used to pursue a specific political project, and the analysis of parliamentary debates has offered us a good explanation of the U-turn in their European position. Secondly, it stresses the importance of parliamentary debates. If we take into account that 1996 was the last election where the LN participated alone (since then, it has been part of the Casa delle Libertà coalition), the analysis of electoral programmes does not allow us to see and understand such a specific and radical change.

The analysis of the usages of Europe has also helped to overcome some of the limitations of focusing purely on electoral competition or salience. In particular, it has shown the importance of indirect impacts of Europeanisation such as the reduction of policy decidability and the disempowerment of elections, the de-politicization of the European issue and even other effects, such as the coalition-

building effect (Mair 2001; Bartolini 2005). The reduction of policy decidability is clear in Spanish Budget debates as both PSOE's and PP's speakers state that they pursue the same economic goals. When there is a substantially communitarised policy, with clear objectives, deadlines and goals, the room for manoeuvre by governmental parties is reduced. Therefore, successive governments have to implement the same policy, with little room for different proposals. The idea of de-politicization is also clear, especially, but not only, in Italy. Parties in government tend to stress European opportunities and incentives while opposition parties tend to neglect them. As some scholars have shown, this can be due to the asymmetry of information and the government's role in European negotiations, where the opposition is absent (Raunio 2002). This "one-way" importance implies that there is not a real debate on European issues in general parliamentary debates. This de-politicization can, especially if we take into account the growing European competencies, produce a clear deficit in the relation between the parliamentary debate, political competition and the voters. Finally, the Spanish way of adopting the Euro with minority governments has demonstrated the EU's role in fostering government stability with a coalition-building effect. CIU and PNV supported different governments (socialist and conservatives) to assure Spain's success in joining the Euro. These two ethnoregionalist parties have a positive position towards the EU, and their support was oriented towards the final goal of joining the Euro.

To conclude, the analysis of the usages of Europe in parliamentary debates shows the importance of dealing with this other crucial area of parliamentary competition. Indeed, it complements other types of analyses and provides diverse evidence of both direct and indirect impacts of European integration on domestic systems. Context, timing, governmental status, ideology or type of party and party systems are all important factors for understanding why and how parties internalise Europe along with its multiple consequences for political competition, voters and the process of European integration at large.

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