

# The argumentative style of the opening speech of a debate in the European Parliament

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In this contribution a characterization is given of the argumentative style utilised in an opening speech of a plenary debate in the European Parliament. This debate is initiated through an opening speech in which the rapporteur of a parliamentary committee presents the European Commission's proposal, as well as the amendments and the arguments to support them. As it is the rapporteur's aim to gain broad parliamentary agreement with the proposal, the opening speech is vital to the debate, because all contributions of the MEPs relate directly to the argumentation put forward by the rapporteur. Based on the analytic overview the strategic design and the three dimensions of argumentative style the argumentative style that is used by the rapporteur is characterized.

**Keywords:** argumentative style, European parliament, parliamentary debate

## 1. Introduction

The European Parliament has become an important factor in the legislative process of the European Union. Together with the Council, the Parliament can approve, amend or reject proposals for legislation put forward by the European Commission. In the legislative process the parliamentary debates have a fixed place: Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) always vote on Commission proposals the day after these proposals have been discussed in plenary sessions. According to Corbett et al. (2016), the European Parliament cannot be called “sexy in media terms” (p.11). With this characterization they refer to the fact that debates in the European Parliament are not as lively and exiting as debates in the national parliaments can be.

In this paper, I aim to describe the argumentative style of the European Parliament, in particular the argumentative style of the opening speech of the “rappor-

teur”, which plays a central role in debates of the European Parliament. Based on my observations about its institutional background, an analytic overview and an account of the strategic considerations, I will provide an analysis of the argumentative style in this opening speech. I will rely on the three dimensions of argumentative styles as described by van Eemeren: “the selection of standpoints, starting points, arguments or other argumentative moves (topical choice dimension), the adjustment of argumentative moves to the frame of reference and preferences of the listeners or readers (audience demand dimension), and the choice of verbal or non-verbal means for advancing argumentative moves (presentational dimension)” (2021, p.10–11). I will first describe the institutional background of debate in the European Parliament. Next, I will provide a short analytic overview of the argumentation in the opening speech.<sup>1</sup> Then, I will go into the strategic considerations and, finally, I will characterize the argumentative style by taking into account the three dimensions of argumentative style.

## 2. Legislative debates in the European parliament

Obvious differences between debates in the European Parliament and debates in national parliaments are the plurality of languages used in the European Parliament, the sheer number of MEPs, and the existence of rather heterogeneous political groups instead of the political parties with well-defined political outlines in national parliaments. However, probably the biggest difference is the way in which the European Parliament works. When a bill is made public, in a national parliament the outcome of the procedure is usually clear. This is not the case in the European Parliament, where “a draft directive is really a draft” (Corbett et al. 2016: 11). MEPs are much more engaged in shaping and amending legislation than their colleagues in national parliaments. They need to discuss proposals in committees and debates and they frequently amend and rewrite proposals.

Most contributions of the MEPs to debates are prepared in advance and written out. They are simultaneously translated in all languages that are spoken by the MEPs. Only by following special procedures can MEPs directly react to someone else’s contribution to the debate. Overall, the reactions are friendly and composed. These circumstances however do not make the debates in Parliament very lively.

The shortest route to European legislation is as follows: Parliament decides on a Commission proposal and comes with a first reading “opinion” (approving

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1. This analysis does not include the argumentative patterns and the dialectical routes. For a full-fledged analysis of the argumentative style these two elements also need to be taken into account.

the proposal or approving the proposal with amendments). If the Council agrees with this opinion, the legislative proposal is adopted. In case the Council does not approve of the outcome of the European Parliament's first reading, it adopts a new opinion called a "common position". In the second reading, Parliament may approve of this common position, adopt amendments or reject the common position by an absolute majority of MEPs (Corbett et al. 2016: 276).

The MEPs are organised in political groups. According to Parliamentary Rule, 32 members "may form themselves into groups according to their political affinities". Political groups are important for building majorities on legislation, the budget and other votes. Groups also play an important role in choosing the President, committee chairs and committee rapporteurs.

Groups issue voting instructions to their members on how to vote on each amendment and text. The group's position is defined by a process of discussion and negotiations. It is usually accepted by most members, but not necessarily by all (Corbett et al. 2016: 141).

When it comes to groups, ideological divisions are in many cases not important: looking for a right or left wing majority in the European Parliament is therefore not always relevant. Often, widespread agreement with a proposal is sought rather than just a narrow majority. The rapporteur system is oriented at finding such a wide consensus. According to Corbett et al., "Voting patterns are sometimes more related to national, regional and sectoral interests than to ideological divisions. [...] Coalitions, for example of those representing agricultural areas are often forged across Group boundaries" (2016: 143).

Committees are responsible for the preparatory work for plenary parliamentary sittings. Much of the work in the European Parliament is carried out in committee: a lot of discussion has taken place in committee before a proposal is actually discussed in the plenary debate. The committees draw up, adopt and amend legislative proposals as well as own-initiative reports, consider Commission and Council proposals and, where necessary, prepare reports to be presented to the plenary assembly (Garssen 2017a).

The committees produce draft legislation or other texts proposed by the Commission or the Council. Own initiative reports stemming from the European Parliament might examine an entirely new issue or a Commission communication on which Parliament has not been formally consulted. Once a committee has decided to draw up a report or opinion, it nominates a *rapporteur*. In case the committee decides to approve of a legislative proposal without amendment, no rapporteur is appointed.

It is the rapporteur's task to introduce the initial discussion of the proposal within the committee, to present a draft text with amendments, to draft legislation for the committee to vote on. A rapporteur is responsible for analysing the pro-

posal and discussing it with the members of the committee. The rapporteur handles the discussions in the responsible committee of the European Parliament as well as in plenary sessions.

After the discussions in the committee, the rapporteur makes recommendations to the committee on what position to take. The committee can amend the position, and will vote on it and all amendments made to it. In general, the rapporteur will first create a working document that serves as a basis for the discussion in committee and for a dialogue with experts. The next step is the plenary debate in Parliament. For that purpose, the rapporteur presents the report to Parliament by giving an opening speech reporting the most important points of the report.

For two reasons the opening speech is of vital importance to the debate. First, the report is the outcome of essential deliberations by the committee. This outcome the rapporteur presents to the MEPs in the opening speech of the plenary debate. Second, the opening speech determines the remainder of the debate (Garssen 2017a). In the opening speech the rapporteur not only presents the (amended) proposals, but also advances the main arguments in favour of these proposals. This is because the committee is aiming for a broad acceptance of the proposal in Parliament. Hence the opening speech is far from neutral. In their reactions to the opening speech, the proponents of the proposal will support or amplify the arguments put forward by the rapporteur. In most cases they emphasise the problems mentioned by the rapporteur that led to the new proposal. The opponents, on the other hand, generally acknowledge the problems, but try to show that other solutions are much better (Garssen 2017a: 41).

Legislative debates in the European Parliaments consist basically of a series of reactions to the report presented by the rapporteur. There is a fixed speaking order and not much room for deviations by interruption (Garssen 2017a: 33).

Within the activity type of a legislative debate in the European Parliament (van Eemeren & Garssen 2010: 31), the opening speech by the rapporteur can be seen as an embedded activity type. In the opening speech the rapporteur presents the report drawn up by the committee. It is important to understand that this presentation does not only consist of a presentation of the main proposals. Typically, the rapporteur puts also forward argumentation to defend the proposals that can be found in the report.

### 3. The opening speech of the debate about the European food supply chain

On Monday, September 6, 2010, in the European Parliament in Strasbourg a debate on fair revenues for farmers took place that was initiated by a report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development entitled 'A better functioning food supply chain in Europe'. The report was presented to the Parliament by the rapporteur José Bové, a prominent member of the European Green Party (EGP). In this report, some important reforms of the European agricultural policy are proposed. In the debate, several proposals were discussed before voting took place the next day.

In 2009 the Commission released a publication about problems existing in the European agricultural sector. The committee that prepared the report was inspired by this publication, but, unlike what is usually the case, the report is not written in response to an initiative of the Commission. The report is actually one of the few *own initiative proposals* of the European Parliament. Voting, which took place on September 7, 2010, led to the adoption of the resolution, so the committee's proposal was accepted.

The background of the debate is a crisis in the European food supply: European farmers are underpaid for the products they produce while consumer prices are exceptionally high. The cause of this unwanted situation is the fact that in the process from farm to shop many steps are not visible and that the food industry has an undesirable amount of power. As happens in all such debates in the European Parliament, the rapporteur of the committee concerned starts with an opening speech in which the report of the committee is presented.

#### Opening Speech by the Rapporteur

Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to begin by thanking all my colleagues from the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, and especially the shadow rapporteurs, for their support in this task.

This report, like the one by Mr Lyon, is part of our major debate on the reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP).<sup>2</sup> We have managed to reach a large number of compromises, which have been adopted by a large majority in our group – by 32 votes to 4. I believe that our message to the Commission is a powerful one: we all want greater transparency in the food chain and legislation that guarantees fair competition between farmers and all operators in the food chain. We also want concrete measures, in Europe and elsewhere, to combat speculation and abuses of market power and to safeguard farmers' revenues.

I am surprised that, on the initiative of one or two political groups in this House, we are being asked to vote tomorrow on a long list of separate votes, which go against the powerful and consensual message that we adopted by a large majority in committee.

15 Could it be that events over the summer have made you change your minds? I rather think that the intense lobbying carried out in recent days by the large-scale distribution sector and certain operators in the agri-food industry is the reason for the excessive number of separate votes. In any case, I cannot imagine, ladies and gentlemen, that you would give in to such pressure in order to weaken our common message.

20 Our committee has taken stock of the crisis affecting European farmers. It intends to propose concrete, strong measures: in less than 10 years, the Union has lost 3.5 million farming jobs. It is a massacre on a terrible scale. Bulgaria, for example, has lost one in two farmers. In 2009, revenues plummeted. In France and Germany, farmers have lost 20% of their revenue on average, and in Hungary, they have lost more than 35%. Farming and rural  
25 communities are in danger of disappearing.

Forced as it was by the exasperation of farmers and by the demonstrations of dairy cattle breeders, in December 2009, the European Commission published a communication entitled, 'A better functioning food supply chain in Europe'. The latter shows that, between 1995 and 2005, the proportion of the added value of the food chain that went to agricultural  
30 producers decreased from 31% to 24%. The prices paid to farmers are falling in virtually every sector, without European consumers benefiting as a result.

The Commission says that these problems are linked to increased concentration in the wholesale, processing and distribution sectors, which impose their will on unorganised producers.

35 The Commission is concerned about the lack of transparency in relation to pricing and margins. It recognises the difficulty in obtaining precise and reliable data, and admits that it does not have the information it needs to adapt its policies quickly and effectively.

To remedy this, I propose that the Commission creates a European farm prices and margins observatory, on the model of that which exists in the United States. This body will be  
40 responsible for defining European farmers' production costs. It will tell us the real costs of a litre of milk, a kilo of wheat or a kilo of beef from the moment it leaves the farm. This information will serve as a basis for negotiations between farmers and the other operators in the food chain. This body will also be responsible for assessing which sectors claim all the added value, to the detriment of producers and consumers.

45 The European Commission would thus be able to identify which operators are abusing the balance of power and abusing their dominant position. It also seems crucial to make the 20 largest European companies draft an annual report on their market share and the internal margins they generate.

Transparency poses no threat to the market economy. On the contrary, it is an absolute  
50 necessity in order to prevent the abuses that have been observed in agriculture and in many other sectors, in particular, that of finance.

Who can claim that, when farmers sell their milk or their meat, they are on an

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2. Bové here refers to a more general debate, which took place on 7 July 2010, about the future of the common agricultural policy. George Lyon was the rapporteur for the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development.

equal footing with multinationals, which influence commodity price building on the global markets?

The balance of power is completely unbalanced, and some would say unfair.

- 55 In order to restore the balance, a first emergency measure would be to allow farmers to come together within producers' organisations. The second, additional measure involves prohibiting selling of goods below purchase price at Community level.

Forced discounts, subsequent alterations to contract terms, and unjustified listing fees are a common occurrence. They are hitting farmers and the thousands of small and medium-sized processing companies hard, because they have to go through the large-scale distribution sector in order to sell their products. The European Commission must take stock of the extent of these anti-economic practices, and it must take the measures required to stop them.

Lastly, speculation on agricultural commodities is a scourge. Financiers and speculators are looking for instant rewards and instant profits. For them, poverty, hunger, and famine are synonymous with profits. We did not think that we would relive the 2008 riots, but we could not have been more mistaken. Since June, the price of wheat has risen by more than 70%. The prices of maize, soya and rice are also on the increase. Last week, seven people were killed in Maputo, Mozambique, for demonstrating against the 30% increase in food prices.

- 70 Are we going to continue to stand by and do nothing, as we did two years ago? Are we going to continue to put up with investment banks bankrupting European farmers and crushing the men and women of our planet?

I call on the European Union to take the initiative to create a global agency to regulate the markets.

- 75 Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I invite you to send out a strong message so that the new CAP is fairer for European farmers and consumers and so that there is fair competition between operators which allows for the creation of a framework for regulating the markets and which gives short shrift to speculators. It is the responsibility of the European Parliament, as it prepares to exercise its joint decision-making power in agricultural matters, not to submit to any pressure, from wherever it may come. Our message must remain clear and consistent.

In his opening speech, the rapporteur presents the background of the report and its most important points: a series of proposals to make the food chain a fairer process. The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development found that the various proposals made in the report could be sure of a very large agreement; 32 committee members were in favour of the proposals, while only 4 were against. In spite of this big majority, certain MEPs asked to vote on a long list of separate issues. Because of the overwhelming majority of proponents of the proposals, Bové expresses first his annoyance about this plea for a vote. In the remainder of his opening speech, he explains the existing problems and presents the proposals made by the committee.

## 4. Analysis of the argumentative discourse in the opening speech

### 4.1 The analytically relevant moves

The opening speech by the rapporteur is clearly argumentative. It not only contains the proposals made by the committee, but also provides argumentation in defence of these proposals. In this sub-section an analytic overview of the opening speech is presented.

#### a. *The difference of opinion*

In his opening speech, the rapporteur puts forward four separate standpoints connected through a common theme: the bad position of farmers, not only in Europe but also elsewhere. The first standpoint is about a proposal that aims at making the European food chain more transparent. The remainder of the proposals involve concrete short term measures to improve the position of farmers.

Because four different issues are raised, the difference of opinion is multiple. In the plenary sessions in the European Parliament in which a Commission proposal is discussed, there are usually MEPs in favour of the proposal(s) presented by the rapporteur and also MEPs who are against them. This is also the case in our example. The difference of opinion under discussion here is therefore mixed. This goes for all four standpoints at issue.

When identifying the parties in this mixed-multiple difference of opinion, also the rapporteur also needs to be included. The rapporteur is not only responsible for presenting the committee's position, in his opening speech he also argues for this position. This means that the rapporteur can be seen as the main proponent of the proposals that are discussed in Parliament. If we regard the opening speech of the rapporteur in our analysis as the point of departure of the discussion, there is a multiple mixed difference of opinion between the rapporteur together with the MEPs who are in favour of the proposal and the MEPs who are against it.

The standpoints can be found in lines 7–11, when the rapporteur announces the positions of the committee without going into details about the actual proposals. Referring to standpoint 1, the rapporteur states that we need a more transparent food plan that guarantees fair competition. He refers to standpoints 2–4 when he mentions the “concrete measures [...] to combat speculation and abuses of market power and to safeguard farmers' revenues”. Later the standpoints are presented in a more specific way: the concrete proposals are made in lines 38–39 (standpoint 1), 55–57 (standpoints 2 and 3), and 73–74 (standpoint 4).



### b. *The point of departure*

The first part of the opening stage runs from line 1 to line 6. In this part the rapporteur provides some background information regarding the report that will be discussed that day. The opening stage continues in lines 12–19. In that part, the rapporteur raises a point of order by criticizing the fact that some political groups have asked to vote “on a long list of separate votes”. This request will make the decision procedure much less efficient.

### c. *The argumentation structure*

The arguments can be found in lines 20–37, 39–54, and 58–72. The argumentation structure for standpoint 1, which is analysed below, is rather complex. In order to keep it clear, in this paper, I only reconstruct the argumentation structure on the main level.

#### *Argumentation structure standpoint 1, main level*

1. The Commission should create a European farm prices and margins observatory on the model of that which exists in the United States
  - 1.1a Creating such an observatory leads to more transparency regarding pricing and margins
  - 1.1b More transparency is badly needed
    - (1.1a–1.1b') (If more transparency is badly needed and creating an observatory leads to more transparency, the Commission should create a farm prices and margins observatory)
    - (1.1a–1.1b').1 Transparency poses no threat to the market economy observed in agriculture and in many other sectors, in particular, that of finance

#### *Argumentation structure standpoint 2*

2. Farmers should be allowed to come together within producers' organisations
  - 2.1a The balance of power is completely unbalanced, and some would say unfair
  - (2.1b) (Allowing farmers to come together within producers' organisations will help restore the balance of power)
    - 2.1a.1 When farmers sell their milk or their meat, they are not on an equal footing with multinationals, which influence commodity price building on the global markets

#### *Argumentation structure standpoint 3*

3. Selling goods below purchase price at Community level should be prohibited

3.1a Anti-economic practices such as forced discounts, subsequent alterations to contract terms, and unjustified listing of fees are a common occurrence and are hitting farmers and the thousands of small and medium-sized processing companies hard

(3.1b) (This prohibition will stop anti-economic practices)

3.1a.1 They have to go through the large-scale distribution sector in order to sell their products

#### *Argumentation structure standpoint 4*

4. The European Union has to take the initiative to create a global agency to regulate the markets

4.1a Speculation on agricultural commodities is a scourge

(4.1b) (A global agency can control speculation on agricultural commodities)

4.1a.1a Financiers and speculators are looking for instant rewards and instant profits

#### **d.** *The outcome*

The concluding stage can be found in lines 75–81 where the rapporteur ends his opening speech as follows: “Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I invite you to send out a strong message so that the new CAP is fairer for European farmers and consumers and so that there is fair competition between operators which allows for the creation of a framework for regulating the markets and which gives short shrift to speculators.” The rapporteur presents his conclusion and urges the audience not to give in to external pressure.

#### **4.2** The strategic considerations

In each of the four prescriptive standpoints a specific proposal is made for the regulation of the European agricultural sector. For the defence of the standpoints the rapporteur uses in each case the same strategy. First, he makes sure that the audience is convinced that the current situation is problematic. Next, he proposes the measures aimed at solving the problems. The argumentation for these standpoints consists in each case of complex problem-solving argumentation on the main level of the rapporteur’s defence and sometimes also on the sub-level.

Problem-solving argumentation offers a clear rationale for accepting the proposal. More importantly, it is the means of defence that is to be expected in the context of a legislative discussion in the European Parliament. MEPs (like their colleagues in national parliaments) are not likely to accept a new regulation if it is not clear why this regulation would be necessary. By going into the existing problems, the rapporteur aims to show that immediate action is necessary.

In his use of problem-solving argumentation the rapporteur chooses to concentrate on the problems while leaving the efficacy of the proposals largely implicit. Furthermore, he chooses not to talk about possible alternative proposals and hardly goes into unwanted side-effects. In other words, the rapporteur does not anticipate any other critical questions pertaining to problem-solving argumentation than those about the problem(s). The intended effectiveness of the argumentation relies for the most part on the fact that the audience fully understands the seriousness of the situation in which the European agricultural sector finds itself.

The audience needs to see that immediate action is necessary. From the realisation that this is the case, they should deduce that the proposed measure is the logical solution; no alternatives are to be considered, because they are not regarded worth mentioning. After understanding the necessity of the interventions, further debate about these interventions should not be necessary.

In arguing for the fact that problems exist, the rapporteur defends the 'existential presupposition' going with an adequate use of this type of argumentation that the problematic situation exists throughout Europe. At the same time, he defends the 'normative presupposition' that this situation is to a large extent unwanted by pointing at the consequences of leaving the current situation unchanged.

In presenting the problems, the following two strategic considerations are important.

First, it is reasonable and effective to expect that the audience will be prepared to accept the proposals that are defended if it is clear to them that the problems to dealt with are relevant to European policy making. This means that the problems should be such that, in principle, they can and should be solved by intervention of the European Union. The problems should also be European in a different sense: each of them needs to be a structural problem throughout Europe. If they exist only in one nation state, it is unlikely that the MEPs will agree with introducing European regulation to tackle this national problem.

A second strategic consideration has to do with the fact that for reaching a majority of votes, the rapporteur cannot just rely on the left or the right side of the parties in Parliament. He will need a broad adherence from his audience and this means that he will aim to convince voters from the big parties in the centre (Christian democrats, social democrats and, less important, liberals). The second strategic consideration therefore is that the rapporteur's intervention will be reasonable and effective if the problems he mentions are such that they appeal both to the moderate left and the moderate right.

An assumedly shared material starting point in implementing these strategic considerations in the discourse is the normative presumption that the situation

described by the rapporteur and the committee is indeed very undesirable and unwanted. This assumption plays an important role in the rapporteur's defence of his explicit statement that there is a crisis. The commonality of the normative material starting point that the European agricultural sector is valuable and should not disappear is taken for granted. The rapporteur and the committee believe that the audience will be in favour of a strong European agricultural sector.

## 5. The argumentative style of the rapporteur's opening speech

### 5.1 Characteristics of the confrontational argumentative style

In what follows, I will characterize the argumentative style utilised by the rapporteur in his opening speech. In doing so, I will take into account the three dimensions of argumentative style: topical selection, adaption to audience demand, and exploitation of presentational devices. I start with the confrontation stage of the argumentative process.

#### *Topical selection*

In the rapporteur's opening speech the standpoints are announced at the very beginning of the rapporteur's opening speech and much later (retrospectively) presented in a concrete form. The initial situation starts at the beginning of the speech.<sup>3</sup> In line 7 the rapporteur states: "I believe that our message to the Commission is a powerful one: we all want greater transparency in the food chain and legislation that guarantees fair competition between farmers and all operators in the food chain. We also want concrete measures, in Europe and elsewhere, to combat speculation and abuses of market power and to safeguard farmers' revenues". In this announcement, the actual measures are not yet mentioned. Starting in line 38, the rapporteur presents the concrete proposals.

The selection of these proposals ensues for the most part from what is decided in the committee. This is what is discussed among the members of the committee and this is what they agreed on. In this announcement of the positions taken by the committee, the rapporteur makes a division between the long-term proposal and the concrete measures that need to be implemented as soon as possible. In choosing from the topical selection in this way, the rapporteur covers most possibilities: there will not only be a plan that tackles the structural problems in the

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3. Strictly speaking, the actual standpoints are not really presented here, but merely announced in expressing the intention of solving the problems involved.

sector but also a direct cure for the most pressing problems the farmers in Europe are facing.

Another interesting topical choice can be found in standpoint 3): the observatory that will be installed is modelled on “what exists in the United States”. This addition enables Bové to show that this kind of institution is elsewhere already in place, without having to present comparison argumentation (the addition is part of the standpoint). Advancing comparison argumentation would come with the extra burden of showing that it actually works in the US and that the US are comparable with Europe (*quod non* in many ways). Mentioning the US may anticipate the criticism that this kind of political interference will lead to plan economy of the Soviet type. As we have seen, such criticism was to be expected and is indeed more than once raised by opponents in the debate that followed.

### *Audience demand*

In selecting the four standpoints, the rapporteur adapts at the same time to audience demand. By making this division, he caters not only to members of the audience who prefer concrete plans and do not believe in a long-term plan that will involve a lot of bureaucracy, but also to members who believe in structural measures. Also, the Members of Parliament who agree to the long-term plan but are afraid that this will not help the farmers in the short run are satisfied by this series of standpoints. Standpoint 4, the call on the EU to take the initiative to create a global agency to regulate the markets, is the weakest and the vaguest of all proposals that are made. No attempts are made to make clear what kind of agency it will be; only the intention to do something on a global scale is expressed. This standpoint seems to be put forward in anticipation of criticism by MEPs who want to put the problem in a global perspective. It involves a very general intention to look at possibilities for a wider (global) view on agricultural problems.

### *Exploitation of presentational devices*

When it comes to the presentational dimension the specific placement of the standpoints in the text is interesting. The announcement of the standpoint takes place at the beginning of the speech (in lines 7–11), but this part of the initial situation does not contain the specific proposals. First, the audience needs to be convinced of the problems and their urgency. Only then, are these people ready to accept the actual measures that are proposed. What is systematically foregrounded is the fact that there are serious problems that need to be tackled, not what measures need to be taken to solve these problems.

By means of the announcement, the rapporteur deliberately tries to create a specific impression: overall, we need greater transparency, together with concrete

measures. That the plan and the measures are well-considered is underlined by the rapporteur's characterization of the committee's powerful position.

In the formulations of the standpoints, the use of personal pronouns is interesting. When expressing the standpoints, the rapporteur uses the possessive adjective "our" and the personal pronoun "we" (lines 7–8), but leaves it in the middle whether he refers to the members of his committee or to the MEPs. It seems clear that he cannot refer to the MEPs, but he does not explicitly refer to the committee either. By acting in this way, he may suggest that the MEPs are already in agreement with the proposals.

The concrete standpoints are presented in such a way that they not only seem to be urgent, but also the most obvious and best (if not the only) solution to the problems: *To remedy this* (line 38); *A first emergency measure would be* (line 55); *The second, additional measure involves* (line 56).

To sum up, in the initial situation the rapporteur presents his standpoints as necessary, urgent and efficient measures that are acceptable to all who realise that the problems in the agricultural sector need to be solved. The standpoints are selected and presented in a rather business-like way: they are the outcome of deliberations of the committee and the audience does not really have a say in the selection of the issues.

## 5.2 Characteristics of the opening argumentative style

When describing the opening argumentative style, three separate aspects of the opening speech are relevant. First, the short description of the background of the debate (lines 4–6). Second, the material starting points put forward in the speech that are used in defence of the standpoints. Third, the opening remarks made in the parts where the rapporteur talks about the unwanted behaviour of MEPs who tried to initiate a plan to vote "on a long list of separate votes" (his point of order is raised in lines 12 to 19).

### *Topical selection*

The topical selection made in the introduction to the report (line 4) is aimed at stressing the fact that the report is "part of a major debate on the reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP)". The rapporteur thus makes clear that the report is not an ad hoc document of the European Parliament, but part of larger discussion. In this way, he anticipates the audience's criticism that this is just an accidental discussion initiated by the European Parliament. Next, he stresses the fact that the committee "managed to reach a large number of compromises, which have been adopted by a large majority in our group – by 32 votes to 4". In doing

so, he prepares the audience for the fact that what is to be presented is acceptable as it is.

Looking at the material starting points that are used in the defence of the standpoints, we can make a distinction between descriptive material starting points and normative material starting points. When it comes to the selection of the material starting points, the rapporteur has a strong preference for the use of statistics and figures that have a scientific and official flavour. The crisis in Europe is described by using concrete and precise numbers (line 20–25): the Union lost 3.5 million farming jobs; Bulgaria has lost one in two farmers; in France and Germany farmers have lost 20% of their revenue on average; in Hungary they have lost more than 35%. Next, information is presented that originates from the Commission's communication 'A better functioning food supply in Europe' (lines 24–30).

### *Audience demand*

The numbers and statistics provided will be taken as official and non-controversial. The starting points consist of facts that are directly verifiable and most likely acceptable to the MEPs, and norms that are equally acceptable. The descriptive material starting points are presented in figures and percentages, which gives them an air of precision and factuality. The normative starting points remain largely implicit. However, given the way the arguments for the problem statement are presented, the rapporteur expects that the audience will immediately agree with the basic values underlying the argumentation for the problem statement: the agricultural sector is an important part of the EU and both European farmers and consumers need to be protected.

In the paragraphs covered by lines 12–19, the rapporteur makes a point of order. One or two political groups have taken the initiative to vote on a long list of separate votes;<sup>4</sup> the rapporteur speaks against this in a rather reproachful way. To his mind, voting on separate issues would weaken the proposal as a whole. Again, the rapporteur refers to the consensual message that was adopted by "a large majority in committee". He then expresses the suspicion that the members who want separate votes were influenced by the food lobby. In doing so, he relies on the idea that the MEPs are expected to come to an independent judgment and not to give in to external pressure.

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4. Judging from the reactions of MEPs in the actual debate, we may take it that this initiative came from the PPE (Christian Democrats) and members of ALDE (Liberals).

### *Exploitation of presentational devices*

When looking at the presentational dimension, it is striking that the rapporteur says ironically and rather paternalistically that he cannot imagine that MEPs “would give in to such pressure in order to weaken our common message”. The use of the possessive pronoun “our” may refer to the members of the committee, but it could also be that the rapporteur is referring to Parliament as a whole. His general message is that most MEPs will be in agreement with this report and its proposals, and only a few dissidents, who have been maliciously influenced by lobbyists, are sabotaging this urgent plan. The procedural starting points are about the attempts certain members undertook to have a vote on separate issues. The rapporteur condemns these attempts and calls for a manner of proceeding that is to be expected from Parliament: getting to a decision about the carefully prepared report without any external influence. In other words, he makes a call for objective, responsible, and independent decision making. In this call he presents the events in such a way that the proposal to vote about separate issues not only goes against the outcome of the committee votes, but also against procedural rules. The rapporteur sighs almost farther-like that he cannot believe that MEPs would give in to external pressure. This is one of the few personal parts of his opening speech. The rapporteur seems to be rather passionate about the independence of the European Parliament.

## 5.3 Characteristics of the argumentational argumentative style

### *Topical selection*

The rapporteur’s topical selection in arguing for the four standpoints that are advanced is rather similar in all four cases. In defence of all of them he relies on complex problem-solving argumentation. In each case he addresses a serious problem in the food-chain and makes the claim that the proposed action will solve the problem. The topical selection that comes about in the subordinative argumentation is determined by a strong focus on the problems and to much lesser extent on the effectiveness of the proposals.

The largest part of the opening speech is devoted to the problem statement. Much of the argumentation put forward is aimed at showing that there are problems, that these problems are serious and that they pertain to the whole EU. The rapporteur goes at great lengths to achieve one effect: the audience should be aware that these problems exist all over Europe and should be solved urgently.

By the use of causal argumentation, it is made clear to what kind of problems the lack of transparency leads. There is a crisis, farming and rural communities are in danger of disappearing. Farmers have lost large percentages of their rev-



enues. This is not just a local problem; throughout Europe farmers encounter these difficulties. In order to give an impression of the scale of the problem, several examples are mentioned (France, Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary), thus providing a defence of the existential presupposition of the problem statement (Garssen 2017b: 12). The problem does not only arise in France and Germany, the EU's leading countries in the West, it also exists in the East.

The rapporteur hardly goes into possible counter-arguments to the problem-solving argumentation that is put forward on the main level and alternative proposals are not discussed. He only states that transparency does not pose a threat to the market economy but is – on the contrary – necessary.

The argumentation for standpoint 2 and for standpoint 3 is much less elaborate. In both cases the rapporteur uses problem-solving argumentation and in both cases the problem-statement is explicitly mentioned while the causal statement remains unexpressed and is not defended. The problem-statement is in both cases defended by just one argument. In fact, the argumentation put forward for standpoint 1 has already set the stage. It is not necessary to repeat all problems that play a part in the European agricultural sector, because it has been duly made clear that there is a crisis. Therefore it is already evident that the short term solutions proposed in standpoint 2 and 3 are necessary.

The topical selection for standpoint 4 *The European Union has to take the initiative to create a global agency to regulate the markets* also centres around the problem: the argumentation on the sub-level is put forward in defence of the problem statement ("Speculation on agricultural commodities is a scourge"). Again, no attention is paid to the efficiency and feasibility of the plan or to alternative solutions.

The dialectical routes chosen by the rapporteur in the defence of his standpoints are very similar. On the main level, he puts forward problem-solving argumentation. The problem-statement receives a lot of attention and the causal statement gets little or no defence. Alternative solutions and feasibility are not mentioned at all. Only once the rapporteur goes into possible side effects. In referring to the problems that are pestering the European agricultural sector, the rapporteur clearly chooses arguments that are easy to defend. By only mentioning the problems and the solution while steering away from more complicated matters, the topical selection is only oriented towards the goal of finding a solution.

### *Audience demand*

This strong focus on the problems can at the same time be seen as an effective adaption to audience demand. Only when it is clear that there is a real problem that falls within the responsibility of the European Union, new legislation or measures can be considered in the European Parliament. The problems should not

only be severe enough, they should also be a real European problem. This is the reason why the rapporteur not only goes into the normative presupposition of the problem by pointing at the consequences of doing nothing about the current situation, but also into the existential presupposition by making clear that the problem exists throughout Europe. Furthermore, he adapts to audience demand by mentioning not only the social problems of individual farmers but also underlining the great importance of a strong agricultural sector. In doing so he addresses both the left and the right side of the political spectrum of the audience. In this way, the argumentation caters to all opinions in the centre of the political spectrum. With its stress on the problems of the producers, the rapporteur's argumentation steers clear from any political ideology. The three largest political groups in the European Parliament are the Christian democrats, the social democrats, and the liberals, and it is clear that the rapporteur cannot satisfy all political tastes. The rapporteur clearly chooses his battles. It is in the middle of the political spectrum where he can expect approval, not further to the left or the right. Political parties further to the left can be expected to say that the EU should intervene much more in the European market; politicians further to the right are expected to be against this kind of market interventions. To these extremes, the rapporteur has not much to offer; instead, he relies on the idea that everyone will want to solve the enormous problems that are described.

### *Exploitation of presentational devices*

As indicated above, the order of presentation is such that the problems are presented first, and immediately after that the solutions. This order of presentation creates the suggestion that the solutions automatically follow from the problems. This suggestion is fortified by the total lack of mention of alternative solutions in the opening speech. In the presentation, the problems are foregrounded. Presentational devices are chosen in such a way that the problem is amplified by stressing its urgency. There is a "crisis", a "massacre on a terrible scale", "revenues plummeted", and communities are in "danger of disappearing". Overall, the tone of the speech is neutral and business-like. However, the use of these presentational devices is more emotional and personal.

## 5.4 Characteristics of the concluding argumentative style

### *Topical selection*

In the final paragraph, a one-sided view of the outcome of the discussion is established. The conclusion starts with the following line: "I invite you to send out a strong message so that the new CAP is fairer for European farmers and consumers

and so that there is fair competition between operators which allows for the creation of a framework for regulating the markets and which gives short shrift to speculators" (lines 75–78). In this concluding remark the rapporteur mainly repeats his first standpoint about the need for the creation of a framework for regulating the markets.

### *Audience demand and exploitation of presentational devices*

With his "invitation", the rapporteur avoids a phrasing like "it is clear that you should vote for this proposal". Instead, the audience's acceptance of the proposal is presupposed by wrapping this concluding remark up in an invitation. However, it is not an invitation to accept the standpoint(s), but an invitation to voice the standpoint(s) loud and clear. This way of presenting suggests that the audience is already in agreement with the standpoint. The only thing that still needs to be done is to send out a strong message. At the same time, the invitation can be seen as an adaption to audience demand, since an invitation can be accepted or denied, so that it seems as if the audience can still decide for itself. In the process, the audience is nevertheless treated as a rather passive group that only needs to be encouraged to voice loud and clear the acceptable opinions.

By using the phrase "our message", he makes it seem as if Parliament is already in agreement about the acceptability of the proposals. The rapporteur presents this call as if all MEPs have in principle one common position. MEPs who do not join the vast majority are portrayed as being influenced by external pressure. Their dissent goes against the responsibilities of the European Parliament. The rapporteur treats the outcome of the discussion as a factual matter.

## **6. Conclusion**

Based on our description of the three dimensions of argumentative style in the opening speech, we can now come to a characterization of the argumentative style utilised in the rapporteur's opening speech in a debate of the European Parliament about reforms in the European agricultural policy. In his role as a rapporteur, it is Bove's aim to gain as much adherence as possible to the proposals made in the committee report. There was a large majority for the proposals in the committee, but only when there is also a majority in the European Parliament, can the report be moved for assent to other bodies. It is particularly important that Parliament agrees with the report as a whole, not just with some parts of it.

In the initial situation, the rapporteur presents four separate proposals. One of them is a plan for setting up a European conservatory for the agricultural sector that should lead to more transparency in the food chain from farmer to con-

sumer. Next, there are two standpoints relating to short term measures to protect famers. The fourth standpoint pertains to a general and rather vague plan to combat global speculation in the food production sector. In the initial situation, the rapporteur presents his standpoints as necessary, urgent and efficient measures that will be acceptable to all who realise which problems need to be solved in the agricultural sector. The selection of standpoints is business-like, because it is made clear that they are proposals which are the outcome of the work done in committee. The outcome of the committee's work is brought to the table and nothing else. In the initial situation the rapporteur also lives up of what the audience may expect: a clear and objective view of what the committee has decided. The outcomes of the committee's discussions and votes are presented in matter-of-fact formulations of the topics of discussion. This makes the confrontational argumentative style mostly detached.

In the next stage of the argumentative process, the material starting points are chosen in such a way that they can hardly be denied. They consist of verifiable facts which are presented matter-of-factly while the norms underlying the characterization of the current situation as problematic are expected to be generally acceptable. The underlying values related to the economic importance to the European agricultural sector and the rights and interests of both farmers and consumers will generally be found acceptable. The audience in the European Parliament will most likely accept the sources that are mentioned right away. The material starting point are presented in a forthcoming and accurate way. If possible, dates and statistics are mentioned. Because of these characteristics, the opening argumentative style is predominantly detached.

For his defence of each of the standpoints in the empirical counterpart of the argumentation stage, the rapporteur employs problem-solving argumentation. On the main level of the defence, he points at a problem that exists in the European and/or global agricultural sector and argues that this problem will be solved by the plans presented in the proposals. I have made clear that the rapporteur chooses to focus on defending the problem statement. He consistently points at the main aim of the proposals he is defending of solving the problems that exist. The use of problem-solving argumentation offers a clear rationale for accepting the standpoints at issue. When the existing problems are stressed, the problem-solving argumentation consists mainly of arguments that must secure that the audience becomes convinced that action is needed. By this particular topical selection, it is suggested that these are the best, if not the only, possible solutions to the problems. No alternative plans are considered, and no side effects of any of the solutions are presented.

The arguments are mostly aimed at pointing out the urgency of the measures that are proposed. Because it is made clear that the problems should be solved

and will be solved by the measures, the arguments have a clear rationale. By putting forward these arguments, the audience is addressed in such a way that if they accept the urgency of the situation, they will also accept the necessity of the implementation of the proposals. In the presentational dimension of argumentative style, the arguments are advanced in an objective fashion, although once in a while more personal statements are used to stress the urgency of the situation. When taken together, these characteristics make the argumentational argumentative style predominately detached, while the rapporteur occasionally makes use of an engaged argumentative style when his personal concerns seem to come to light.

In the concluding part of the opening speech the rapporteur makes it clear, albeit in an indirect fashion, that the proposed policies should be accepted. Without further ado he invites the audience to “send out a strong message”. This implies that he considers the reasons provided enough to come to the conclusion that they need to adopt the proposals that are made. This is done in a rather matter-of-factly fashion. With some reservation, the concluding argumentative style can therefore be characterized as detached.

Taking account of the results of our analysis of the confrontational, the opening, the argumentational and the concluding argumentative style that is utilised, the general argumentative style that is put to good use by the rapporteur in this opening speech can be characterized as predominantly detached.

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