

# Confusing Cues:

## Competition and Collusion of Party Strategies in Referendums on the EU Constitution

BEN CRUM, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

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### ABSTRACT

This paper analyses what factors determine the positioning of parties in referendums on the European Constitutional Treaty. The analysis gives particular attention to the position taken by opposition parties, as they are likely to be torn between ideological inclinations and strategic considerations. What is more, whichever way the opposition decides to go determines very much the options presented to the electorate. If the opposition sides with the government (the Collusive Model) the mobilisation of the No-side is left to protest parties. If, however, the opposition chooses to oppose the government (the Competitive Model) the central divide in the referendum campaign coincides with that between the main parties. It is found that the Collusive Model dominates in the ten countries where a referendum on the Constitutional Treaty has been expected, but for the three where a right-conservative opposition opposes Constitutional Treaty. In contrast, when Social Democrats dominate the opposition they are ideologically inclined to join the Yes-camp, but at the risk of factionalism and defection of their electorate.

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### Introduction

The damning verdict of the electorates in France and the Netherlands over the proposed Constitutional Treaty for Europe in national referenda has again put into stark relief the issue of whether and how European integration can be provided with democratic legitimacy. Notably, had the political elites of the two countries stuck to the line followed at the last EU Treaty revisions of Nice and Amsterdam (France did of course have a narrowly passed referendum on the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992), the parliaments in the two states would, for all we know, have ratified the Constitutional Treaty by comfortable majorities. The fact that the large majority of their electorates was of a different opinion raises some profound questions concerning the relationship between direct and indirect democracy in EU affairs, and in particular the correspondence between the structure of the party system and the structure of public opinion in EU affairs: Can European integration cope, and be reconciled, with direct democracy? Do parties fail in adequately representing public opinion on EU affairs? How can we articulate EU politics with politics in the domestic domain? Are changes warranted in terms of legitimation strategies, institutions or the party and political opportunity structure of EU politics?

Political parties fulfil a key role in Europe's parliamentary democracies in allowing for the articulation of different political views and mobilising support for them. While parties can control the process of parliamentary ratification, they enjoy critically less control over the outcome of a referendum. If indeed political parties would be critical, then there would be little doubt about the outcome of EU referendums; especially in parliamentary systems where the government that has signed the Treaty generally enjoys majority support in the parliament (and thus among the electorate), a 'Yes' should be secure if the political parties can sway their followers. What is more, as we find in many parliamentary ratifications that also the main opposition parties heartily endorse the Treaty revisions, governments have even less to fear.

Even if in practice political parties cannot fix the outcome of a referendum, they are prominent – and, indeed, in many cases the most prominent – players in the referendum campaigns. Political parties provide the voters with important 'cues' about what is at stake in the referendum and how they should cast their vote (LeDuc, 2002: 722; cf. Lupia & McCubbins, 1998). Especially when the issue is complex, as EU Treaty revisions generally are, voters are likely to consult the position of their preferred party. Party positioning may also have another effect as voters may use the referendum to express their opposition to the governing parties (cf. Franklin, Marsh & McLaren, 1994). Thus not only can parties influence the referendum individually, their influence has to be seen in relation to the strategies of the other parties.

This paper examines the position political parties have adopted in those countries that have been committed to holding a national referendum on the EU Constitutional Treaty. Besides Denmark and Ireland, which for constitutional reasons have generally been obliged to subject European treaty revisions to a referendum, eight other countries have committed themselves to holding such a referendum: Spain, France, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Poland and

the Czech Republic (cf. Closa, 2005).<sup>1</sup> By June 2005, three of these have been held, with only the Spanish referendum yielding a positive response. The referendum in Luxembourg will take place on 10 July. Whether the other six countries will still have a referendum will depend on the course of the “period of reflection” that the European Council of June 2005 announced following the negative outcomes of the referendums in France and the Netherlands.

While for the moment the overview of the outcome of the referendums remains incomplete, we do know on which sides the political parties in these countries have positioned themselves. Hence, the paper focuses first of all on the factors that determine the positioning of parties. Indeed, one may expect that depending on the way political parties position themselves, there are important differences on the role they can play and the impact they can have on referendum campaigns (cf. LeDuc, 2004). For this purpose the paper highlights in particular the difference between, on the one hand, countries where the main political parties, government and opposition, campaign together in favour of ratification (the Collusive Model) and, on the other hand, those countries in which the divide between the Yes- and the No-camp coincides with the divide between government and opposition (the Competitive Model).

By focussing on the role of political parties, this article also seeks to link the existing literature on EU referendums with research on the impact of European integration on political parties and their ideologies. The first, theoretical section below draws upon both strands of research to define some key concepts and to establish the main hypotheses. The second part then turns to the ten countries in which referendums on the EU Constitutional Treaty have been foreseen, to establish the structures of party behaviour, the reasons for their emergence and their accompanying effects.

## **I. The Theory of Political Parties in EU Referendums**

### *The Impact of Parties on Referendum Results*

Traditionally, the dominant approach to voting behaviour in general and referendum behaviour in particular is the *sincere voter approach* (cf. Farquharson, 1969; Rosema, 2004: Appendix A) that assumes that voters will cast their vote on the basis of their substantive evaluation of the issue at hand (e.g. Svensson, 2002). Thus the decisive issue whether or not voters will cast their vote in favour of ratification of an EU Treaty is whether they consider this new Treaty as an advancement.

Political parties enter into the sincere voter approach to the extent that voters’ knowledge of the issue at hand is limited (cf. Schneider & Weitsman, 1996). When it comes to EU Treaties this can be assumed for various reasons. Above all EU Treaties are complex deals involving a large number of provisions that few voters can be expected to know completely and to be able to weigh their pro’s and con’s. Furthermore, in most EU member states the level of information on EU affairs is generally low, as is well reflected in the suggestion that support for EU integration rests on a ‘permissive’ rather than a well-reflected consensus (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970). When voters have only limited information, political parties may come to play an important role in working as a cognitive shortcut by providing them with cues. Voters that have come to associate their political opinions with certain

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<sup>1</sup> Initially also Belgium was expected to hold a referendum but the government has changed its mind. On the other hand, while in principle the main political parties in the Czech republic are still committed towards holding a referendum, domestic political dynamics may well lead to the referendum being called off and ratification taking place through the normal parliamentary procedure (cf. Král, 2005).

political parties may well rely on these political parties to provide them with a pointer on how to position themselves vis-à-vis a political choice about which they lack sufficient knowledge. Basically, then the sincere voter approach suggests that under conditions of limited knowledge, political parties may steer their electorate and the eventual referendum result is likely to reflect the variation of opinion among the political parties. Thus, if parties representing a majority of the electorate approve a new EU Treaty then the electorate is likely to do so as well.

The sincere voter approach has been challenged by an alternative, *second-order politics approach* (Franklin, Marsh & McLaren, 1994; Schneider & Weitsman, 1996; cf. Reif & Schmitt, 1980). The basic tenet of the second order politics approach is that EU elections and referendums cannot be considered as autonomous electoral tests but tend rather to be overshadowed by the most prominent political constellation, that of national politics. Thus the way voters cast their vote is very much determined by their appreciation of national politics and, more specifically, the performance of the incumbent government: “referendum votes held to ratify [the TEU] are better interpreted as decisions made on short-term, national, rather than on long-term, European considerations” (Franklin, Marsh & McLaren, 1994: 470). Assuming that the government promotes a positive verdict on a new EU Treaty (as it is bound to do as it has in principle already signed the Treaty itself), whether or not voters follow this lead basically depends on their appreciation of the government.

Thus political parties also play an important role in this second-order politics approach, but it is quite a different one. Rather than providing the electorate with cues of how to assess the issue at hand, parties can exploit the referendum either as a confirmation of their support as governing parties or as a way to challenge the government.

Empirical evidence suggests that both mechanisms are in fact at work in practice. In an attempt to reconcile the two approaches, Mark Franklin (2002: 753; cf. Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2004) has suggested that second-order effect of the appreciation of the government in office on the referendum result depends on:

- (1) the extent to which voters bring to bear deep-seated knowledge and enduring preferences;
- (2) the extent to which non-governmental parties are united in opposition to the government’s position on the referendum proposal; and
- (3) the closeness of the political balance of forces on the question at issue.

In general in both explanations we find that as the knowledge of voters increases, the role of political parties in shaping the referendum result is likely to reduce. Still, as long as knowledge is relatively low, the influence of parties may work in different ways. On the one hand, voters may have themselves led by the substantive, ideological position of the parties at hand. On the other hand, voters may have their choice led by whether or not their preferred party is supportive of the incumbent government. Substantive and strategic cues may coincide but they need not. Basically, this is an issue of party strategy.

#### *Party Ideology and European Integration*

The issue of European integration has very much appeared from outside of the established parameters of the national party systems and it was by no means self-evident how it would be accommodated. National party systems in Europe have generally come to be marked by well-established ideological divisions. Most prominently, many parties have distinguished themselves along a left-right axis, with socialist worker parties towards the left end and conservative parties towards the right. In different

countries there have also been other axes that have come to crosscut the left-right axis, for instance concerning religious differences, regionalism etc.

Even if the issue of Europe integration very much appeared from the outside, empirical studies demonstrate a remarkable degree of coherence in the way parties of similar political persuasion have accommodated it (Marks, Wilson & Ray, 2002; Hooghe, Marks & Wilson, 2004). From the start of the integration project, centre-right parties have tended to look approvingly on it, especially as long as the emphasis was on market integration through liberalisation. Centre-left parties may have been more reluctant initially, but gradually they also have come to embrace European integration once it moved more and more into issues of re-regulation in spheres like regional and environmental policy (Hooghe, Marks & Wilson, 2004: 129). Notably, we find that outright opposition to Europe is mostly reserved to the ideological fringes occupied by parties that generally adopt a protest-oriented or anti-system stance (Taggart, 1999). Hooghe, Marks and Wilson (2004) thus suggest that support for European integration along the left-right axis can be seen as an inverted U-curve with low support being concentrated at the extreme ends on both sides.

In fact, Hooghe, Marks and Wilson put forward an alternative ideological axis that displays a simple, linear relationship with support for EU integration, namely what they call the GAL-TAN axis. According to their findings support for European integration tends to be high among parties that can be characterised as Green/Alternative/Libertarian (GAL) and low among parties that rather qualify as Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist (TAN). In many respects this axis crosscuts with the left-right axis. On the left, one finds both GAL-parties, like the Greens, as well as parties with more of a TAN-signature, like the (former) communist and regionalist parties. At the same time on the right end of the spectrum there are GAL-parties of an outspoken liberal or libertarian signature as well as nationalist parties with a TAN-penchant.

**Table 1** Ideological predispositions of main European party families towards EU integration

<b>Ideological family</b>	<b>Economic integration</b>	<b>Political integration</b>	<b>Overall stance on EU integration</b>
Extreme left/ Communist	Strongly opposed	Moderately opposed	Strongly opposed
Green	Moderately opposed	Mixed	Moderately opposed
Social-Democratic	Moderately in favour	Strongly in favour	Moderately to strongly in favour
Liberal	Strongly in favour	Strongly in favour	Strongly in favour
Christian-democratic	Strongly in favour	Strongly in favour	Strongly in favour
Conservative	Strongly in favour	Strongly opposed	Moderately in favour
Extreme right	Moderately opposed	Strongly opposed	Strongly opposed

Based on Marks, Wilson & Ray (2002: 587).

The two ideological axis – left-right and GAL-TAN – cannot be reduced to each other and each of them captures a different aspect of European integration, left-right focussing on the economic side and GAL-TAN rather on the political side. Table 1 (derived from Marks, Wilson and Ray, 2002) lists the position of all main ideological families on economic and political integration and also presents an overall appraisal. Notably, there emerges a distinct pro-European core of Social Democrats, Liberals and Christian Democrats that are ideologically inclined to endorse further steps of integration, both economic and political. Euroscepticism is mostly to be found outside of the ideological core. At the same time, one may note that whereas for economic integration the centre of gravity of support hinges to the right of the centre, when it comes to political integration it hinges to the left.

### *Strategic Implications of the EU Referendum Setting*

However, the strategic choices political parties make are not exclusively ruled by their ideological orientations, they also respond to the context in which they operate: the political commitments they engage in, the expectations they raise and the strategies of other political parties. The context of a referendum on an EU Treaty has a number of general characteristics that may affect the strategic choices political parties make.

First and foremost is the fact that Treaty revisions are only established with the approval of each and every government involved. The ratification that then follows basically involves the government getting the result of the international negotiations approved at home. Implication of this is that government parties will be expected to endorse the negotiation result, also because failure of ratification will cause a loss of face vis-à-vis the other governments. Some conditions allow however for a loosening of this expectation. One is the possibility that a change of government occurs in-between the conclusion of the negotiations and the ratification referendum. The incoming government need not necessarily feel (morally) bound by the negotiation result achieved by its predecessor. Secondly, the sense of commitment may be weaker in coalition governments, in particular among junior coalition partners that do not hold any of the cabinet portfolios directly involved (Prime Minister, Foreign Affairs, European Affairs).

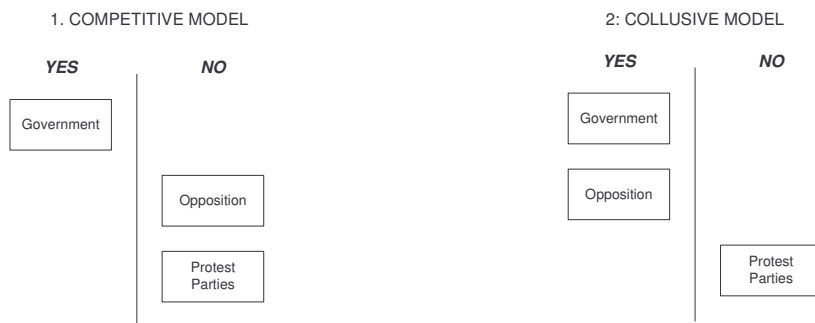
More generally, for any party that is willing to engage in government of one of the member states, some costs can be identified in turning against EU Treaties. In political terms, such a party may well lose credit in the eyes of other governments and in particular in the eyes of the members of its European party family that are in government. Such confidence may be of great value once the party does come in government and has to justify its European achievements to its home audience. Moreover, once a Treaty change does come to be adopted despite its own efforts to the contrary, a party will find itself legally obliged to work by its terms once it does come into office. There thus may emerge a marked contrast between its original opposition and its subsequent duty to play by the rules. Given then that EU Treaty changes are generally established by a broad European political consensus and that any party entering in government will have little choice but to play by the rules, mainstream parties vying for office experience pressure to behave responsibly and to campaign on the Yes-side.

However, for non-government parties there is a fundamental factor that may well go against endorsement of Treaty changes and which is directly related to the second order approach to European contests. As the EU Treaties are negotiated and agreed by the government, opposition parties may seek to use EU referendums as a means to mobilise protest against the standing government. As Franklin, Marsh and McLaren (1994: 462) put it: "Opposition parties may be less than wholehearted about mobilizing votes in support of government policy when an adverse vote could produce considerable political embarrassment for their political opponents". An additional element that may work in the same direction is that being given a choice in the referendum, voters might also want to see this choice being reflected by their political elites. The elites uniting on one of the two options on offer may discredit the referendum in the eyes of the public (cf. Franklin, Marsh & McLaren, 1994; Hug & Sciarini, 2000: 7).

### *The Structure of Contestation: Competition and Collusion*

As government parties are bound to endorse the EU Constitutional Treaty and protest parties are naturally inclined to oppose it, the (mainstream) opposition parties come to play a key role. In principle one would expect ideological orientations to be decisive in these circumstances, with parties within the pro-European ideological core tending towards an endorsement of the Constitutional Treaty and those outside of it tending towards a rejection. Still, the referendum setting complicates the situation as it creates the temptation to turn the referendum against the government, even if this temptation may be tempered by the desire to show oneself 'governmentable'.

Depending on whichever way the opposition parties are swayed, there are two basic models of party mobilisation in EU referendums. In the Competitive Model we find the opposition choosing the No-side in opposition to the government and together with protest parties. In the Collusive Model we find the opposition parties joining the side of the government parties, leaving the No-side to protest parties alone.



A first hypothesis is then:

- I) When parties associated to the pro-European ideological core (Social-Democrats, Christian-Democrats and Liberals) dominate the opposition, the distribution of party positions will come to resemble the Collusive Model.

In turn (hypothesis I'), if the opposition is of a different ideological persuasion, we would expect to find the competitive model.

However, while looking at the declared positions of parties, we should not ignore the underlying dynamics. Franklin, Marsh & McLaren (1994: 466) observed that in the Maastricht referendums governing parties "had greatest success in suppressing factional dissent". On the other hand, the presence of contradictory pressures is likely to manifest itself in opposition parties. Even if these parties and their leadership are formally committed one way or the other, they are likely to face contrary sentiments within their party, thus leading to factionalism (cf. Taggart, 1998: 369). This applies in particular to opposition parties of pro-European persuasion since if they follow their ideology followers will accuse them of sleeping with the enemy and if they choose to campaign in the No-camp, they will stand accused of letting strategy prevail over substance (cf. Franklin, Marsh & McLaren, 466).

- II) Opposition parties that decide to collude with the government are liable to factionalism.

Then, the question is what impact parties' positioning has on the referendum result. Government parties can generally count on their electorate following their lead when it comes to EU referendums (Ray, 2003). Again here the spotlight is on the role adopted by the main opposition

parties. The dilemma these parties face between ideological and strategic inclinations also spills over to their electorate (cf. Schneider & Weitsman, 1996):

III) Opposition parties are less successful in swaying their supporters to their side than government parties.

In fact, Franklin, Marsh and McLaren (1994: 463; but cf. Hug & Sciarini, 2000) have found this hypothesis confirmed in the case of the three referendums on the Maastricht Treaty: “Those [pro-Treaty parties] in government did well enough but those in opposition, whatever their European credentials, saw their supporters significantly divided between ‘yes’ and ‘no’ camps”. One may even want to specify this hypothesis in that it suggests both that voters of opposition parties are more likely to defect from their party’s stance as well as to abstain altogether.

There is a further argument that can be made about the impact of political parties on voting behaviour. Lawrence LeDuc (2002: 713) has suggested that party identification and ideological orientation are likely to play a smaller role, and thus increase the unpredictability of referendums, “when parties are internally divided, ideological alignments are unclear or an issue is new and unfamiliar to the public”. Building upon this, I hypothesise:

IV) If the main parties collude, their positions are less likely to be followed, as voters will look for other cues.

This hypothesis points to the limits of parties to influence referendums. It suggests that major opposition parties by joining the government in effect reduce the capacity of all parties to influence the referendum result and thereby increase the unpredictability of the outcome. Naturally, this is not to say that if the opposition wants the Yes-vote to win, it better refrains from joining the Yes-camp. Still, as far as the role of political parties is concerned the most secure road to a Yes-vote may be what LeDuc (2002: 728) has labelled the ‘uphill struggle’: “The party [government] initiating the referendum knows that it can count on the votes of its core supporters. It knows also where the additional votes may lie that it needs in order to secure a majority and that it can win these only through a hard fought campaign.” The major premise here is that the incumbent government parties know their core support to be secure, a premise that by no means can always be taken for granted. Obviously, apart from ‘the uphill struggle’, there are other ways that a Yes-vote may be secured. The crucial difference, however, is that in these cases the role of political parties is secondary only.

## **II. Actual Party Strategies in the EU Constitution Referendums**

Table 2 presents the party positions of the ten EU member states where a referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty is taking place or is strongly anticipated. The analysis is limited to those parties that secured at least 4% of the popular vote in the most recent elections for the national parliament (as at June 2005). This implies that all government parties are included and also the main opposition parties, while of the protest parties only those most prominent are included. An additional consequence is that parties only (or mostly) active in EP-elections (Denmark) have been excluded. In total then we are looking at 20 government parties and 37 opposition parties in the ten countries representing more than 90% of the total number of votes cast in the most recent elections for the national parliaments.

**Table 2** Party Positions in the 10 Referendum Countries

Party in favour of ratification		Party against ratification		Party undecided	
GOVERNMENT			OPPOSITION		
Party	Party Group	Vote share	Party	Party Group	Vote share
<b>CZECH REPUBLIC</b>					
Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD)	PES	(30%)	Civic Democratic Party (ODS)	EPP-ED	(24%)
Christian and Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL)	EPP-ED	(10%)	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM)	EUL-NGL	(18%)
Freedom Union-Democratic Union (US-DU)	EPP-ED	(4%)			
<b>DENMARK</b>					
Liberals (V)	ELDR	(29%)	Social Democrats (SD)	PES	(26%)
Conservative People's Party (KF)	EPP-ED	(10%)	Danish People's Party (DF)	UEN	(13%)
			Social Liberals (RV)	ELDR	(9%)
			Socialist People's Party (SF)	EG/EFA	(6%)
<b>FRANCE</b>					
Union for the Republic (UMP)	EPP-ED	(34%)	Socialist Party (PS)	PES	(24%)
Union for the French Democracy (UDF)	ELDR	(5%)	National Front (FN)	NA	(11%)
			French Communist Party (PCF)	EUL-NGL	(5%)
			The Greens	EG/EFA	(4%)
<b>IRELAND</b>					
Fianna Fail	UEN	(41%)	Fine Gael	EPP-ED	(22%)
Progressive Democrats	ELDR	(4%)	Labour Party	PES	(11%)
			Sinn Fein	EUL-NGL	(6%)
			Green Party	EG/EFA	(4%)
<b>LUXEMBURG</b>					
Christian Social People's Party (CSV)	EPP-ED	(36%)	Luxemburg's Socialist Workersparty (LSAP)	PES	(23%)
Democratic Party (DP)	ELDR	(16%)	The Greens	EG/EFA	(12%)
			Action Committee Dem. and Pensions (ADR)	NA	(10%)
<b>THE NETHERLANDS</b>					
Christian-Democratic Appeal (CDA)	EPP-ED	(29%)	Labour Party (PvdA)	PES	(27%)
People's Party for Freedom and Dem. (VVD)	ELDR	(18%)	Socialist Party (SP)	EUL-NGL	(6%)
Democrats 66	ELDR	(4%)	List Pim Fortuyn (LPF)	NA	(6%)
			Green Left (GL)	EG/EFA	(5%)
<b>POLAND</b>					
Alliance of Democratic Left (SLD)	PES	(41%)	Citizens' Platform (PO)	EPP-ED	(13%)
Union of Labour (UP)			Self Defence of the Polish Republic (S)	NA	(10%)
Polish Social Democracy (SDLP)			Law and Justice (PiS)	UEN	(9%)
			Polish People's Party (PSL)	EPP-ED	(9%)
			League of Polish Families (LPR)	ID	(8%)
<b>PORTUGAL</b>					
Socialist Party (PS)	PES	(45%)	Social Democrat Party (PSD)	EPP-ED	(29%)
			Unitarian Democratic Coalition (CDU)	EUL-NGL	(8%)
			? People's Party (PP)	EPP-ED	(7%)
			Left Block (BE)	EUL-NGL	(6%)
<b>SPAIN</b>					
Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE)	PES	(43%)	Peoples' Party (PP)	EPP-ED	(38%)
			United Left (IU)	EUL-NGL	(5%)
			Democratic Convergence of Catalunya (CDC)	ELDR	(3%)
			Republican Left of Catalunya (ERC)	EG/EFA	(2%)
			Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV)	EG/EFA	(2%)
<b>UNITED KINGDOM</b>					
Labour Party	PES	(35%)	Conservative Party	EPP-ED	(32%)
			Liberal Democrats	ELDR	(22%)

Based on the EPIN Ratification Monitor (Kurpas et al. 2005; [www.epin.org](http://www.epin.org)). Vote shares based on [www.electionworld.org](http://www.electionworld.org).

As was to be expected, all government parties campaign in favour of the ratification of the European Constitution, with the only exception being some hesitation among the Czech Freedom Union that is a junior partner in the government. Notably, this comes for most parties as rather unproblematic as they have consistently supported European integration over the years and have been directly involved in the negotiations on the Constitutional Treaty. An exception to this rule is the Portuguese Socialist Party that came into office only after the negotiations had been concluded but whose support of the Treaty is beyond contestation.

Notably, the picture on the side of non-government parties is more diverse. Basically we can distinguish three countries (UK, POL, CZ) that follow the Competitive Model, while the other seven rather reflect the alternative, Collusive Model. Notably, in all three cases that follow the Competitive Model, the opposition is dominated by centre-right parties with a penchant for the right rather than the centre. Typically, the British Conservatives and the Czech ODS make up the ED group within the EP's Christian Democrat-Conservative EPP-ED group. The Polish case is rather singular as the main opposition party, the Christian-Democrat Citizens' Platform (PO), still has not made up its mind on the Constitution but faces severe pressure from the other right-wing opposition parties that have adopted a strong anti-Constitution position.

Still for the centre-right in Spain, Portugal and Ireland their traditional pro-European orientation predominates. In the case of Portugal and Spain this orientation is reinforced further by the fact that the centre-right parties left office only recently and have been representing their countries in (most of) the negotiations on the Constitutional Treaty. In Ireland there is further the factor to consider that the Christian Democratic party opposes a centre-right government rather than a centre-left one, as is the case for the other Christian-democratic opposition parties.

While opposition parties that operate right of centre may thus be tempted to come out against the Constitution, such tendencies are completely absent from parties associated with the liberal ELDR-group. Neither do we find any opposition to the EU Constitution among Social Democratic parties.

Thus all centre-right governments know the mainstream opposition parties to be on their side. There are of course notable differences in the way this ad hoc grand coalition has been maintained, especially as opposition parties have reason to resist being drawn in by the government. The most extreme example of collusive behaviour we probably find in Denmark where following the signing of the Constitutional Treaty, the Liberal-Conservative coalition government secured a national agreement entitled *Denmark in the enlarged Europe* with the main opposition parties committing both sides to a constructive and proactive policy towards further and better European integration (Sørensen & Verregaard, 2005).

Beyond the pro-European ideological core, the only parties that as opposition parties support the EU Constitution are Green parties. Notably, the majority of Green parties in the referendum countries (DK, F, Lux, NL) has come to endorse the European Constitution, but this has not come easily. In fact, the Irish Greens after having opposed the Nice Treaty have made their stance dependent on an internal referendum. The French and Danish Greens already preceded them and in both cases the majority of the party membership (53% among the French and 64% among the Danish Greens) came out in favour of the Constitution. Notably, also the regionalist parties in Spain that are associated with the Green party-group in the EP remained divided, with the Basque group choosing to endorse the Constitution and the Catalans opposing it.

Apart then from the Christian-Conservative parties that have chosen to campaign against the Social-Democrat government and the Green parties that have not (yet) joined the pro-integration camp, opposition to the EU Constitution is concentrated among the nationalistic and extreme right, the extreme left and smaller protest parties. Without exception, all parties associated to the European United Left in the EP oppose the European Constitution. The same would apply for all parties associated with the right-wing Union for Europe of the Nations Group were it not for the Irish Fianna Fail that sits in government. The remainder of the opposing parties is made up of anti-establishment and protest parties like the French Front National, the List Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands, the Pension Committee in Luxembourg, the League of Polish families and the Self Defense of the Polish Republic.

### *Factionalism*

The most notable case of party factionalisation over the EU Constitutional Treaty is the French Parti Socialiste. While inter- and intra-partypolitical strategising were in no way absent, the internal divisions came to be articulated as ideological ones with the opponents invoking the prospect of a 'Alter-Europe' (Ricard-Nihoul & Larhant, 2005). Eventually, the party-line was determined by way of an internal referendum in which 59% of the turned-out membership came out in favour of the Constitutional Treaty. Still, this has not refrained some prominent socialists from campaigning for a 'non'.

Notably, however, signs of internal tensions are much less apparent in other Social-Democratic parties that find themselves in opposition, like the ones in the Netherlands, Denmark, Luxembourg and Ireland. In fact, for internal tensions similar to the PS we rather have to turn to right-wing opposition parties. Thus one may for instance consider the ambivalent tendencies that the Czech ODS-opposition harbours beyond the Eurosceptic rhetoric of Vaclav Klaus. Also the indecisiveness of the Polish Citizens' Platform and the Polish People's Party can be accounted for by them being torn between the reflexes of opposition and striking a more responsible pose.

Another group of parties that is liable to internal factionalisation are the Green parties. While many of the Green parties opposed earlier EU Treaties, the majority of them is now coming out in favour of the Constitutional Treaty. Partly this development may be attributed to a shift of the integration process towards (re-)regulation (cf. Hooghe, Marks & Wilson, 2004), but it may also signal a trend in which Green parties are more and more shedding their anti-establishment sentiments and merging into the political mainstream. Typically, in the case of the French and the Danish Greens referendums were used to legitimise the change in party stance. The Irish Greens remain undecided for the moment as a referendum is still to take place.

One thing worth noting is what we may call the 'force of government'; government parties remain distinctively immune from any significant factionalisation (cf. Franklin, Marsh & McLaren, 1994: 466). Being part of the government and having been associated with the negotiations on the Constitutional Treaty, there have been little doubts about the official party line, even though in most government parties Eurosceptic voices have not been completely silenced.

### *Parties' Influence on the Referendum Result*

So far (June 2005) three of the ten countries have actually held their referendums and this gives some first evidence on the ability of parties to cue their voters. Notably, all these three cases conformed to the Collusive Model with the main opposition party campaigning in favour of the Constitutional

Treaty. The French and the Dutch cases are even more similar as in these cases the main opposition party was the Social-Democratic party that together with the Green party was campaigning side by side with a centre-right government. In both cases, the No-campaign was thus left to anti-establishment parties on the left and right extremes of the political spectrum.

The Spanish case is slightly different since here the referendum was sought by the young Social-Democratic government that only one year earlier had succeeded the centre-right Partido Popular in office, which thus had in fact been in charge over most of the Spanish negotiations over the Constitutional Treaty. The overwhelming positive outcome of the Spanish referendum (a ‘Si’ of 77%) can in fact be attributed to the success of the two main parties in holding sway over their party supporters. This applies above all to the Social-Democrats who saw a defection rate of no more than 7%. Also the majority of the PP-electorate followed its official party stance, but notably its share fell below that of the overall outcome. Notably, the rate of abstention among the opposition parties campaigning for a ‘Yes’ (PP and CDC) lies significantly above the 2% abstention rate among PSOE-sympathisers. In the No-camp it was particularly the Catalan Extreme left that succeeded in effectively steering its following.

**Table 3** Distribution of votes by party in Spanish Referendum (20/2/2005)

Voters close to	Si %	Non %	Blank	Don't know / No answer
<b>Government Parties</b>				
Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE)	<b>93</b>	4	2	1
<b>Opposition</b>				
Peoples' Party (PP)	<b>72</b>	19	8	1
United Left (IU)	32	<b>61</b>	6	1
Democratic Convergence of Catalunya (CDC/CiU)	<b>62</b>	19	18	1
Republican Left of Catalunya (ERC)	5	<b>87</b>	8	1
Basque Nationalist Party (PNV)	<b>42</b>	57	0	1

Source: FLASH EUROBAROMETER 168 (2005), *European Constitution. Post-Referendum survey in Spain*, European Commission/Gallup Europe, March.

In the case of the French referendum that was won by the No-camp with 55%, it were the anti-establishment parties on the extreme left (PCF) and the extreme right (FN) that were most successful in cueing their followers. Critically, the opposition parties that after internal party referendums decided to endorse the Yes-camp, the Social Democrats and the Greens, failed to sway their voters and indeed rather found the majority of them defecting to the other side. The electorate of the government parties seems to have been less affected by the collusion of the political mainstream as the grand majority of them stayed in the Yes-camp.

**Table 4** Distribution of votes by party in French Referendum (29/5/2005)

Voters close to	Oui%	Non%	Blank	Don't know/ No answer
<b>Government Parties</b>				
Union for the Republic (UMP) / Union for the French Democracy (UDF)	<b>70</b>	24	1	5
<b>Opposition</b>				
Socialist Party (PS)	<b>35</b>	55	2	8
<b>National Front (FN) / MNR</b>	4	<b>81</b>	3	12
<b>French Communist Party (PCF)</b>	6	<b>90</b>	0	4
Verts	<b>33</b>	50	4	13

Source: FLASH EUROBAROMETER 171 (2005), *La Constitution européenne: sondage post-référendum en France*, European Commission/Gallup Europe, Juin.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, in the Dutch case where 62% decided against ratification, we find like in the French case that the anti-establishment parties have been most successful in rallying their voters. The collusion effect is clearly discernable in the case of the leading opposition party that joined the Yes-camp, the Labour Party. However, rather than seeing a majority of their electorate defect like their French equivalent, the Greens find the majority of their following, with the official party-line, on the Yes-side.

**Table 5** Distribution of votes by party in Dutch Referendum (1/6/2005)

Voters close to	Ja %	Nee %
<b>Government Parties</b>	<b>53</b>	47
Christian-Democratic Appeal (CDA)	<b>49</b>	51
People's Party for Freedom and Dem. (VVD)	<b>51</b>	49
Democrats 66		
<b>Opposition</b>		
Labour Party (PvdA)	<b>37</b>	63
<b>Socialist Party (SP)</b>	13	<b>87</b>
Green Left (GL)	<b>54</b>	46

Source: FLASH EUROBAROMETER 172 (2005), *The European Constitution. Post-Referendum survey in The Netherlands*, European Commission/Gallup Europe, June.<sup>3</sup>

In all three countries we find that it are indeed protest parties, combining their ideological opposition to Europe with the practical opposition to the government, that have been most successful in cueing their followers to vote for a No. Government parties have generally succeeded in getting their voters to endorse the Constitutional Treaty. The main problems arise with the centre-left parties that for ideological reasons find themselves siding with the government. These parties find a majority of their

<sup>2</sup> An exit poll by IPSOS (*Referendum 29 Mai 2005: Le Sondage sorti des Urnes*) basically shows the same pattern with the minor addendum that it demonstrates supporters of the governing UMP to have been somewhat more supportive of the Constitution than those of its coalition partner UDF (80% versus 76% for the 'Oui').

<sup>3</sup> An exit-poll by Interview/NSS (1/6/2005, commissioned by the ANP) basically yields the same pattern with the differences that it registers a considerably stronger support for the 'Ja' among the governing CDA and VVD (78% and 61% respectively) and that the smaller parties of the ChristenUnie and the Group Wilders were distinctively successful in swaying their electorate to the 'Nee'-camp (with respectively 93% and 85% of their electorate voting 'Nee').

followers actually moving away from them and siding with the No-camp that is dominated by anti-establishment parties.

As important as they may be, these three cases only allow for a limited number of tentative conclusions. Above all they do not allow us to test the difference that arises from the main opposition party adopting a competitive stance and seeking a No. To do that we would have to have referendum results from the Competitive Models in the UK, Poland and the Czech Republic. Arguing counterfactually, one may reflect on the likely effects if the opposition parties in France and the Netherlands would have consistently adopted a competitive strategy. For one thing, such a strategy certainly would not have prevented factionalism as is also demonstrated by the deep divisions that the internal party referendums revealed in France. It probably would have meant that even a larger share of the opposition vote would have gone to the No-camp. The key question is however whether it would have allowed the centre-right government parties to engage in an uphill struggle. Given the notably low standing of both governments, this would not appear too likely, but especially in the Dutch case there would have been room for the government parties to sway a larger part of their following than they actually succeeded in doing.

## **Conclusion**

Political parties do not control referendum outcomes and there is a whole lot of factors in which parties do not enter that may determine the choice voters make, not least the substance of the decision before them. Still parties may play a role in directing voters by providing cues. On the basis of party data from the 10 countries that have been committed to subject the EU Constitutional Treaty to a referendum and the results in the three countries where a referendum has actually taken place by June 2005, this paper has examined the factors that drive political parties to choose sides in referendum campaigns and the extent to which these choices condition the impact they can have on the eventual outcome.

Theoretical considerations led us to focus in particular on the position taken by opposition parties, as they are likely to be torn between ideological inclinations and strategic considerations. What is more, whichever way the opposition decides to go determines very much the voters' perception of the options on offer. If the opposition sides with the government – what we call the Collusive Model – the mobilisation of the No-side is left to protest parties. If, however, the opposition chooses to oppose the government – the Competitive Model – the central divide in the referendum campaign coincides with that between the main parties.

A first finding is that whereas one may expect certain tensions between ideological and strategic inclinations, in practice the former predominates when parties determine their stance in the referendums on the EU Constitution. Parties that were defined as being part of the pro-European ideological core (Social Democrats, Liberals and Christian Democrats) support the EU Constitutional Treaty regardless of whether they are in or out of government. This hypothesis has been confirmed as we found the Collusive Model obtaining in seven of the ten countries that have been set to have a referendum and where the opposition is dominated by Social Democrats and/or Christian-Democrats and Liberals. Notably, in the three cases where the Competitive Model occurs, the opposition is dominated by parties on the conservative end of the centre-right.

Interestingly, these findings suggest that the centre of gravity for support of the Constitutional Treaty has to be located left of centre. Another way to interpret this finding is that the Constitutional

Treaty is less associated with economic integration, but rather with political integration. Implication of this is that when the opposition is dominated by Social Democrats, the articulation of Euroscepticism is bound to be left in the hands of anti-establishment parties. Going by the Constitutional Treaty, the issue of further European integration is only likely to divide the main political parties when the opposition is dominated by right-conservatives.

The second hypothesis concerned factionalism and suggested that this is particularly likely among opposition parties that side with the Yes-camp. The French Parti Socialiste might figure as a very strong case to support this thesis. However, while factionalisation is indeed to be found among opposition parties, joining the Yes-camp was found to be neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for it. Among the other Social-Democratic opposition parties endorsing a Yes (DK, Lux, NL, IRL) we find little signs of factionalisation. On the other hand, however, the competitive strategy of the centre-right oppositions in Poland and the Czech Republic does cause strains of factionalism. Furthermore, factionalism is particularly visible among Green parties that have converted from opposition to previous European Treaties to support for the Constitutional Treaty.

While opposition parties exposed to contradictory pressures may thus be able to prevent factionalism, the contradictions are much harder to suppress when it comes to the party electorate. This is at least suggested by the evidence from the three referendums held so far on the Constitutional Treaty as well as by previous research (Franklin, Marsh & McLaren, 1994). Here we find centre-left parties to be particularly vulnerable, as their ideological inclination tells them to join the Yes-camp while their followers rather tend to oppose the Yes that is championed by the government. These problems of major opposition parties stand in stark contrast with the success of protest parties to sway their followers to vote No on both ideological and strategic grounds.

Overall, there emerges a marked contrast between the ideological stickiness among the main political parties to endorse further European integration and the contradictory pressures they face when they turn to their electorate. In the face of contradictory pressures and a diverse electorate, the main political parties seem to cling to well-entrenched ideological inclinations for lack of an appropriate strategic response. Indeed, this situation may well undermine parties' credibility in cueing their electorate. Moreover, with the ghost of direct democracy on EU affairs having been allowed out of the box, the credibility of European party systems to articulate public opinion on EU affairs may well come to be structurally challenged – even if there will be considerable variation in the ability of the different party systems to accommodate this challenge.

In the absence of data for the effects of competitive party structures (CZ, Pol, UK), the hypothesis that voters are less likely to follow their party's cues when the main parties collude could not (yet) be tested. Indeed, also other factors may influence the degree in which parties can hold sway over voters' choices in referendums. An obvious one is the general degree of knowledge and to test this it would be particularly interesting to analyse the Danish and the Irish referendums since one can assume voters in these countries to have gained considerably in knowledge through their experience with previous referendum campaigns on the EU (cf. Svensson, 2002). Following this argument one would expect that if indeed there will be further Treaty revisions in the future and if the trend to employ the referendums in the ratification process persists, political parties will eventually play an ever more modest role in influencing the outcomes of these referendums.

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