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## The Treaty of Lisbon: changing perceptions through redenomination

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THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) has been plagued by a democratic deficit (Meyer, 1999) and by the need to justify the European integration (Glen-cross, 2009). These authors, among others, have put the lack and/or the failure of political communication as central to the debate.

The 2004 Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE) initiated a period of great changes in the integration project since it was an important step in formalizing the conceptual entity that is the EU. The unsuccessful task of explaining and (in)forming citizens on the notion of a constitutional treaty is reflected in the increasing fears among several of its member states regarding the ensuing loss of political power, and consequently, even greater loss of national sovereignty.

To meet this challenge it was imperative to create a consensus among its member states by allaying the fears and secondly by establishing a seemingly “neutral” non-partisan leader to popularize this notion. This need was met by José Sócrates as the President of the 2007 Council of the EU, which succeeded the German Presidency.

#### The political communication of the Portuguese Presidency

We will analyse the speeches of the Portuguese Prime Minister on how he articulated the task of *selling* the Reform Treaty. The parameters for the purpose of our research are four speeches given by Sócrates, which are central to the project of promoting the EU Treaty.

Using content analysis we examine the language and the words used to gain support from the resistant member states.

As aptly observed by Seoane, the culture and EU political regime are the main factors of the disengagement of European citizens from EU-level politics. We are convinced, however, that what EU or national leaders say and how they say to *persuasively inform* their audiences is crucial to secure their participation. Language (political communication) seems to be the vehicle to get political support from citizens for a greater European integration.

According to Norris (2000) the impact of political communication in post-industrial societies is not negative in civic commitment, and claim is founded in an interactive bidirectional process or virtuous circle from which she tries to explain the democratic participation through the consumption of media or political campaigns. In her opinion the active participants are activated by the political communication. Accordingly, political message still matters since it is difficult to attract people who are not active citizens.

EU’s leaders nonetheless ignore not only the need for clarity and simplicity necessary to communi-

cate its message to its citizens, but also the need to explain integration (Morgan, 2005; Hoeksma, 2009). This is a relevant issue because, as Hoeksma *et al* (2011: 25) observed: “a special effort has to be made in order to communicate in plain and simple terms what the EU is, what the purposes of the Union are and why the commitment of citizens is crucial for the new polity to prosper”.

“  
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Words, in particular, if persuasively used can succeed in its rhetorical effect, as a useful way of convincing people to accept and embrace the arguments. While persuasion is not an exclusive use of political communication, it has a strong persuasive dimension in this field due to its main goal, which is *manufacturing consent*. In politics the word or language, *in latu sensu*, is its essence, an instrument of power (Roderick, 2000: 30).

Although the distance between EU and the national leaders with its citizens is only partially explained by poor communication, it is equally important to focus on how they deploy words in their discourse on the construction of the EU.

The EU political leaders through their speeches further exacerbated poor communication by using obfuscating language. Whether this was intentional or not remains to be seen, but their verbosity was a definite departure from the language that informed the process of the Lisbon Treaty (LT). The success of Treaty reform process was contingent on a change in citizen’s perceptions regarding EU construction, so as to get them on board for reforming the Treaty. The LT, a final solution to the simplification of the existing Treaties, seemed to be a move to satisfy the political interests of the national leaders. It seems to be neither a genuine attempt to meet the peoples concerns nor an attempt to uphold the ideal of EU.

The biggest achievement of the LT was to end the period of constitutional uncertainty in the EU.

#### Abandoning the Constitutional concept

The TCE consisted of a single text but it was dropped and replaced by the Reform Treaty. Accordingly, the reform of the TCE was actually a way of abandoning the constitutional concept. There are two significant elements of the LT that contributed to the changing perceptions of the constitutional nature of the EU.

The first is the maintenance of an EU *normal*, classic treaty model (constituted by two or more texts) which blocked people from connecting the Treaties to their own Constitution.

The EU juridical framework still continues to be based on some revised treaties (not a single text). It was renamed as LT which encompasses two Treaties: Maastricht (TEU – Treaty on European Union), February 27, 1992 and Rome (TEC, now TFEU – Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union), March 25, 1957.

The second element is the name of the European Constitution. To accomplish this, EU leaders and political leaders at the national level adopted the simple device of renaming or redenominating the text. Eliminating some words that would remind people of a Constitution, they chose a different name for the treaty.

Not surprisingly, Moreira has described the LT process as a semantic patch of the Constitution project (2010). Therefore, continuing the tradition of giving a name of a European city to the EU treaties reinforces the idea of a non-European Constitution, and doing so EU leaders managed to get around national referendum for its ratification.

However, the bulk of the work of the TCE remains the same in the 2007 IGC mandate, and that means that the Reform Treaty keeps the material nature of a constitution in some of its main reforms (Piçarra, 2011).

In order to demonstrate that the “signals” expressed by the European citizens were heard, the main architects of the EU Treaty disguised it under the cloak of a “new” Treaty.

The aspects of *form* were an important matter in the whole process of abandoning the constitutional concept. One of these aspects was the process of redenomination, which aimed to modify not only perceptions but also audience attitude and behaviour toward the TCE.

However, this is a more complex process since the redenomination is a product of new experience of the communicator. According to Campbell *et al.* (1997: 11): “The words used to label acts, persons, objects, events, qualities, and relationships indicate an attitudinal bias in an individual’s perception of the word, based on that person’s experiences”.

Looking closely at the importance of the relationship between the user (communicator) and audience in the creation of a desired effect of the redenomination in audience, these authors specify: “In addition, the words that a person uses influence the attitudinal biases of others because the situations in which the words are used become new or additional experiences for both the user and the audience”.

**SPEECHES GIVEN BY JOSÉ SÓCRATES,  
WHICH ARE CENTRAL TO THE PROJECT  
OF PROMOTING THE EU TREATY:**

- a) The two speeches that presented the presidency programme in Portuguese and European Parliament (EP).
- b) The speech after the successful negotiations in the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) in the EP.
- c) The speech at the signing ceremony in Lisbon.

Therefore, the speaker has to adjust himself to new circumstances by using other words to name the same reality.

The changing of the name was, in fact, the most visible modification: the treaty came out as Reform Treaty.

Apart from replacing the name of the treaty, EU leaders eliminated some terminology as well. The term *Constitution*, which was not so common at the supranational level until that moment, is banished; also terms like *law* and *framework-law*, and any reference to the European flag, hymn or motto are abandoned; the word *Community* is replaced by *Union*, and the term *High Representative* was used instead of *Minister*. The Article regarding the principle of supremacy of the EU law over the national laws was withdrawn and replaced by a Declaration.

But the change of the Treaty denomination, especially the elimination of the word *Constitution* in its title was meant to give the perception that European leaders were talking about a brand new Treaty.

Equally used as a device for this purpose was the replacement of the word *peoples* by *citizens*, a discrete change that went unnoticed, and was completely ignored in Sócrates' address on the issues agreed on the Reform Treaty. The word *people(s)* leads listeners or readers to think of a supranation, while *citizens* refers to the idea of a country.

The communication line of the reform treaty process seems mainly to focus on the superficial changes rather than any substantive changes. The aspects of form are simple in contrast with the substantive aspects which are understood only by few (ex., European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), the veto power of the National Parliaments to decisions taken in the scope of EU and the deferred vote by qualified majority in the European Council until 2014, not mentioning the transitory period for its complete enactment in 2017).

Five days after the agreement on the final text of the Reform Treaty, Sócrates presented the results of the IGC to the European Parliament (EP). He tailored his speech to suit the audience, naturally, in EP Sócrates was more descriptive and raised a couple of complex issues. On the other hand, his address at the national parliament and in the signing Ceremony of the LT in Lisbon on 13 December 2007 those types of issues were not mentioned or were touched upon superficially in passing. The audience of this public ceremony had different characteristics than that of the EP.

First and foremost it was a live television transmission event to Member States.

The communication strategy regarding Sócrates' audience varies on whether it was EP members or the public. Accordingly, Sócrates kept detailed issues of the reform of the Treaty to a more interested and willing EP audience on this subject. Additionally, the repetitive use of certain words when speaking to both the EP members and the public was his main strategy of promoting the reforming Treaty.

The *corpora* analysed shows a high frequency use of the word *fast*, and in some paragraphs the idea of *being fast*, associated with the Reform Treaty/Lisbon Treaty.

The repetition of the term *fast* was important to create in the audience the perception that the EU leaders were willing to act quickly to an end to the institutional setback. The second word repeatedly used in Sócrates' speeches is *new* which means rupture with the past and the name changing are two important ways of inducing change and presenting a different reality.

The word *challenge* is indubitably to which is associated the idea of change: there is not any kind of challenge if nothing has to be changed. Another word is *future* which is the EU word of this decade. It was introduced in a systematic way in Laeken European Council in Brussels in December 2001.

Finally, the reference to EU's values, which subsumes objectives and mission, constitute an integral element of the European rhetoric and inseparable aspect of the EU leaders' speeches.

#### Final remark

The failure of communication is mostly rooted in the political weakness of the communicator, Sócrates, in spite of his strong communicative skills.

It leads us to believe that the Portuguese Prime Minister, a loyal and willing partner in this project, assumed a mediator role instead of an active political stand. He was willing to wholeheartedly support and participate in the promotion of the Reform Treaty since there was no discord regarding the objective of EU project.

To appease some member states it was necessary to reformulate the Treaty by removing the objectionable aspects. It was however interesting to find how the LT began substituting the language to neutralize the objections without affecting real change.

Words that met the goal of camouflaging the concept of constitution were used which additionally did not contribute in clarifying constitutional process. ■

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