

**WORKSHOP 2
DEBATING THE EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION: IDEAS, ARGUMENTS,
REFERENDUM CAMPAIGNS**

Partisan Strategies in Light of the European Constitution in Spain

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1. Strange bedfellows

Spain is the first European country to have submitted the new European Constitution to a referendum for approval. On 20 February 2005, the Spanish people accepted the new constitutional text by a wide majority of 76'73%, with 17'24% rejecting it. However, turnout by electors was only 42'32%, a lower figure than those for previous votes concerning Europe. That day marked the end of an electoral campaign in which most of Europe was watching Spain and in which various Spanish political parties had declared themselves in favour of or against the constitutional text, which gave rise to unusual political combinations. The constitutional text was therefore responsible for bringing together parties which oppose each other in the domestic political arena –such as the governing Partido Socialista Obrero Espanyol (the Socialist Party), and the main opposition Partido Popular (the People's Party), which both campaigned for the Yes vote. It also separated political groups forming part of the same governing coalition, such as the Partido Socialista Obrero Espanyol, which campaigned for the Yes vote, and its coalition partners, Izquierda Unida (United Left) and Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Catalan Nationalist Republican Left), who campaigned for the No vote.

It also led to agreement between ideologically opposed political groups while highlighting significant differences between parties sharing the same basic ideological central points. As a result, if we analyse the parties' positions using the two main ideological benchmarks –left/right-wing politics, and in Spain, nationalism/centralism– it can be seen that there are no instances of ideologically similar parties having similar positions on the Constitution. This means that while left-wing parties campaigned for opposing positions –the Partido Socialista Obrero Español campaigned for the Yes vote, and Izquierda Unida, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya and the Chunta Aragonesista (left-wing Aragonese Federalists) chose to campaign for the No vote– in the nationalist sphere, political groups such as Convergència i Unió (Nationalist Christian Democrats), the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (Basque Nationalist Party) and the Coalición Canaria (Canary Islands Nationalist Party) were in favour of the Yes vote, unlike groups such as Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya and the Bloque Nacionalista Gallego (left-wing Galicia Nationalists).

These peculiarities and the failure of ideological co-ordinates to reflect each party's position make an analysis of the reasons given by each political group for supporting or rejecting the new European Constitution even more interesting and necessary. This paper therefore aims to study the arguments given by each political party in its party

political advertising and to compare those supporting and opposing the Constitution. In order to carry out this study, a methodology based on Chaïm Perelman's Argumentation Theory has been applied. This methodology enables the argumentative core which is the basis of each party's political rhetoric to be isolated.

2. The argumentative perspective as a model for analysis: the argumentative core

In order to analyze the different argumentations used by political parties in the Spanish Referendum campaign for the approbation of European Constitution, we use a method based on the rhetorical system and on the proposal of Chaïm Perelman. It consists of making an analysis of the reality so as to extract from it those elements that will make up the significant matters of reference in the speech. This task takes place in the context of *inventio*, which is the rhetorical operation in which background elements, upon which the speech will be drafted, are decided on and that, in the end, are those that have the greatest persuasive force. In this stage, the speaker must analyse the current political reality and decide which arguments his or her speech will be based on: what part of the reality will be reflected and what will be ignored, if happenings that occur near to the audience will be used or if values are decided upon, whether a speech full of referential elements will be written, or if only the most essential ones will be chosen. These decisions, as well as those chosen later on, must be conditioned by those taken in the previous stage. Consequently, *inventio* is the first operation in constituting a speech and the deepest structure of speeches, which will be taken as a point of reference in later stages, is configured in it. It is a highly complex stage that has generated, over time, abundant literature aimed at guiding the speaker in finding the topics for his or her speech—those with which the audience will identify or not and accept or reject with what that implies for the final result of the communication—. One of the most interesting attempts to provide the speaker with a guide is the one Chaïm Perelman¹ carries out, because it is easily adapted to political communication.

Perelman presents his ideas in the book entitled, *Teoría de la Argumentación. La nueva retórica [The Theory of Argumentation. The New Rhetoric]*² written in collaboration with Olbrechts-Tyteca. In it, he threshes out his theory on human rationality based on the presumptions of classical Aristotelian rhetoric. Perelman develops a model based on two fundamental points: the *general agreements* and the *procedures* for argumentation. The former affirms that there are general agreements that exist and with which the audience which they are aimed is in agreement and that operate as starting points for argumentation. This means that to persuade a certain public, its basic characteristics must be known and the speech adapted to those characteristics. It is not possible, therefore, to persuade just anybody using just any thesis. Persuasion is limited by that which the public interprets because, in addition, it is the public itself that has the last word on the success or failure of the communication. In second place, some *procedures* with a more or less logical appearance and that have as a goal to transmit the validity of the agreements to those who disagree. The *procedures* are responsible for the audience being willing to accept new ideas proposed, because it is through them that the processes of persuasive logic –or near logic– are carried out.

¹ To delve more deeply into Perelman's proposal, see Perelman, Ch.; Olbrecht-Tyteca, L.: *Tratado de la argumentación. La nueva retórica*. Madrid: Gredos, 1994. To see Perelman's model adapted to persuasive electoral communication see Pericot, J.; Capdevila, A.: *op. cit.*; Pericot, J.; Capdevila, A.; Pintor, I.: *op. cit.* i Capdevila, A.: *op. cit.*.

² Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca published their work for the first time in 1958 under the title: *Traité de l'argumentation. La nouvelle rethorique* (Bruxelles: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles). The Spanish translation of that work has been used in this communication. It is entitled: *Tratado de la argumentación. La nueva retórica*. Madrid: Gredos, 1994.

The greatest strength of Perelman theory as an explanatory model for persuasive processes is based, precisely, on these postulates: the *general agreements* and the *procedures*. According to the author, the *general agreements* have a different persuasive force depending on whether they are based on the shared reality of those participating in the communication or on their preferences. In each one of these categories, different types are established that create greater or lesser agreement among the audience. According to Perelman, the more agreement there is the greater persuasive force there is and that makes choosing one or another agreement basic for the final persuasiveness of the speech. Therefore, found among the *general agreements based on reality* are: *true facts* and *assumptions*. Among the *agreements based on the audience's preferences* are: *values*, *hierarchies* and *places in common*.

Perelman defines the *facts* as unarguable agreements that the audience clearly accepts without argument. A fact may lose its status if placed in doubt by a sufficient number of people or if someone with sufficient authority to do so questions it. They are the agreements most strongly adhered to and that is why they are the most solid argumentative basis. *Truths* are defined as systems of facts with a more general and more complex scope, because they place a number of certain events in relation one to the other. There are two levels within the truths: those that refer to the external reality of the speech and that, therefore, make up part of the listeners' prior knowledge, and those referring to the facts laid out in the speech itself and that form part of the universe constructed by it. Lastly, the *assumptions* are bound to experience and common sense and act as a guide for locating new links. They are founded on some principles: *Principle of quality* (the quality of the act manifests the quality of the author or vice versa); *Principle of believability* (what is said is considered to be the truth); *Principle of interest* (one is curious about his or her surroundings and that is why the utterances are likely to cause interest) and *Principle of good sense* (affects the good sense character of human beings).

In regard to the *agreements based on the audience's preferences* the first to be emphasised is *values*. These *values* are *generally agreed opinions*. They are of two types: *general*, which are abstract and based on rules everyone accepts under any circumstance (e.g., justice, liberty, or truth). They are very useful persuasive instruments in that they can be used in many ways according to the ideology of those who defend them. On the other hand, *particular* values exist that are attributable to a private individual or group. They have a unique, genuine character that allows the de-authorisation of the others (e.g.: virtue, loyalty, or friendship). Secondly, the structures or *hierarchies* that give order to values should be emphasised. Every culture agrees to a hierarchic order among values that may be heterogeneous. Lastly, Perelman points out the *common places* that are premises of general character that values and hierarchies are founded on.

As previously mentioned, the second basic point of Perelman's theory are the argumentation *procedures*, which are responsible for transmitting the validity between the agreed point of departure and the new conclusions that the listeners have still not agreed to. The operations of quasi-logic that cause modifications in the listeners' way of thinking occur in this part. There are two types of *procedures*: one is *association* and the other is *disassociation*.

The *association procedures* take their force of persuasion from their similitude with methods of unquestionable reasoning –mathematical and logical formulas–. They are argumentative outlines by which an interpretation of the world is constructed bonds between diverse and disperse elements are established. Within the elements of *association* distinction can be made between *quasi-logical structures*, *structures based on reality* and those that *structure reality*. In the *quasi-logical structures*, *logical*

structures and *mathematical relationships* can be distinguished. The former reduce reality to a formal outline and the latter are relationships that establish a formal outline between mathematical logic and value judgements. The *structures based on reality* may be of *succession* (in which phenomena of a similar nature join together) and those of co-existence (that join unequal realities). Those that *structure reality* are based on a known fact to which certain values are granted and are presented in such a way that reality is seen differently. Three types of argument can be found there: *example*, *illustration* and *model*.

The *disassociation procedures* are techniques for breaking down elements that are considered to be part of a unit. Among them *philosophical binomial* is to be emphasised. The binomial leads one to relate two concepts from our culture (e.g., good/evil, real/possible). A positive or negative value is granted to each of the parts of the binomial and the audience adheres to one or the other according to how the speaker presents them.

The choice of one of the elements in detriment to the others sets up certain possible worlds with which the voter will identify or not. In regard to the *possible world* it should be said that the *general agreements* proposed by Perelman and which were defined above should be inscribed in a reference framework that gives them coherency and which makes it possible to clearly establish when a general agreement acts as just that. Without this interpretative frame work, inconsistencies make occur. Therefore, with the general agreements, a speech is put together that frames the reference, that is to say, it delimits the fragments of socially constructed reality that are put in play to mark the interpretative limits. Political parties specifically construct the foundation of *possible worlds* and *possible worlds* to accept in relation to a certain *public model* defined as the speaker's ideal mental construction that may be more or less close to the *empirical audience* (real public to which the speech is directed).

3. Visions of Europe

Europeanism is one of the predominant *values* in the Spanish Referendum campaign for the approval of a Constitutional Treaty for Europe. All political parties defend an idea of Europe—which may be more or less explicit, as will be seen—and declare that they are completely in favour of Spain's full integration into this political structure. However, as mentioned above, this is not reflected in a united stance by all political groups concerning the constitutional text and each of them, regardless of their ideological positions, constructs an argumentative structure to justify their position. This argumentative structure, as mentioned above, can be considered based on the *possible worlds* that the various political groups promise or reject and the logical relationship between these worlds.

In their political advertising, all the parties use an argumentative structure focusing on the existence of two *possible worlds*, one based on the Europe arising from the approval of the Treaty and the other on the Europe coming about as a result of its rejection. The differences appear firstly in the presentation of each of these worlds and secondly, in the way in which they are peopled. The fact that the parties' objective—Europe—is the same and their understanding of it is different gives rise to paradoxical situations that may be confusing for the audience, in which parties with opposing positions use the same *facts* and *values* to uphold their ideas, as will be seen.

The Partido Socialista Obrero Español/Partit Socialista de Catalunya (PSOE/PSC) presents two *possible worlds* in its television campaigns. There is the world of the Yes

vote, which they identify with Europe, and the world of the No vote, which remains in the background and is not expanded upon. This party therefore focuses on the *possible world* that will come about after the approval of the Constitutional Treaty and which is defined as one in which Spain and Catalonia will improve thanks to their full, complete and pioneering integration in Europe. The same structure of worlds is presented by the Partido Popular (PP), Izquierda Unida/Iniciativa per Catalunya (IU/ICV), Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC), the Bloque Nacionalista Gallego (BNG) and the Chunta Aragonesista (CHA). The PP portrays the *possible world* of the Yes vote and that of the No vote in its advertisements, but unlike the PSOE, develops them both to practically the same extent. The world of the Yes vote is a Europe which is "good for Spain" although it is "not the best of those possible". The world of the No vote coincides with a situation in which Europe would not be present in Spanish political life. The PP is the only party which develops the argument for both worlds symmetrically. This reflects the main opposition party's somewhat ambiguous position with regard to this Referendum. While they officially ask for a Yes vote for the Treaty, they informally hint that they would not be unhappy with a defeat for the Yes vote backed by the PSOE, because this could be seen as a failure for the President of the Government, José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero.

IU/ICV support the No vote in this Referendum and sustain their position on an argumentative structure based on two *possible worlds*: the world of the Yes vote, which is defined as a distant and monotonous Europe, and the world of the No vote, which is a Europe that is close and different. As can be seen, this group identifies its *possible worlds* using very specific *values* that it expands upon in unequal terms. Meanwhile, its media content focuses on an explanation of the world that it supports, i.e. the world of the No vote. However, the opposite world is only mentioned in minimal terms, using *values* that are considered as a result of opposition to them or that arise from images. A very similar structure is used by the BNG, which also opposes approval of the Treaty. It identifies the *possible world* of the No vote with a social Europe focusing on its constituent peoples, while the Yes vote is saved for a market-based Europe. In its television advertisement, it only shows the world it promises, the Europe focusing on its constituent peoples, using a large amount of *values* that culminate in a *value* that places all the others in order of importance: a better Europe.

ERC and the CHA support the No vote for the Constitution and show two opposing *possible worlds*: that of the Yes vote, which is depicted as negative, and that of the No vote, which is shown as positive. In their approach using a collision of two worlds, they coincide with the parties mentioned above, but unlike them, they give broad consideration to the world of the Yes vote while they only mention some individual points in the world of the No vote. ERC identifies the world of the Yes vote with a Europe that does not fully recognise important social rights and one in which Catalonia cannot fully develop as a nation. The CHA identifies the world of the No vote with a social Europe focusing on its constituent peoples and that of the Yes vote with "Another Europe". It is precisely this Europe which is the most defined in this group's rhetoric. It gives a detailed analysis of the points of the constitutional Treaty with which it does not agree because they do not lead to the European model they support as "social and focusing on its constituent peoples".

The conservative nationalist parties Convergència i Unió (CiU), the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) and the Coalición Canaria (CC), who are all in favour of a Yes vote for the European Constitution, have a less polarised structure of worlds. These groups, which also share the same campaign slogan —*More Europe, more Catalonia (or more Basque Country, or more Canary Islands)*— do not depict a Yes to Europe versus No to Europe dualism in their advertising, as in the cases above, but instead suggest a structure of worlds in which the nationalities they represent play a

key role. CiU makes a distinction between the *possible world* of the party itself identified with Catalonia and that of a Catalonia that is decisive in Europe, and establishes a very close relationship between these two worlds, as will be seen below. The coalition depicts both worlds to the same extent although it attributes more values to the first world. The PNV presents a sole *possible world*, the Europe of constituent peoples, which contains various sub-worlds, in which the Basque people plays a prominent part. The PNV basically develops the general *possible world* using a large number of values and gives the *possible sub-world* of the Basque people some essential values which it contributes to the *possible global world*. Finally, the CC constructs its *possible worlds* in time and presents the current *possible world*, in which the Canary Islands are not fully European, and the *possible future world*, after the constitutional text has been approved, in which the Canary Islands will be fully European. The world that is developed to the greatest extent by the CC is the future world characterised by a fusion of the values contributed by Europe and those provided by the Canary Islands.

All the political parties people the *possible worlds* that they present with various individuals (*general agreements*) with the aim of making them more attractive to the public at which they are aimed and to thereby achieve support for the ideas in the form of a vote. In general terms, it can be said that *values* predominate in the configuration of *possible worlds*. These *values* are present throughout their rhetoric, followed at some distance by *facts* and *truths*. This type of construction, focusing on *agreements based on the electorate's preferences*, shows the parties' interest in mainly reaching their own voters rather than those of other parties. The only party to clearly defy this trend is the PSOE/PSC, which in its advertisements balances the *facts* and *truths* provided with the *values* supported. This is because the PSOE/PSC led the Government at the time of the Referendum and defends a more institutional position, which it needs to communicate to a larger number of citizens.

If the individuals peopling the *possible worlds* supported by those in favour of the Yes vote for the Constitution are analysed, there is the idea that approval of the Treaty will lead to a Europe that is strong, caring, secure, prosperous, consistent, sensible, trusting, open, integrated, responsible, balanced, developed, united, honest and equal. This would lead to *facts* such as improvements in the economy and education, fair trade, employment, pensioners' rights and improvement in help for families. Among supporters of the yes vote, the world arising from a rejection of the European Constitution is hardly discussed, except in PP advertisements, in which some *values* related to this possibility are presented. In this case, it is a Europe that is chaotic, ignorant, apathetic, radical, disunited, rash, closed, vulnerable, unbalanced, confused and exclusive.

Among those campaigning for the No vote, the image of the Europe that they propose as a positive one predominates, and is one which is attained by rejecting the constitutional text. This Europe is characterised by being close at hand, transparent, respectful, secular and fair, and defends social rights and is independent of the United States. However, the Europe arising from approval of the Treaty has war, conservatism, inconsistency, racism, deceit and passiveness as its *values*, and discrimination against nations without a state, the lack of a guarantee to the right to employment, housing and health, an increase in defence spending and the predominance of a neoliberal economic model as its *facts* and *truths*.

However, as far as individuals are concerned, the paradoxical situation mentioned above, in which parties with opposing positions regarding approval of the constitutional Treaty use the same *facts* and *values* to justify their positions merits special attention. This leads to a significant level of confusion because the question of which *values* and

facts are attributable to the Europe that is going to be created based on the new Constitution and those that would be created with alternative constitutions is not clarified. In short, the image of Europe is blurred, confusing and contradictory as far as citizens are concerned. There are many examples of *values* such as progress, peace, tolerance, equality, diversity, democracy, plurality, commitment, freedom, difference, Europeanism and justice being assigned both to positions in favour of the Constitution and to those advocating the opposite. As far as *facts* and *truths* are concerned, there are contradictions regarding the status of Catalan as a co-official language in Europe (ERC says that the new Constitution does not guarantee this right, while CiU and the PSOE/PSC say the opposite); the defence of the environment (which the PSOE/PSC says it guarantees and IU/ICV says it does not); and the improvement of social rights such as housing and health (which the PSOE/PSC say that it enshrines and ERC and the CHA deny), among others.

Having built and peopled the *possible worlds*, the political groups use a range of *argumentative procedures* to give credence to their proposals and to thereby reinforce voters' support for their position. Among these is the fact that despite the majority of parties presenting contradictory *possible worlds*, there is a very limited use of *philosophical binomial dissociation procedures*. This type of argument is used to highlight the incompatibility between two *possible worlds* that are depicted to the electorate as opposite. This resource is used by parties including the PP, IU/ICV, ERC, the BNG and the CHA, but is only used in a clear and forceful manner by the PP, as it is the only party which depicts the two opposing worlds in a similar manner. The other parties only show one world and thereby defuse contradiction and opposition. The low impact of this *procedure* means that the campaign is not very aggressive because contradictions are not highlighted and only one position is shown, which may be the party's own or that of others, depending on the case.

However, the use of *association procedures*, which seek solidarity between the *possible worlds* and their individuals, are much more common in this campaign. Among these are the *person-action procedure* by which the parties base the construction of the *possible worlds* they promise on their own *values* or the virtues of their leaders. Groups such as the PSOE/PSC, the PP, IU/ICV, CiU, ERC and the CHA guarantee that they are able to fulfil their promises thanks to their leaders or their team as a whole, who dedicate all their capabilities to achieving the project. Another *procedure* used by several political parties is the *quasi-logical frequency procedure*, which is used by parties holding office in the Spanish national and autonomous regional governments. With this strategy, parties use their past actions as a guarantee of their actions in the future —if they have done well so far, there is no reason to think they will not do so from now on. This is the case of the PSOE/PSC, the PNV and CiU (currently in opposition after 20 years as the Catalan Government) which show everything they have achieved to date so that the audience supports what they are going to do.

The use of these two types of *association procedures* shows the importance of parties in this electoral campaign. Most parties build a strong image for themselves, which is used as a guarantee for supporting their proposals and shows their members' commitment to the position they are advocating. Perhaps this explains the low level of ideological involvement compared to the high profile of leaders and party political *values* in the persuasive audiovisual discourse.

Another *procedure* that is used to a great extent by political parties with a strong logical component is the *quasi-logical mathematical relationship of sum* which is used by both the PSOE/PSC and the conservative nationalists, CiU, the PNV and the CC. All these parties support *possible worlds* that promise an idea of an increase in benefits for Spain or the nationalities that they represent. Slogans like *More Europe, more*

Catalonia aim to clearly show the substantial improvement that the Yes vote to Europe would entail compared to other possibilities.

A study of the arguments given by each political party enables us to see some coincidences and differences that are given below by way of a summary. In the nationalist sphere, there are two clear and definite tendencies, which coincide with a position in favour of or against the Constitution, respectively. Firstly, there is a common argumentative approach by the conservative nationalist parties —i.e. the PNV, the CC and CiU— in favour of approval, both in terms of the structure of *possible worlds* (less polarised) and the *procedures* used (*mathematical relationships of sum and frequency*). Secondly, the left-wing nationalist parties —i.e. ERC, the CHA and the BNG— which with IU-ICV all oppose the Treaty, coincide in their presentation of two worlds which even though they are developed to varying extents, have a clear relationship of opposition.

However, confusion arises in left-right terms when the two main centralist parties, the PSOE/PSC and the PP, are considered. Although both parties present a profound dual structure of opposing *possible worlds*, the PP uses an argument that is closer to that of the left-wing nationalists (more polarised, with the development of two opposite worlds), while the PSOE/PSC opts for a structure that is closer to the conservative nationalists (with the basic development of a single world - that of the Yes vote - and the use of *sum* and *frequency procedures*).

The explanation for the paradoxical nature of this situation may be found on the one hand in the *fact* that the PSOE/PSC is the party of Government, like most of the conservative nationalists, and on the other, in the internal ambiguity of the PP, whose position has never been clearly forceful, despite it being the same as that of the government.