

**SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME  
THE PEOPLE PROGRAMME  
MARIE CURIE ACTIONS – NETWORKS FOR INITIAL TRAINING (ITN)**

**ELECDEM  
TRAINING NETWORK IN ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY**

**GRANT AGREEMENT NUMBER: 238607**

**Deliverable D14.1 – Communication and Mobilisation  
Final Report**

**Early Stage Research fellow (ESR)  
Pieterjan Desmet**

**Host Institution  
University of Amsterdam**



## **ABSTRACT**

In this dissertation, democratic performance evaluations of the EU are the central concept, which will be assessed from three perspectives. First, the impact of national institutional quality of democratic performance evaluations is assessed, using a multilevel model that encompasses objective indicators of national institutional quality per country. Second, the impact of the election campaign is assessed, using two wave panel survey data, combined with content analysis data, both gathered during the EP election campaign of 2009. Third, the impact of interpersonal communication is studied, both in a real-world and an experimental setting. The results indicate that national institutional quality is used as a yardstick to evaluate the democratic performance of the EU, especially by people who are knowledgeable about domestic politics. Furthermore, evaluative media messages and interpersonal communication about the EU do have an effect on EU evaluations. Over the course of an election campaign, media do reach European citizens with evaluative messages. Similarly, and even to a greater extent, interpersonal communication helps people to form and change their opinions on the democratic performance of the EU. However, the influence of interpersonal communication depends on the level of mutual agreement discussants perceive.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	4
LIST OF FIGURES	5
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	6
<b>FULL REPORT</b>	9
<b>OBJECTIVES/AIMS</b>	10
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	13
<b>CHAPTER 1</b> SECOND-ORDER INSTITUTIONS: NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY AS A YARDSTICK FOR EU EVALUATION	30
<b>CHAPTER 2</b> THE CONTENT OF THE MESSAGE, AND THE ROLE OF DISAGREEMENT: EFFECTS OF MEDIA AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION ON EU EVALUATIONS	49
<b>CHAPTER 3</b> TALKING ABOUT POLITICS: EFFECTS OF MEDIA AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION ON EU EVALUATIONS	70
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	92
<b>APPENDIX</b>	103

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table I.1</b>	Descriptives of Dependent and Independent Variables From Panel Survey Data	37
<b>Table I.2</b>	Effects of Individual- and Country-Level Variables on Democratic Performance Evaluations of the EU: Multi Level Model Estimates	41
<b>Table II.1</b>	Descriptives of the variables	58
<b>Table II.2</b>	Effect of evaluative media and IPC on EU evaluations	59
<b>Table II.3</b>	Effect of the interaction between evaluative media and IPC on EU evaluations	60
<b>Table II.4</b>	Effect of evaluative media, IPC and disagreement on EU evaluations	61
<b>Table III.1</b>	Descriptives of the variables	78
<b>Table III.2</b>	Effect of the article and the conversation on EU evaluations	78
<b>Table III.3</b>	Effect of the article and the conversation on EU evaluations (dummies)	80
<b>Table III.4</b>	Reinforcement effect of tone congruence between article and conversation	81
<b>Table III.5</b>	Effect of disagreement within the conversation on EU evaluations	82

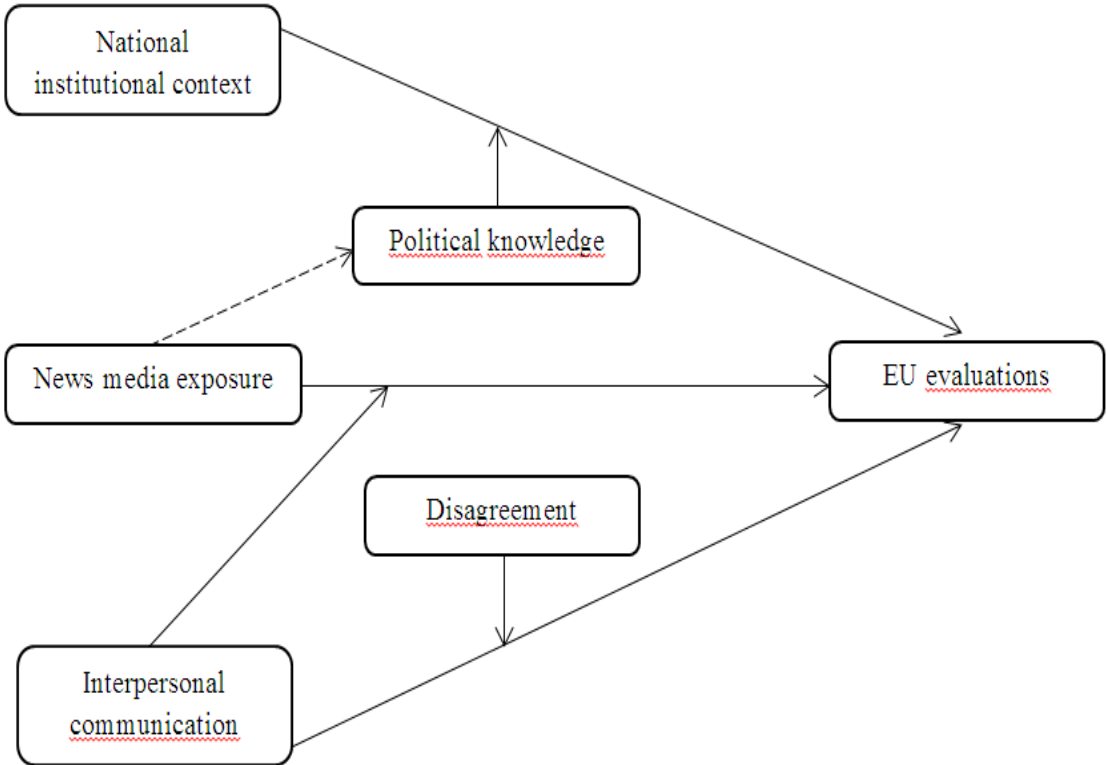
## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 0.1</b>	Antecedents of EU democratic performance evaluations	10
<b>Figure 0.2</b>	Factor Solution for the EU attitude items	16
<b>Figure I.1</b>	Quality of Institutions and Satisfaction with European Democracy, per Country	38
<b>Figure III.1</b>	Estimated means of EU democratic performance evaluations after being exposed to an EU article (negative, neutral or positive) and engaging in an online EU conversation (negative, neutral or positive)	79
<b>Figure III.2</b>	Moderation effect of disagreement on the effect of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations	74

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Attitudes towards the EU are multi-dimensional, and can be directed towards different objects. In this project, I set out to explain the evaluation of the actual functioning of the democratic political system of the European Union. Since two decades, the European project gets more and more contested by the European population. The notion of a ‘democratic deficit’ has dominated the debates on the EU in the first decade of this century. People’s evaluations of how the European Union functions seem to matter more and more. These evaluations of the European democratic performance are the central focus of this research project.

**Figure 0.1: Antecedents of EU evaluations: outline of the dissertation**



The aim of the first study was twofold: assessing the influence of the quality of institutions at the national level on democratic performance evaluations of the EU, and exploring the moderating effect of political knowledge on the influence of institutional quality on those evaluations. As Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) showed, evaluations of a supranational policy level depend on the interplay between national and supranational institutions. I

combined survey data about citizens' perceptions of political performance with objective measures of national institutional quality from 21 EU member states. With these data, I constructed a multilevel model, which enabled us to examine the differential impact of national institutional quality on evaluations of the EU's democratic performance, and the role political knowledge plays with regard to this effect. I found support for both expectations. First, there is a negative relation between national institutional quality and democratic performance evaluation of the EU. Higher institutional quality at the national level has a negative effect on the evaluation of European governance. Second, I found a moderating effect of political knowledge on the effect of institutional quality on democratic performance evaluations of the EU. The more citizens know about their own national politics, the more they use this knowledge as a yardstick for evaluation at supranational level.

In the second study, I set out to explain the effect of media messages and disagreement within interpersonal communication on EU democratic performance evaluations. By combining a two-wave panel study with a content analysis, developed during the three final weeks of the EP-election campaign, I was able to link content and tone to exposure to media and interpersonal communication. The results showed that exposure to positive EU evaluations in the media has a positive effect on individual EU evaluations. The more citizens were exposed to positive EU evaluations through the news media, the more positive they became about the democratic performance of the EU and its institutions. I found similar results for interpersonal communication. Secondly, I expected disagreement within interpersonal communication to moderate the effect of interpersonal communication. The more disagreement one perceives, the less effect interpersonal communication has on EU evaluations.

In the third study, I wanted to test the effect of tone congruence between media messages and interpersonal communication on democratic performance evaluations, using an experimental 3x3 design. After reading an article (which was either EU positive, EU negative, or not about the EU), participants had to engage in an online conversation (with a discussant who was either EU positive, EU negative, or not talking about the EU). Thanks to the experimental setting, I was able to manipulate the tone of the media message and the interpersonal conversation. Consequently, I could test the effect of tone congruence between both sources of information. As expected, I found a reinforcement effect of media and interpersonal communication when the tone of both was congruent. I also found confirmation for another result from Chapter 2 in this experimental setting: disagreement moderates the effect of interpersonal communication.

## **Communication and Mobilisation**

This final report belongs to work package 14: Communication and Mobilisation. I choose a more fundamental approach than suggested by the workpackage: what is the effect of an election campaign on the overall evaluations of a (supranational) policy level, and which processes contribute to this effect? In doing so, I focused on the conditions under which media coverage and campaigns matter for political mobilization and for which citizens this is most likely to happen. Apart from the media coverage, I also looked at the differentiated effect of campaigns in different member states, and more specifically, at the effect of national institutional quality in this process.



## **FULL REPORT**

**EVALUATING THE EU: THE INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL  
QUALITY, MEDIA AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION ON EU  
DEMOCRATIC PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS**

## **OBJECTIVES/AIMS**

This dissertation was part of a greater project, ELECDEM, a training network in electoral democracy. The objectives of the ELECDEM network are encapsulated in three linked, interdependent themes that evaluate the effects of globalization, communication and institutions on the quality of electoral democracy. The main research objectives of the network are: (1) Apply a comprehensive and cross-national approach to the evaluation of the current state of electoral democracy, using the indicators of electoral participation, efficacy and trust, representation and accountability; (2) Evaluate how globalization, communication and institutions influence the quality of electoral democracy. (3) Apply key advanced methodological techniques to the study of electoral democracy.

### **a. Conceptual linkages: Evaluating Electoral Democracy**

We studied the current state of electoral democracy in the EU from different perspectives. The key independent variable here is the evaluation of the democratic performance of the EU. It is one of the dimensions of attitudes towards the EU, and it encompasses indicators of efficacy, representation and accountability. Evaluations of the EU are thus the central focus of this thesis, and are studied on three levels: the national context, the media context and the interpersonal context. In our first chapter, we take on a cross-national approach, and use several objective indicators at the national level to measure national institutional quality. This measurement includes indicators of efficacy, representation and accountability as well. With this study, we demonstrate how institutions at the national level have an influence on the evaluation of institutions at the supranational level. In our second study and third study, the effect of communication is central. We look at the effect of media on individuals, combined with the effect interpersonal communication. We investigate how these flows of information affect individuals in their EU-evaluations. In sum, we attempt to answer three research questions:

1. How does the national institutional context affect individual evaluations of the democratic performance of the EU, and does political knowledge moderate this effect?
2. How does the media context affect individual evaluations of the democratic performance of the EU, and does interpersonal communication moderate this effect?
3. What is the effect of tone congruence between mass and interpersonal communication and disagreement within interpersonal communication on the existing effects of both forms of communication on individual evaluations of the democratic performance of the EU?

## **b. Key methodologies and Data**

To answer our research questions, we will investigate potential antecedents of EU democratic performance evaluations from three different angles: at the macro level, the influence of national institutional quality on EU-evaluations, at the meso level, the influence of media messages on EU-evaluations, and at the micro level, the influence of interpersonal communication on EU-evaluations. Our theoretical approach requires a multi-methodological design. We need cross-national data to allow a comparison across member states, both on their national institutional characteristics, and on individual EU evaluations. We need time serial data as well, to measure the change in time. This dynamic dataset should encompass survey data on individual EU evaluations and media exposure, and content analysis data, to grasp the evaluative tone in the media messages. Ideally, this second dataset is representative for the European population. This dataset would not fully allow us to measure content related contingencies of interpersonal communication. Therefore, an experiment, where these content related contingencies could be manipulated, would be ideally suited to capture the exact impact of interpersonal communication, in combination with media messages.

The ELECDEM project has provided this project the data and methodological expertise that we needed. First, we were able to use the EES data, which we used for both the first and the second chapter. Second, we profited from the methodological training and expertise on multi-level approaches (chapter 1), electoral survey design (chapter 1 and 2), content analysis (chapter 2) and experimentation (chapter 3).

In chapter one, we have used survey data from 21 EU member states (**EES data**) and combined them with country characteristics. As such, we were able to deploy a **multilevel model**, which was ideally suited to grasp the variation between individuals and, on the second level, between EU-member states. This allowed to measure the effect of national institutional quality on EU-evaluations. Furthermore, potential moderators and mediators of this effect, such as political knowledge, could be accounted for within this multilevel model. Thanks to the specific training in cross-national and multi-level approaches, we were able to demonstrate the existing cross-national variation in EU-evaluations, and the impact of national institutional quality on that variation.

In our second chapter, we wanted to measure the effect of media on EU-evaluations. Media-coverage of the EU is centered around EU-events, such as the EU summits and the EP-elections (De Vreese, Lauf & Peter, 2007). At the same time, conversational timing is related to the conversation's potential to impact the effect of campaign messages (Hardy & Scheufele, 2009). A conversation the day after or before a major debate/campaign event might

be more likely to involve citizens who are less involved than conversations held at a random point in time, due to the imposed voting duty. The EP-elections are the most obvious incentive for people to think about their supranational institutions, therefore, changes in EU-evaluations are most likely to appear within the campaign period. For the second chapter, we combined data from a two-wave survey panel in 21 EU countries (**EES data**) around the EP-elections (first wave three weeks before the election day, second wave around election day) with **content analysis** data from the same member states, gathered within the three weeks preceding election day. Again, the methodological training provided by ELECDDEM in content analysis proved very helpful. After combining both datasets, we were able to measure the effect of media tone and interpersonal communication on change in EU-democratic performance evaluations.

A potential problem here was the lack of information we have on those interpersonal conversations. Therefore, we conducted an **experiment** for our third chapter, where the tone of both media message and interpersonal message was manipulated. This allowed us to test the effect of evaluative media messages and interpersonal messages. Furthermore, we analyzed the importance of tone congruence for the effect of both types of communication on EU-evaluations. The training session provided by ELECDDEM on experimentation was a source of inspiration and expertise for this chapter.

The methodological training and expertise, and the data provided by the ELECDDEM network were essential for this project. All three chapters benefited greatly from it. It allowed to measure the concepts that we needed.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Public support for the EU is at an all-time low. Especially citizens of the founding member states are less inclined to accept decisions of their own political leaders at the European level than before (Hix, 2008). For many decades, the idea of a “permissive consensus” (Moravcsik, 1991; Hooghe & Marks, 2008)<sup>1</sup> allowed European elites to build this unique supranational organization at a remarkable speed. But while the European Union rapidly had become more powerful, the impact of public opinion increased as well. Concerns about the ‘democratic deficit’<sup>2</sup>, initially expressed by pro- and anti-Europeans alike in the mid 1980s, are nowadays voiced throughout Europe (Hix, 2008). Ironically, further European integration more than ever depends on the support of EU citizens, who have become increasingly skeptical about the functioning of the EU (Hobolt, 2009). As a result, political elites are more than ever concerned about the way European citizens evaluate the democratic performance of the European Union. The nature of these EU evaluations will be central in this dissertation.

In this introduction, I will shortly situate the debate on the democratic deficit and the increased importance of EU evaluations in the recent history of the EU. Next, I will differentiate EU democratic performance evaluations<sup>3</sup> from other dimensions of EU attitudes and introduce the three main antecedents of EU democratic performance evaluations. Then, the methodological approach will be explained. After discussing what this dissertation adds to the research field, I will conclude with a brief overview of the studies that embody the three main chapters<sup>4</sup> of this dissertation.

### **How citizens’ evaluations of the EU became important**

Since the early nineties, further European integration, widening or deepening, has to deal with firm protest and criticism. As early as in 1993, within the debate on the Maastricht treaty and the introduction of the Euro, Smith and Wanke (1993) predicted the expanding importance of public opinion on EU matters. “The growing importance of public opinion obviously comes at a crucial point in the integration process. Public support will be important if Europeans are to accept truly borderless trade and the economic dislocations that will come with the transition to economic and monetary union” (Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993, p. 508). The performance of European institutions is critically watched by those political groups who fight against the loss of national sovereignty that follows from further European integration. This shift in the relation between European elites and European citizens can be explained by two separate processes: a general transformation in the nature of politics in advanced Western

European industrial societies (the post material value change), and a specific transformation in European politics (towards the EMU).

The post material value change theory, put forward by Inglehart (1977), explains the changes affecting the mass public in advanced industrial democracies, and has two premises: the scarcity hypothesis, and the socialization hypothesis. First, the public's basic value priorities are determined by scarcity: greater value for scarce goods. Second, individual value priorities are formed early in life, and are as such determined by the socioeconomic conditions of that period. Given these two premises, Inglehart argues that due to the socioeconomic changes in Western industrial societies, the value priorities of its people are changing, causing gaps between generations. Post material goals such as self-expression, personal freedom and individualism have become more important than traditional values, such as economic well-being, social security and religion.

Dalton (1996) linked this framework to political changes and democratization issues. The shift towards post material value orientations has redefined the nature of politics in advanced industrial societies. New ideas gave rise to new social movements, and as such new divisions in public and political groups. Furthermore, the style of democratic politics underwent some transformations. Dalton calls this post material trend in politics the "individualization of politics", which "involves a shift away from electoral decision making based on social groups and/or party cues toward a more individualized and inwardly-oriented style of political choice" (Dalton, 1996, p. 11). Together with this political emancipation of the citizen, there has been a shift in the position of the voter/citizen, towards a role as consumer (Peng & Hackley, 2007). Concerns become more individual and more heterogeneous. Short-term considerations of policy preferences and performance evaluations are the new decision-making criteria for voting. Due to increasing levels of sophistication, citizens are more aware of inconsistencies and, maybe more important, are able to speak up for it. Political institutions anticipated on this shift and started confirming citizens in their role as consumers. Whereas politics used to be a matter of a small elite, now a large proportion of the society wants to be involved. As such, bridging the legitimacy gap is an important step in dealing with this new reality.

Besides this transformation, EU politics itself has transformed as well. The transition to the European Monetary Union (EMU) during the nineties changed the basis on which citizens evaluate the performance of the EU (Eichenberg & Dalton, 2007). "The contrast in the pre- and post-Maastricht periods indicates that as citizens became aware of the implications of EMU and the EU's changing policy role, their calculus of support changed"

(p. 43). According to Eichenberg and Dalton, European citizens did not necessarily reject the EMU, which is probably something that is neither interesting nor comprehensible to citizens (McNamara, 1998). Europeans feared the harmonizing or even integration of the social security, the ‘neofunctionalist nightmare’ (Eichenberg and Dalton, 2007, p. 43).

### **Evaluating the democratic performance of the EU**

**Dimensions.** Attitudes towards European governance are structured along related but distinct dimensions (Rohrschneider, 2002; Scheuer, 2005). They can be directed towards different objects, and they can be of affective or utilitarian nature (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & De Vreese, 2011). This distinction is partially based on Easton’s model of system support (1975). Easton differentiates between three different objects of political support: the community, the regime and the authorities, and two modes of support: specific and diffuse. Whereas specific support depends on the output of politics and policies, diffuse support varies between different objects of support. Lindberg and Scheingold (1970) differentiated between affective and utilitarian support for respectively vague ideals and policy interests. To fully capture the multi-dimensionality of EU attitudes, studies of public opinion about the EU should reflect on these different types of support. But how can we then distinguish between different facets of EU attitudes? In the literature umbrella terms such as euroskepticism or EU support have been used interchangeably. This can be conceptually and empirically misleading (Duch and Taylor, 1997; Abts and Krouwel, 2007). An analysis of 25 survey items that encompass a range of different types of measures of EU attitudes resulted in five distinct dimensions (Boomgaarden et al., 2011). These dimensions are unique components of the overall notion of EU attitudes and the different dimensions overall only correlate moderately with one another.

**Figure 0.2: Factor Solution for the EU attitude items**

	Factors				
	Performance	Negative affection	Idealism/ utilitarianism	Identity	Strengthening
I am afraid of the European Union.		.832			
I feel threatened by the European Union.		.850			
I am angry about the European Union.		.792			
I am disgusted with the European Union.		.815			
I feel close to fellow Europeans.				.590	
The European flag means a lot to me.				.703	
Being a citizen of the EU means a lot to me				.737	
I am proud to be a European citizen.				.728	
<b>The decision making process in the European Union is transparent.</b>	.740				
<b>The European Union functions well as it is.</b>	.728				
<b>The European Union functions according to democratic principles.</b>	.648				
<b>I trust the European Parliament</b>	.673				
<b><i>I am satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU</i></b>	.710				
The European Union fosters peace and stability.			.736		
The European Union fosters the preservation of the environment.			.671		
COUNTRY membership of the European Union is a good thing.			.709		
COUNTRY has benefited from being a member of the European Union.			.742		
The European Union should become one country.					.837
Desired speed of European integration.					.667
The decision making power of the European Union should be extended.					.599
Initial eigenvalue	8.793	2.229	1.140	1.119	0.814
% explained variance	43.963	11.146	5.698	5.594	4.069
Rotation sums of square loadings	3.454	3.186	2.981	2.568	1.905
% explained variance	17.272	15.929	14.905	12.838	9.525

*Note:* Principal components analysis with varimax rotation (Kaiser Normalization). Rotation converged in six iterations. We note that using a promax rotation in which factors are allowed to correlate yields substantially similar results. Based on the work of Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas & de Vreese (2011)

*Note:* N=32.000. Information on the used data can be found in chapter 1.



The first factor one can distinguish is labeled ‘negative affection (towards the EU)’, and consists of items expressing negative affections towards the EU and a perceived threat of European Unification form the strongest factor. ‘(EU) identity’ is the second factor, with items relating to identification with Europe and the EU. The third factor, ‘(EU) performance’, relates to items that deal with the democratic functioning and the performance of European institutions. The fourth factor consists of two dimensions: ‘utilitarianism and idealism’. It combines traditional country benefit and support measures and of items expressing post-materialist approach to the benefits of European integration. The fifth factor, ‘strengthening’, relates to the future of European integration and to the process of further deepening and widening of the EU (for more information, see Boomgaarden et al., 2011).

**Evaluating the democratic performance of the European Union.** Evaluations of the EU have been operationalized in a variety of ways. Some scholars used support for integration (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000; Janssen, 1991) to assess citizens’ attitudes towards the EU. Other scholars used satisfaction with (European) democracy as their variable of interest (Karp, Banducci, & Bowler, 2003; Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Aarts & Thomassen, 2008). Both beliefs concerning democracy in general and evaluations of political performance of specific governments are crucial for this item. However, as a single-item subjective indicator, satisfaction with democracy seems very similar to measures of subjective well-being. Canache, Mondak and Seligson (2001) describe four methodological concerns with treating satisfaction with democracy this way: its interpretation may vary across individuals, nations, points in time and context of the survey itself (Canache et al, 2001). Although satisfaction with democracy cannot function as a single-subjective indicator, it still has potential value within a larger ‘democratic performance’ scale. As Linde and Ekman (2003) suggested: “satisfaction with the way democracy works is not an indicator of system legitimacy per se. Rather, it is one indicator of support for the performance of a democratic regime” (p. 401). If we are to connect survey items to the concept of democratic legitimacy, we need multiple indicators to “assess the validity and reliability of a measurement of the popular belief in the legitimacy of democracy” (Linde & Ekman, 2003, p. 406).

In this project, I set out to study the EU democratic performance dimension, which concerns the evaluation of the actual functioning of a democratic political system. It contains judgments about the quality of European institutions and democratic procedures. Performance is an important factor in all types of political regimes: “a regime’s legitimacy is largely defined by its effectiveness to deliver goods to the public” (Linde & Ekman, 2003, p. 400). I define legitimacy, in line with Lipset (1981), as “the capacity of the system to engender and

maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society” (p. 64).

### **Antecedents of EU democratic performance evaluations**

I have established EU democratic performance evaluations as a specific dimension of broader EU attitudes. It concerns the evaluation of the actual functioning of the European democratic system. In this dissertation, I set out to explain the nature of these evaluations, which serve as building blocks for EU support. Several scholars reported fluctuation in EU support, both across countries and over time. A first important consideration here is the question whether these evaluations, these opinions about the EU democratic performance held by its citizens, are variable as well. Do they differ across citizens and member states? And if yes, how can we explain these differences? A equally important consideration is the potential dynamic character of these evaluations: do they change over time? Or are these evaluations rather stable? If not, why do they change? Where do people get new input on EU matters? What are the antecedents of EU evaluations? From the literature, we can make a categorization, dividing the potential antecedents in two groups: individual-level variables and aggregate-level variables.

**Individual-level variables.** Within the group of individual-level variables, distinction can be made between *cognitions, attitudes & orientations (affective), perceptions* and *behavior (actions)*. The first group, *cognitions*, has been central in an investigation of Karp, Banducci and Bowler (2003). The link between satisfaction with democracy and political knowledge is based on the ‘cognitive mobilization’ theory, put forward by Inglehart (1970, p. 47): “Cognitive mobilization is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the development of support for the European Community.” This theory predicts a positive relationship between political knowledge and legitimacy. Karp, Banducci and Bowler investigated if knowledge conditions the relationship between institutional evaluations and satisfaction with democracy. The institutional design appeared an important intervening variable in this effect.

A second group of individual-level variables are at the *attitudinal level*. Attitudes, beliefs, orientations and preferences, not necessarily political, have an impact on satisfaction with democracy. In an attempt to broaden the field of investigation, Neville & Kanji (2002) suggested to include citizens’ orientations toward authority patterns in society and the effect of value change, as complements of the existing explanations of satisfaction with democracy. Similarly, Waldron-Moore (1999) focused on personal experiences and orientations. Psychological attributes, such as dogmatism, trust and patriotism, were taken into account while explaining satisfaction with democracy. Dennis & Owen (2001) considered the

influence of the orientations towards the American party-system. Again, the importance of the institutional design was stressed. Beliefs about democracy (Kornberg & Clarke 1994), and more specifically about the accountability and representativeness of elections (McAllister, 2005), also explain variation in satisfaction with democracy. Broader psychological characteristics, such as cynicism (Nadeau, Blais, Nevitte & Gidengil, 2000) and levels of interpersonal trust also have considerable impact.

As mentioned earlier, the institutional design is an important intervening variable, not only on cognitive or attitudinal level. *Perceptions* of the efficacy of institutions (Anderson & Tverdova, 2001; Cusack, 1999), and more general of democracy (Sarsfield & Echegaray, 2006) are important predictors of levels of satisfaction with democracy. Both specific (electoral institutions, local and national governments) and general (system performance) have been taken into account. Expectations and preferences have considerable influence on those perceptions and its correlation with satisfaction.

Finally, levels of *political behavior and action* are important indicators for satisfaction with democracy. Political capital (Dennis & Owen, 2001) and voluntary association membership (Neville & Kanji, 2002) have been added to the list of explaining variables. Furthermore, the outcome of political participation (winning/losing, being part of the majority or minority) has, at least at short term, a considerable impact on the level of satisfaction with democracy. In this context, Nadeau, Blais, Nevitte & Gidengil (2000) investigated the demonstration effect of elections.

***Aggregate-level variables.*** In addition to individual-level variables, factors at an aggregate level also influence satisfaction with democracy. Several references to the importance of the institutional design have already been made. The perception of efficacy of a regime type is logically depending on the way this regime is organized.

A first broad category is the *performance* of the democratic regime. Satisfaction with the performance of the national regime culminates in satisfaction with democracy in general. Distinction can be made between *economic* and *institutional* performance. Wagner, Schneider and Halla (2009) established a positive correlation between high-quality institutions and satisfaction with democracy, based on six institutional characteristics: better rule of law, lower corruption, smaller shadow economy, less regulated political executive recruitment, less regulation of political participation and better checks and balances. Others, such as Weitz-Shapiro (2007), pointed at the importance of local government efficacy. Economic success also predicts higher levels of satisfaction (Wagner, Schneider & Halla, 2009; Cusack, 1999;

Clarke, Ditt & Kornberg, 1993). Variables, such as economic growth, unemployment rate, inflation rate and economic benefits, clearly influence levels of satisfaction with democracy.

A second, more specific category of variables can be labeled *electoral*. Nadeau, Blais, Nevitte & Gidengil (2000) investigated the influence of the electoral cycle as such on levels of satisfaction with democracy. They discovered a 'honeymoon effect', a short increase in levels of satisfaction in the weeks after elections, as a consequence of both the demonstration effect of those elections and cognitive dissonance. More general, variance in *electoral systems* can have an impact on levels of satisfaction (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Kim, 2009).

A third category of variables is to be found in the *democratic history and culture* of a nation such as the age of democracy (Aarts & Thomassen, 2008; Anderson, 1998) and other constitutional characteristics.

A fourth category could be the *media*. The variables at the aggregate level (electoral institutions, system performance, democratic history) have a severe impact on levels of satisfaction with democracy, mainly as an intermediate variable. Perception of government efficacy depends on the existing institutions. Personal experiences with political participation are framed within an existing democratic culture. In the same way, the *media* can be an intervening variable.

### **Focus of this dissertation**

From this wide variety of potential antecedents, we choose to study EU-evaluations from three different perspectives. A first potential antecedent of EU evaluations is the **national context**. Some scholars argue that a true democracy cannot exist at the European level, due to the absence of a European demos (Martinotti & Stefanizzi, 1995; Przeworski, 1995). A demos is formed when a group of individuals agree to make collectively binding rules. If such rules are applied to individuals who do not see themselves as members of a societal group, it becomes an imposition. Many European citizens still feel attached to their nation states and are not prepared to accept decisions by majority rule at the supranational level. They do not comply with decisions that are imposed on them by a majority of citizens in other member states. The power of national attachment, however, does not depend only on feelings, history or culture. There is a certain economical rationale behind the (non-)existence of national identities. According to Sanchez-Cuenca (2000), European decision-making becomes attractive when benefits can be generated, or when the difference between the performance of national and European institutions is unfavorable for the nation-state. "It is the functioning of the European and national institutions that determines whether the citizens of the member states will accept the basic elements of a supranational democracy" (Sanchez-

Cuenca, 2000, p. 168). The interplay between the supranational and national institutions is crucial for the democratic performance of the European Union. Therefore, characteristics of national institutions should be incorporated to grasp the variation amongst countries in EU evaluations. The central research question in the first chapter will be: *Does the level of national institutional quality affect democratic performance evaluations of the EU at the individual level?*

Furthermore, I will explore the potential effect of **political knowledge** on this interplay between national and supranational institutional quality. As Anderson (1998) described, European citizens tend to base their EU evaluations on their opinions on national politics. They do so because they are not able to distinguish between national and European politics due to a lack of knowledge of the (complex) European policy level. The second research question in the first chapter will then be: *Does political knowledge condition the effect of national institutional quality on democratic performance evaluations of the EU?*

A second potential antecedent is **news media exposure**. In addition to internalized political predispositions, citizens use flows of information in forming and determining their political attitudes and opinions (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006a). Given the fact that citizens obtain their information about the EU mainly from the news media, it is important to study the content and the effect of media messages on EU politics. Furthermore, some scholars argue that the EU suffers from a ‘communication deficit’ (Meyer, 1999) and point at the lack of public debate about European integration (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). Assessing whether media use has an impact on evaluations of EU democratic performance is therefore highly relevant. The direct persuasive effect of media content has been somewhat neglected in political communication research (Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998). In spite of the primary focus in the literature on the cognitive effects of news media, via agenda setting, priming and framing, few researchers have continued to explore the direct persuasive influence of media on political preferences (Lenart, 1994). However, scholars have provided empirical evidence of a direct relationship between newspaper endorsements and voting behavior (Robinson, 1974; Erikson, 1976; Coombs, 1981; Stempel & Windhauser, 1991; Dalton et al., 1998). Zaller (1996) has shown that media content can affect political evaluations. Similar claims have been made about the effect of television news on political attitudes and opinions (Robinson, 1976). In a more recent study, Hopmann, Vliegenthart, de Vreese and Albaek (2010) demonstrated the effect of visibility and tone on party choice. Does the tone of media messages, especially in an election campaign, have an impact on EU evaluations of European citizens as well?

A third potential antecedent of EU evaluations is **interpersonal communication**, which has consistently been viewed as an essential condition for a healthy functioning democracy (Scheufele, 2002; Schudson, 1997). Although most studies on political communication effects leave out interpersonal communication (Glynn, Herbst, O’Keefe, & Shapiro, 1999), it may have an important impact on public opinion. It is considered by some scholars as the most influential source of attitude change, in the absence of other sources of information (Mondak, 1995). People engage in interpersonal conversations far more often than they watch television news or read newspapers (Kirchler, 1989). Furthermore, as Eliasoph (1998, p. 41) noted, it is essential to make sense of the large amount of political information people have to deal with. The role of interpersonal communication has been studied mainly as a mediator for mass media effects. Since Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) introduced their ‘filter hypothesis’, maintaining that personal communication mediates the influence of mass communication on individual voters, many studies have repeated this logic when combining personal and mass communication in effect studies on election campaigns (for an overview, see Schmitt-Beck, 2003). However, both interpersonal and mass communication has changed fundamentally since the heydays of the two step-flow paradigm. “The combination of social isolation, communication channel fragmentation and message targeting technologies have produced a very different information recipient than the audience members of the Eisenhower era” (Bennett & Manheim, 2006, p. 215). Individuals nowadays have greater command of their own information environments, and the social interaction component of the two-step flow may have been replaced. Therefore, I will study the direct effect of the tone of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations.

But what to expect from the interaction between media and interpersonal communication? Several scholars have studied the effect of media and interpersonal communication simultaneously; however, no consensus has been reached on the nature of this combined effect (for an overview, see Lenart, 1994). Do both forms of communication reinforce one another? Or does interpersonal communication compete with media messages for influence over the public opinion? Or does this depend on content features of both types of communication? And what is the role of disagreement within interpersonal communication? In Chapter 2 and 3, I aim to answer three research questions:

*How does the content of mass media and interpersonal communication affect citizens’ evaluations of European democratic performance?*

*Is there a reinforcement effect of both forms of communication on EU democratic performance evaluations?*

*Does disagreement between discussants moderate the effect of interpersonal communication on EU democratic performance evaluations?*

### **What I (intend to) add to the research field**

In this dissertation, I will study a particular dimension of attitudes towards the EU: democratic performance evaluations of the EU. No attempt has yet been done to study this particular facet of EU attitudes from different perspectives. First, I want to construct a valid indicator for EU democratic performance evaluations. A second contribution I intend to make is the construction of an objective indicator of national institutional quality. By incorporating specific institutional characteristics into one single indicator of national institutional quality, I hope to measure the impact of the national institutional context of citizens' democratic performance evaluations of the EU. Third, I model political knowledge as a moderator for the interplay between the national and the supranational level for the very first time. Most studies have studied the direct effect of political knowledge on EU evaluations (Anderson, 1998; Karp et al., 2003). Fourth, I will study the effect of tone congruence on the effect of the interplay between media and interpersonal communication on EU evaluations. Most scholars studying the interplay between both forms of communication did not account for such content-related contingencies.

### **Outline of the dissertation**

EU democratic performance evaluations are the central concept of this dissertation. I will study the main concept from three different perspectives. In the first chapter I will adopt a macro perspective, where I will assess the impact of the national institutional context on EU evaluations. I will consider the impact of political knowledge in this process. In the second and third chapter, I will study the potential dynamic character of EU democratic performance evaluations. In Chapter 2, I will focus on the effects of the campaign for the EP elections. Do these evaluations change during an election campaign due to media and interpersonal messages? Do political information and evaluative tone have an impact on individual assessments of the EU? In the third chapter, an experimental design will be used to measure the effect of tone congruence between media and interpersonal communication. Furthermore, I will study the effect of disagreement between discussants in interpersonal communication. In the conclusion, I will discuss the main findings and the implications of those findings and I will suggest directions for future research.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “The conventional wisdom held that European citizens merely provided a ‘permissive consensus’ that enabled elites to pursue the European ideal unconstrained by pressure from the public” (Eichengreen & Dalton, 1993, p. 507).

<sup>2</sup> According to Hix (2008), there is no single definition of the democratic deficit in the EU. I define the democratic deficit as “the growing perception that the EU is an undemocratic system and that something should be done about it” (Hix, 2008, p. 68).

<sup>3</sup> EU evaluations and EU democratic performance evaluations will be used interchangeably.

<sup>4</sup> All three chapters were originally written in the form of articles, and can be read as separate papers. Therefore, there might be some overlap between the three chapters.



## REFERENCES

- Aarts, K. and Thomassen, J. (2008) 'Satisfaction with democracy: do institutions matter?', *Electoral Studies* 27(1): 5-18.
- Abts, K., and Krouwel, A. (2007) Varieties of euroscepticism and populist mobilization: transforming attitudes from mild euroscepticism to harsh eurocynicism. *Acta Politica*, 42, 252-270.
- Anderson, C. J. and Guillory, C.A. (1997) 'Political institutions and satisfaction with democracy: A cross-national analysis of consensus and majoritarian systems', *American Political Science Review* 91(1): 66-81.
- Anderson, C., & Tverdova, Y. (2001) Winners, Losers, and Attitudes about Government in Contemporary Democracies. *International Political Science Review*, 22(4), 321-338.
- Bennet, W.L., & Manheim, J. (2006). The one step flow of communication. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Scienc*, 608(1), 213-232.
- Boomgaarden, H., Schuck, A., Elenbaas, M. and De Vreese, C. (2011) 'Mapping EU attitudes: Conceptual and empirical dimensions of euroscepticism and EU support', *European Union Politics*, doi:10.1177/1465116510395411
- Canache, D., Mondak, J.J., & Seligson, M. (2001), Meaning and Measurement in cross-national research on satisfaction with democracy. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 65, 506-528.
- Clarke, H., Dutt, N., & Kornberg, A.(1993). The Political Economy of Attitudes toward Polity and Society in Western European Democracies. *The journal of politics* 55(4), 998-1021.
- Clarke, H., & Kornberg, A. (1994). Beliefs about Democracy and Satisfaction with Democratic Government: the Canadian Case. *Political Research Quarterly*, 47, 537-63.
- Coombs, S. (1981). *Editorial endorsements and electoral outcomes*. In M. MacKuen & S. Coombs (Eds.), *More than news*. Beverly Hills, Sage Publications.
- Cusack, T. (1999). The Shaping of Popular Satisfaction with Government and Regime Performance in Germany. *British Journal of Political Science*, 29, 641-672.
- Dalton, R. (1996) "Political Cleavages, Issues, and Electoral Change," in L. LeDuc, R. G. Niemi, and P. Norris, *Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996, pp. 319-342.
- Dalton, R., Beck P.M., & Huckfeldt, R. (1998). Partisan cues and the media: Information flows in the 1992 presidential election. *American Political Science Review*, 92(1), 111-126.

- Dennis, J., & Owen, D. (2001). Popular Satisfaction with the Party System and Representative Democracy in the United States. *International Political Science Review*, 22(4), 399-415.
- de Vreese, C.H., & Boomgaarden, H.G. (2006a). How content moderates the effects of television news on political knowledge and engagement. *Acta Politica. International Journal of Political Science*, 41, 317-41.
- de Vreese, C. H., Lauf, E., & Peter, J. (2007). The Media and European Parliament Elections: Second-rate Coverage of a Second-Order Event? In W. van der Brug & C. van der Eijk (Eds), *European Elections and Domestic Politics: Lessons from the Past and Scenarios for the Future*. Paris: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Duch, R., and Taylor, M. (1997). Economics and the vulnerability of the pan-European institutions. *Political Behavior*, 19(1), 65-80.
- Easton, D. (1975) 'A re-assessment of the concept of political support', *British Journal of Political Science* 5(4): 435-57.
- Eichenberg, R. C., & Dalton, R. (1993) 'Europeans and the European community: The dynamics of public support for European integration', *International Organization*, 47(4), 507-34.
- Eichenberg, R.C., & Dalton, R. (2007) Post-Maastricht blues: the Transformation of citizen support for European integration, 1973-2004. *Acta Politica*, 42, 128-152.
- Eliasoph, N. (1998). *Avoiding politics: How Americans produce apathy in everyday life*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Erikson, R. (1976). The influence of newspaper endorsements in presidential elections: The case of 1964. *American Journal of Political Science*, 20(2), 207-233.
- Glynn, C., Herbst, S., O'Keefe, G., & Shapiro, R. (1999). *Public Opinion*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Hardy, B., & Scheufele, D. (2009) Presidential campaign dynamics and the ebb and flow of talk as a moderator: Media exposure, knowledge, and political discussion. *Communication Theory* 19, 89-101.
- Hix, S. (2008). *What's wrong with the European Union & how to fix it*. Bodmin, Cornwall: MPG Books.
- Hobolt, S. (2009) *Europe in question: Referendums on European integration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2008) European Union? *Western European Politics*, 31(1-2), 108-129.

- Hopmann, D., Vliegenthart, R., de Vreese, C., & Albaek, E. (2010) Effects of election news coverage: How visibility and tone influence party choice. *Political Communication*, 27(4), 389-405.
- Inglehart, R. (1977). *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Janssen, J. (1991) 'Postmaterialism, cognitive mobilization and public support for European integration', *British Journal of Political Science* 21(4): 443-68.
- Karp, J., Banducci, S. and Bowler, S. (2003) 'To know it is to love it? Satisfaction with democracy in the European Union', *Comparative Political Studies* 36(3), 271-92.
- Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. (1955). *Personal influence: The part played by people in the flow of mass communications*. New York: Free Press.
- Kim, M. (2009). Cross-National Analyses of Satisfaction with Democracy and Ideological Congruence. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, 19, 49-72.
- Kirchler, E. (1989). Everyday life experiences at home: An interaction diary approach to assess marital relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 2, 311-336.
- Lenart, S. (1994). *Shaping political attitudes: The impact of interpersonal communication and mass media*. London: Sage Publications.
- Lindberg, L.N. and Scheingold, S.A. (1970) *Europe's would-be polity: Patterns of change in the European Community*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Linde, J., & Ekman, J. (2003). Satisfaction with democracy: a Note on a frequently used indicator in comparative politics. *European Journal of Political Research* 42, 391-408.
- Lipset, S.M. (1981) *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Martinotti, G. and Stefanizzi, S. (1995) 'Europeans and the nation state', in O. Niedermeyer and R. Sinnott, (eds.) *Public Opinion and Internationalized Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 163-59.
- McAllister, I. (2005). Accountability, Representation and Satisfaction with Democracy. *International journal of public opinion research*, 17 (3), 371-379.
- McNamara, K.R. (1998) *The Currency of Ideas: Monetary Politics in the European Union*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Meyer, C. (1999) 'Political legitimacy and the invisibility of politics: Exploring the European Union's communication deficit', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 37: 617-39.
- Mondak, J.J. (1995). Media exposure and political discussion in the U.S. elections. *Journal of Politics*, 57(1), 62-85.

- Moravcsik, A. (1991) Negotiating the Single European Act: National interests and conventional statecraft in the European Community. *International Organisation*, 45(1), 19-56.
- Nadeau, R., Blais, A., Nevitte, N., & Gidengil, E. (2000). *Elections and Satisfaction with Democracy*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C.
- Nevitte, N., & Kanji, M. (2002). Authority Orientations and Political Support: A Cross-national Analysis of Satisfaction with Governments and Democracy. *Comparative sociology*, 1, 387.
- Peng, N., & Hackley, C. (2007) Political marketing communications planning in the UK and Taiwan: Comparative insights from leading practitioners, *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 25(5), 483 – 498.
- Przeworski, A. (1995) *Sustainable Democracy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Robinson, J.P. (1976). Interpersonal influence in election campaigns: Two-step flow hypothesis. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 40, 304-319.
- Rohrschneider, R. (2002) ‘The democracy deficit and mass support for an EU-wide government’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 46: 463-75.
- Sánchez-Cuenca, I. (2000) ‘The political basis of support for European integration’, *European Union Politics* 1(2): 147-71.
- Sarsfield, R., & Echegaray, F. (2006). Opening the Black Box : How Satisfaction with Democracy and its Perceived Efficacy Affect Regime Preference in Latin America. *International journal of public opinion research*, 18(2), 153-173.
- Scheuer, A. (2005) *How Europeans see Europe: Structure and dynamics of European legitimacy beliefs*, Amsterdam: Vossiuspers UvA.
- Scheufele, D. A. (2002). Examining differential gains from mass media and their implications for participatory behavior. *Communication Research*, 29, 46-65.
- Schmitt-Beck, R. (2003). Mass communication, personal communication and vote choice: The filter hypothesis of media influence in comparative perspective. *British Journal of Political Science*, 33(2), 233-259.
- Schudson, M. (1997). Why conversation is not the soul of democracy. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 14, 297-309.
- Smith, D., and Wanke, J. (1993) Completing the Single European Market: an Analysis of the impact on the member states. *American Journal of Political Science*, 37(2), 529-554.

- Stempel, G., & Windhauser, J. (1991). *The media in the 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Wagner, A., Schneider, F., Halla, M. (2009). The Quality of Institutions and Satisfaction with Democracy in Western Europe – a Panel Analysis. *European journal of political economy*, 25, 30-41.
- Waldron-Moore, P. (1999). Eastern Europe at the crossroads of democratic transition: Evaluating support for democratic institutions, satisfaction with democratic government, and consolidation of democratic regimes. *Comparative Political Studies*, 32, 32-36.
- Weitz-Shapiro, R. (2007), The Local Connection. Local Government Performance and Satisfaction With Democracy in Argentina. *Comparative Political Studies*.
- Zaller, J.R. (1996). ‘The myth of massive media impact revived: New support for a discredited idea’. In Mutz, D.C., Sniderman, P.M. and Brody, R.A. (eds) *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press)

## **Chapter 1: Second-Order Institutions: National Institutional Quality as a Yardstick for EU Evaluation**

*A version of this chapter was published in Journal of European Public Policy, 19(7), 1071-1088.*

Evaluations of the democratic performance of European institutions vary across individuals and member states. Research suggests that opinion formation on the performance of a democratic regime is contingent on a cost-benefit assessment people make about the regime (Alvarez & Franklin, 1994). These individual cost-benefit assessments can be based on various considerations, such as evaluations of political performance (Klingemann & Fuchs, 1995; Rose & Mishler, 2002), economic performance (Lewis-Beck, 1988; Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Rose, Mishler, & Haerpfer, 1998) and expectations of governance in the near future (Stokes, 2001; Echegaray & Elordi, 2001).

The European supranational polity is different from national democratic systems in many ways and the formation of opinions at the European level is therefore likely to be different from the national level. European decision-making becomes attractive when benefits can be generated, or when the difference between the performance of national and European institutions is unfavorable for the nation-state (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000). The balance between perceptions of supranational and national institutions may be crucial for evaluations of the EU democratic performance. Therefore, one needs to take the characteristics of national institutions into account to further the understanding of citizens' evaluations of the quality of the EU's democratic process. Previous research used subjective indicators such as institutional trust (Karp, Banducci, & Bowler, 2003) or objective measures of corruption (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000) to account for these national characteristics. This study contributes to the existing literature by incorporating specific institutional characteristics into one single indicator of national institutional quality. As such, I provide an objective measure of national institutional quality as a contextual determinant for individual assessments of the quality of EU democratic performance.

Furthermore, I deploy political knowledge as a moderator in this process. The main effect of political knowledge on EU evaluations has been studied by many scholars, yielding mixed results (for an overview, see Karp et al., 2003). To date, no attempt has been made to study the impact of political knowledge as a moderator of the effect of national institutional quality on EU evaluations. According to Rohrschneider (2002), the contrast in institutional quality between the two levels increases the salience of the EU's democratic deficit. Higher levels of domestic political knowledge can strengthen the effect of this relation between the national and supranational level.

In short, this chapter aims to make several contributions, at the analytical, the theoretical and the societal level. I make an analytical contribution by incorporating specific institutional characteristics into one single indicator of national institutional quality, and by deploying political knowledge as a moderator within this process. At the theoretical level, I try to explain how individual judgments are formed and influenced, both by individual and national contextual factors. At the societal level, it is important to fully understand the way individual assessments of the democratic performance of the EU are formed and influenced, in order to deal appropriately with the concerns of the European population.

The impact of *objective differences* in institutional quality between countries on EU evaluations is the main focus of this study. After defining democratic performance evaluations of the EU as a distinct dimension of EU attitudes, I will articulate my expectations about the impact of differences in national institutional quality on EU democratic performance evaluations. In a next step, I will link these differences between countries to the potential impact of political knowledge on EU evaluations, addressing the key question: *does political knowledge condition the effect of national institutional quality on democratic performance evaluations of the EU?*

### **Democratic Performance at the European Level**

Attitudes towards European governance are structured along related but distinct dimensions (Rohrschneider, 2002; Scheuer, 2005). They can be directed towards different objects, and they can be of affective or utilitarian nature (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & De Vreese, 2011). This distinction is partially based on Easton's model of system support (1975). Easton differentiates between three different objects of political support: the community, the regime and the authorities, and two modes of support: specific and diffuse. Whereas specific support depends on the output of politics and policies, diffuse support varies between different objects of support. Lindberg and Scheingold (1970) differentiated between affective and utilitarian support for respectively vague ideals and policy interests. To fully

capture the multi-dimensionality of EU attitudes, studies of public opinion about the EU should reflect on these different types of support. A recent analysis of Boomgaarden et al. (2011) resulted in five distinct dimensions. In this study, I set out to explain democratic performance, which concerns the evaluation of the actual functioning of a democratic political system. It contains judgments about the quality of European institutions and democratic procedures. In line with Rohrschneider (2002), Scheuer (2005) suggested that citizens do not connect their evaluations of EU democratic performance with their political support for further integration. These evaluations serve as building blocks towards future support, and are as such crucial considerations in the process of opinion formation (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000; Rohrschneider, 2002). I pursue this line of work and assess evaluations of democratic performance above and beyond general EU support.

### **Antecedents of Democratic Performance Evaluations in the EU**

Previous studies have suggested different views on the question whether EU opinions are conditioned by the European or the national environment. Some scholars consider the EU to be the most important actor determining people's opinions about the European policy level (Gabel, 1998a; Gabel, 1998b; Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993). EU events and policies are crucial for creating and influencing evaluations. According to Gabel (1998a), more information and higher awareness lead to non-conditional views of the EU. Support then will be developed in response to the EU performance itself, and consequently the public will agree to cede national sovereignty regardless of its assessment of the nation-state. By attributing losses or benefits to the European level, citizens evaluate whether European institutions are working satisfactorily (Kritzinger, 2003). Other scholars regard the nation-state as the central factor influencing public opinion about the supranational level (Janssen, 1991; Martinotti & Stefanizzi, 1995; Anderson, 1998). Lack of interest, knowledge and information (Anderson, 1998; Meyer, 1999; Bennett, 1996) prevents people from developing EU specific opinions. Furthermore, the perception of national factors is more direct and more immediate (Kritzinger, 2003). "For most people, this means that they rely on what they know and think about domestic politics" (Anderson, 1998, p. 576). Compared to the national level, the European policy level is considered of minor importance, or "second-order" (Schmitt, 2005).

A similar pattern can be found in the literature on actual voting behavior. Schmitt (2005) found confirmation for the longstanding second-order national election model (Reif & Schmitt, 1980) in the European Parliamentary (EP) elections of 2004. Due to a lack of information about the EU, citizens use cognitive shortcuts from national politics to determine their EP vote (Schmitt, 2005). As such, national politics remains the central issue in EP



elections. However, recent findings suggest that European issues increasingly matter in EP elections. Studies from the EP elections in 1999 (dan der Brug, van der Eijk, & Franklin, 2007), 2004 (de Vries & Tillman, 2011), and 2009 (de Vries, van der Brug, van Egmond, & van der Eijk, 2011) demonstrate that EU attitudes affect vote choice in EU elections. Confirmation for this ‘Europe matters’ model can also be found in the EU referendum literature on the importance of EU attitudes for voting (Hobolt, 2009).

Recent studies have suggested a third option, with the interplay between national and European factors as the central determinant (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000; Rohrschneider, 2002; Burgoon, 2009). In a study of social welfare politics, Burgoon (2009) compared three perspectives on how provisions at one level affect support at the other. First, provisions at the national level could dampen support for European-level policies; second, provisions at the European level could undermine support for national welfare policies; and finally, the two could have separate politics, with little influence on one another. Additionally, Burgoon suggested a fourth perspective, treating both levels as imperfect substitutes:

“This view comes closest to Sanchez-Cuenca’s claim (2000) that citizens are mindful of how EU governance has opportunity costs for national governance, judging such costs as lower to the extent that national governance is found lacking owing to, for instance, corruption” (Burgoon, 2009, p. 433).

If the European level and the national level are, indeed, imperfect substitutes, then provisions at one level will *indirectly* affect demand at another level. Although Burgoon based his claim only on the social welfare domain, his claim might be generable to the quality of national and supranational institutions in general.

### **National Institutional Quality**

Many authors agree that institutional quality matters for democratic evaluation (Almond & Verba, 1964; Klingeman & Fuchs, 1995; Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Klingeman, 1999; Rose & Mishler, 2002; Blais & Gelinau, 2007; Aarts & Thomassen, 2008; Wagner, Schneider, & Halla, 2009). Wagner et al. (2009) established a positive correlation between high-quality institutions and satisfaction with national democracy. They used six institutional characteristics: rule of law, corruption, shadow economy, regulation of political executive recruitment, regulation of political participation and checks and balances. Do these measures of national institutional quality have a similar influence on the evaluation of institutions at a higher (supranational) level, the EU?

According to Sanchez-Cuenca (2000), EU support depends on the interplay between national and supranational politics, which is “based on the effect of popular perceptions about

national and supranational institutions: the worse citizens' opinions of national institutions and the better their opinion of supranational ones, the stronger their support for European integration" (p. 169).

I expect a similar effect on the evaluation of European democratic performance. The institutional quality within a country provides a framework that is unique for every country. National institutions then function as a yardstick for democratic evaluation at a higher level. Similarly, Rohrschneider (2002) argued that the quality of national institutions affects the effect of perceived democracy deficit on EU support. "The quality of national institutions affects how much weight individuals attach to flaws of EU institutions" (p. 465). In countries with high-quality institutions, the contrast in institutional quality between the two levels increases the salience of the EU's democratic deficit, which in turn increases the probability that this issue would influence citizens' evaluations of the democratic performance of the EU. In countries where the difference in institutional quality is balanced in favor of the EU, the structures of the EU can be perceived as an asset, rather than a liability. "The quality of national institutions enhances the odds that the EU's democracy deficit becomes politicized" (Rohrschneider, 2002, p. 466).

Rohrschneider drew a parallel with the young Central and Eastern European democracies: "One general lesson, then, is that citizens judge new institutions against their experience with the regime that is to be replaced" (p. 472). Evaluations of the EU are indirectly shaped by the quality of national institutions; in a similar way as evaluations of former regimes affect support for democracies in Central Europe (Mishler & Rose, 1997). The better national institutions are, the more critical citizens will be when evaluating supranational institutions. An earlier attempt to study the EU attitudes within Eastern and Central European countries has been done by Christin (2005). He elaborated on the effect of political and economical reforms in Eastern European countries on attitudes towards the EU during the 1990s, before these countries became EU members. His results confirmed the expectation that efficient democratic performance at the national level enhances the existence of skepticism towards the European democratic performance (Christin, 2005). Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) found evidence for a direct effect of national institutional quality on EU support. He stated that higher levels of corruption at the national level directly increase EU support. In this article, I move beyond this focus on corruption and apply the same logic to six national institutional characteristics. I expect a contrasting effect of institutional quality on citizens' EU performance evaluations.

Hypothesis 1: The higher the quality of citizens' national institutions is, the more negative their evaluations of the EU's democratic performance will be.

**Political knowledge: know more, like more?**

Several studies have shown that political knowledge is related to institutional characteristics, such as political efficacy and political support (Almond & Verba, 1964; Weatherford, 1991). Scholars studying the main effect of political knowledge on EU evaluations have reported mixed results (Karp et al., 2003). Depending on the theoretical argument, one could expect positive or negative effects of political knowledge on democratic performance evaluations of the EU. Most studies did not distinguish between domestic political knowledge and EU specific knowledge. However, the domain-specificity is crucial: even individuals who are well informed in general do not necessarily hold or gain knowledge in specific domains, such as EU level policies (McGraw & Pinney, 1990). In this study, I treat the national and supranational policy level as imperfect substitutes (Burgoon, 2009; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000). Therefore, I need to distinguish between knowledge of domestic politics and knowledge of European politics.

I expect that domestic political knowledge moderates the effect of national institutional quality on democratic performance evaluations of the EU. The more citizens in countries with high institutional quality are aware of their domestic politics, and therefore of the difference between domestic and supranational institutions, the less positive they will be about the European institutions. When national institutional quality is low, domestic political knowledge will have a positive effect on those evaluations. In these countries, the balance is in favor of the supranational level. Awareness of the flaws of one's own domestic institutions makes evaluations of supranational institutions more positive.

Hypothesis 2: The higher the level of citizens' national political knowledge is, the larger the negative effect of national institutional quality will be on citizens' evaluations of the EU's democratic performance.

## **Method**

### **Data**

I rely on data from a voter survey<sup>1</sup> conducted in the context of the EP elections of 2009 in 21 member states<sup>2</sup>. The survey was conducted using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI). It included a number of items measuring individual perceptions and evaluations concerning democratic satisfaction, political trust, efficacy, knowledge, interest and participation. It was held in twenty-one of the current European member states. As such, testing aggregate- and individual-level variables simultaneously is possible.

To assess whether institutional quality at national level affects democratic performance evaluations of the EU, country-level data are added to the dataset. Kaufmann, Kraay, and Zoido-Labaton (2002) filtered out six aggregate governance indicators from a large variety of partly overlapping governance indicator databases. On a yearly basis, the World Bank provides a Governance Index based on those indicators. I used the 2008 data (The World Bank Group, 2010) on the indicators.

## Measures

**Dependent variable.** In the extant literature, democratic performance evaluations of the EU have been operationalized in several ways. Some scholars used support for integration (Janssen, 1991; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000) to test citizens' attitudes towards the EU. Other scholars used satisfaction with (European) democracy (SWD) as their variable of interest (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Karp et al., 2003; Aarts & Thomassen, 2008). Boomgaarden et al. (2011) distinguished the democratic performance dimension from four other dimensions of EU attitudes. I will use this democratic performance scale of four items (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.828; Explained variance = 66 %; Eigenvalue = 2.64) as the dependent variable, measuring evaluation of the EU's democratic performance. As such, I constructed an adequate measure of democratic performance evaluations at the European level, firstly, because I use four items instead of one, secondly, because the four items load nicely on the same component of EU attitudes, and thirdly, because the separate items are more precise measures of EU performance evaluation. The first item measures the satisfaction with European democracy: *How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in the European Union?* Respondents could choose between seven categories, ranging from 'not at all satisfied' (1) to 'very satisfied' (7). For the other three items, respondents had to indicate to what extent they agreed with the following statements: (a) *The European Union functions according to democratic principles.* (b) *The decision making process in the European Union is transparent.* (c) *The European Union functions well as it is.* Again, respondents could choose between seven answer categories, ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) till 'strongly agree' (7). By averaging the responses to these items, I created a democratic performance scale<sup>3</sup>, ranging from 1 to 7 (see Table I.1).

**Table I.1 Descriptives of Dependent and Independent Variables From Panel Survey Data**

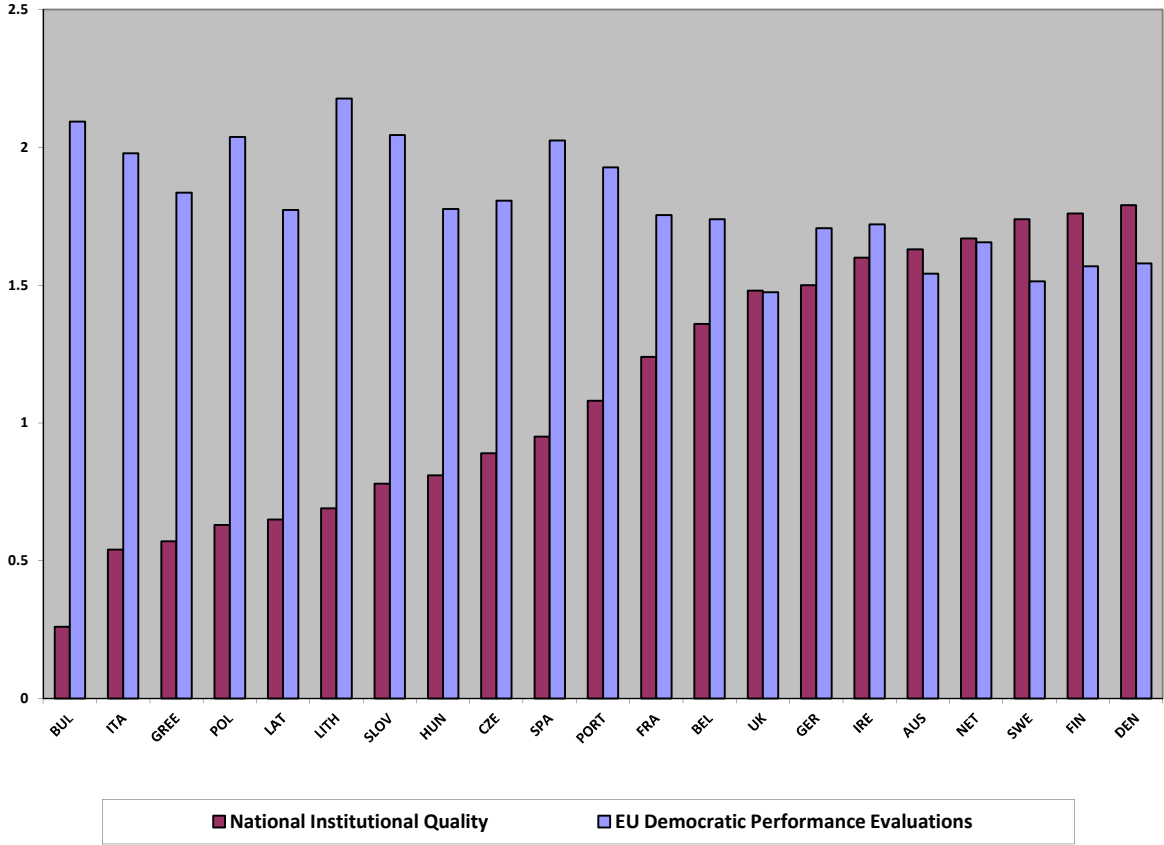
Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Democratic performance (D.V.)	32411	1	7	3.5913	1.20386
Domestic political knowledge	32411	0	1	0.7175	0.35258
Political knowledge EU	32411	0	1	0.54	0.668
SwND	32411	1	7	3.74	1.690
Benefits membership EU	32410	1	7	4.34	1.809
Media use	32411	0	18.87	3.65	3.04176
Education	32411	1	3	1.86	0.942
Age	32411	16	92	38.75	13.198
Gender	32411	0	1	0.54	0.498

### Independent variables

**Institutional quality.** As mentioned earlier, I develop an indicator of good governance, using the six measures used by the World Bank in their Governance Index. Kaufmann et al. (2002) define governance broadly as the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. They flesh out six indicators of good governance from the large variety of indicator databases. ‘*Voice and accountability*’ captures the process in which authority is selected and/or replaced. It includes aspects of the political context such as civil liberties, political rights and independence of the media. ‘*Political instability and violence*’ taps into the likelihood of wrenching changes in government, which has a direct effect on the continuity of policies. ‘*Government effectiveness*’ measures the quality of public service provision, the competence of civil servants and the credibility of the government. ‘*Regulatory burden*’ is focused on the existence of market-unfriendly policies and burdens imposed by regulation. ‘*Rule of law*’ measures the extent to which the agents abide by the rules of society and have confidence in the judiciary. ‘*Control for corruption*’ measures how successful a country is in keeping the exercise of public power for private gains at a minimum (Kaufman et al., 2002). As these indicators are partially overlapping, the estimate of quality of governance for each country is the mean of these six indicators. As such, I created a unique objective measure of national institutional quality (Eigenvalue=5.12; Explained variance=85.33%; Cronbach’s Alpha=0.94). The scores for each country in Figure I.1 indicate

that national institutions of Bulgaria have the lowest score (0.26) and that institutional quality is the highest in Denmark (1.80).

**Figure I.1 Quality of Institutions and Satisfaction with European Democracy, per Country**



*Note.* Institutional Quality: N = 21. Mean = 1.12. St. Deviation = 0.47. Democratic Performance Evaluations: N = 32410. Mean = 3.67. St. Deviation = 1.24. For graphical representation, values of democratic performance evaluations have been divided by factor 2.

**Domestic political knowledge.** The second independent variable is domestic political knowledge. I make a distinction between domestic political knowledge and EU specific political knowledge. To measure domestic political knowledge, I use two multiple-choice questions on factual knowledge of the national political system (see Appendix). A “don’t know” option was included. Incorrect and don’t know answers were coded 0, correct answers were coded 1 (for descriptive statistics of the variables used, see Table I.1). After summing the scores for each individual, I divided them by two for analytical convenience.

**Satisfaction with National Democracy.** Due to a lack of knowledge, people may fail to distinguish between the national and the supranational level. While more knowledgeable citizens have a greater store of EU information available, low-knowledge citizens tend to use evaluations of national governments (Martinotti & Stefanizzi, 1995; Karp et al., 2003). This is in line with theories of survey item response: citizens' responses to survey questions are based on the most salient and immediate considerations available (Zaller, 1992, p. 49-51). As such, the effect of satisfaction with national democracy potentially wipes out the indirect effect of domestic political knowledge on EU evaluations. Therefore, I control for satisfaction with national democracy. I used the original satisfaction with democracy measure: "*Regardless of who is in government, on the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in [COUNTRY]?*" Note that I mention explicitly that this democratic evaluation should not include the performance of the current government. Again, this item is measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, with 4 as the middle category.

#### **Control variables<sup>4</sup>**

**Benefits of EU membership.** Previous research suggested that individual levels of EU support are positively related to perceived economic benefits a member state derives from EU membership (Gabel & Palmer, 1995; Karp et al., 2003). Similarly, perceived costs and benefits of EU membership for one's own country are likely to also affect evaluations of the EU's democratic performance. I therefore control for this effect. As in the Eurobarometer, respondents are asked to assess whether their country benefits from its EU membership. "*[COUNTRY] has on balance benefited from being a member of the European Union.*" This item is measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, with 4 as the middle category.

**EU specific knowledge.** To measure EU specific political knowledge, I asked two multiple-choice questions about the recent institutional reforms in the EU (see Appendix). I followed the same coding procedure as used for the domestic political questions<sup>5</sup>.

**Socio-economic Background.** Three variables were included to control for other potentially confounding factors: age, gender and education (Karp et al., 2003). I used a dummy for education dividing the respondents in three groups: low education, middle education and high education, which generally boils down to the completion of primary school (low), high school (middle) and university/college (high).

**GDP per capita<sup>6</sup>.** On the country level, I included GDP per capita as a control measure of economic wealth, which is likely to be correlated with lower levels of satisfaction with European institutions (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000).

**Net benefit EU membership.** The net transfers from the EU to the country can be a good predictor for EU support (Karp et al., 2003). Therefore, I included the net benefit (percentage of GDP) each country gets from EU membership as a control measure.

**Years of EU membership.** Awareness of the difference between national and European institutional quality can depend on the number of years a country has been member of the EU. Therefore, I control for the years of EU membership per country.

### **Analysis**

To test the hypotheses formulated above, I employ multilevel modeling techniques. I do not use the more common approach of estimating ordinary (OLS) regression models, as the assumption of independence of the residuals, fundamental to OLS regression analysis, is violated. This is because the values of the dependent variable are more similar among citizens within countries than among citizens in different countries. Eleven percent of the variance of the dependent variable (significantly different from zero,  $p < .05$ ), can be attributed to this nesting of citizens within countries. If I ignored this nested structure of the data, I would underestimate the standard errors of the regression coefficients, which might lead us to find relationships to be statistically significant even if they are not (so-called ‘type-1 errors’). Multilevel modeling remedies this problem (e.g., Snijders & Bosker, 1999; Goldstein, 2003). I distinguish between two levels of analysis, the individual level and the country level, and simultaneously estimate effects at both levels as well as cross-level interaction effects.

### **Results**

The results are displayed in Table I.2. The random effects model (Model 2.1) shows the negative effect of national institutional quality on evaluations of democratic performance. A difference of one unit in institutional quality, for example between Poland (0.63) and Austria (1.63), causes a decrease in EU democratic performance evaluations between Poland and Austria of 0.466 (significant at the  $p=0.01$  level) on a scale from 1 to 7. These results support the first hypothesis: national institutional quality has a significant negative effect on EU democratic performance evaluations. I controlled for the effect of perceived costs and benefits of EU membership for one’s own country. The results show that those perceived benefits have a significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) effect ( $b=0.274$ ) on democratic performance evaluations of the EU. Citizens perceiving their country’s benefits as optimal (7) are far more satisfied with EU democratic performance than those who perceive those benefits as minimal (1): their evaluation of EU democratic performance is 1.644 higher on a seven-point scale. Furthermore, I controlled for the net benefits each country acquires from EU membership, and for the effect of economic wealth on EU democratic performance evaluations. Neither of



those control variables had a significant effect, nor did the inclusion of those variables alter the results.

**Table I.2 Effects of Individual- and Country-Level Variables on Democratic Performance Evaluations of the EU: Multi Level Model Estimates**

<b>Independent variable</b>	<b>Model 2.1</b>	<b>Model 2.2</b>
Constant	2.188*** (0.072)	2.198*** (0.075)
Institutional Quality (n=21)	- 0.466** (0.049)	- 0.472** (0.052)
Political knowledge (dom)	-0.012 (0.054)	0.319** (0.073)
Political knowledge (EU)	0.014* (0.008)	0.014* (0.008)
<u>Control:</u>		
Education	-0.033*** (0.006)	-0.033*** (0.006)
Gender	0.118*** (0.011)	0.118*** (0.011)
Age	-0.007*** (0.000)	-0.007*** (0.000)
Media use	0.008*** (0.002)	0.008*** (0.002)
Satisfaction with Nat Dem	0.257*** (0.012)	0.256*** (0.012)
Benefits of EU member	0.274*** (0.003)	0.273*** (0.003)
<u>Interactions:</u>		
Pol know(dom) * Inst Qual		-0.297** (0.055)
Pol know(dom) * SwND	-0.029* (0.010)	-0.028* (0.010)
-2*log	86861.696	86844.471

*Note.* Standard errors are in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ . N=32411

In a next step, I added the interaction of domestic political knowledge with national institutional quality to test hypothesis 2. The results are displayed in the second column (Model 2.2) of Table I.2, which indicates that the interaction between domestic political knowledge and institutional quality has a significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) negative effect ( $b = -0.297$ ) on EU democratic performance evaluations<sup>7</sup>. The negative effect of national institutional quality on EU evaluations increases as the level of domestic political knowledge increases. Furthermore, the model fit significantly ( $2 * LL$  decreases 17 points) improves when this interaction is added. This result confirms the expected moderating effect of domestic political knowledge on the linkage between national institutional quality and EU evaluations

(hypothesis two). I controlled for the interaction between satisfaction with national democracy and domestic political knowledge, which had, as theoretically expected, a significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) negative effect ( $b = -0.028$ )<sup>8</sup>.

### **Discussion**

The aim of this study was twofold: assessing the influence of the quality of institutions at the national level on democratic performance evaluations of the EU, and exploring the moderating effect of political knowledge on the influence of institutional quality on those evaluations. As Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) showed, evaluations of a supranational policy level depend on the interplay between national and supranational institutions. I combined survey data about citizens' perceptions of political performance with objective measures of national institutional quality from 21 EU member states. With these data, I constructed a multilevel model, which enabled me to examine the differential impact of national institutional quality on evaluations of the EU's democratic performance, and the role political knowledge plays with regard to this effect.

I found support for the first hypothesis: there is a negative relation between national institutional quality and democratic performance evaluation of the EU. Higher institutional quality at the national level has a negative effect on the evaluation of European governance. Danish citizens, for instance, are in general more critical towards EU performance than, say, Bulgarians. Being confronted with low-quality institutions at the national level makes citizens more positive about European institutions. People might be more willing to adopt supranational policy when the difference between the performance of national and European institutions is unfavorable for the nation-state. As Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) stated, the interplay between supranational and national institutions is crucial for evaluations of the EU's democratic performance. Sanchez-Cuenca tested this hypothesis using corruption as an indicator of institutional quality at the national level. Other scholars used subjective measures of institutional quality, such as trust and satisfaction with national democracy (Karp et al., 2003). In this study, I combined six indicators of good governance (Kaufmann et al., 2002) into one indicator of national institutional quality. By using an objective indicator, accounting for a wide range of institutional characteristics, I established a linkage between contextual factors at the national level and citizens' perceptions of EU governance. These results also indicate the existence of different perceptions across countries, both on the actual performance of European institutions, and on the expectations citizens have towards those institutions. This finding is important, as it demonstrates that legitimacy concerns should also be acknowledged differentially across countries. The overall pattern of these country

differences can be perceived as a division between East and West, or as a division between new and old members, because of differential familiarity levels with the EU, stemming from a (lack of a) socialization process. I tested for both categorizations, but neither the East-West divide, nor the old-new categorization was significant. Still, the fact that Eastern Europeans appear more satisfied with EU democratic performance leaves us with some questions this study cannot answer. Is this only temporal? Will this pattern (from 2009) persist when citizens in the new member states get more acquainted with the European institutions? Only future research can provide answers on these questions.

A second aim of this study was to explore the moderating effect of political knowledge on the effect of institutional quality on democratic performance evaluations of the EU. The multilevel dataset enabled us to explore this linkage for the first time. The results support hypothesis two: the effect of national institutional quality on EU evaluations is moderated by domestic political knowledge. The negative effect of national institutional quality increases as levels of domestic political knowledge increase. This finding has several implications. First, it strengthens the support for the first hypothesis. National institutional quality has a stronger effect for those who know more about national politics. The more citizens know about their own national politics, the more they use this knowledge as a yardstick for evaluation at supranational level. Apart from a differential approach across countries, one should as well differentiate within each country in attempting to deal with legitimacy issues. Furthermore, these results confirm the importance of distinguishing between different types of knowledge. Further research should incorporate a direct assessment of political knowledge in the specific domain of EU level politics.

This chapter has established a clear linkage between national institutional quality and democratic performance evaluations of the European institutions. National institutional quality indeed serves as a yardstick for EU evaluation. Furthermore, I have demonstrated for the first time that domestic political knowledge moderates the effect of national institutions on EU evaluations, and as such, that European institutions are, indeed, ‘second-order institutions’. In the next chapter, the impact of an election campaign, and more specifically of political information from media and interpersonal communication on EU evaluations will be studied.

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The study was funded by the Dutch National Science Foundation (VICI grant) and additional grants from the Danish Science Foundation, the University of Amsterdam, and the

Swedish Riksbanken Foundation. For more information and documentation, see de Vreese, van Spanje, Schuck, Boomgaarden, Vliegthart, Azrout, and Elenbaas (2010).

<sup>2</sup> The countries were the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Ireland, Austria, Portugal, Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Netherlands, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, and Bulgaria. The country selection includes larger and smaller member states, countries from North, South, East and West, and long term and new members of the Union. The country selection was finalized based on feasibility.

<sup>3</sup> This factor analysis was performed with the same data in a different study (Boomgaarden et al., 2011), where more information on the different dimensions of EU attitudes can be found.

<sup>4</sup> I also added a dummy variable (post-communist member states versus other member states) to the analysis to test for democratic history. Adding this variable did not change the results significantly.

<sup>5</sup> In view of the VIF values, there are no problems associated with multicollinearity between domestic political knowledge and EU specific political knowledge.

<sup>6</sup> In view of the VIF values, there are no problems associated with multicollinearity between GDP per capita and national institutional quality.

<sup>7</sup> For analytical reasons, I centered the values of both political knowledge and institutional quality around their mean.

<sup>8</sup> I am aware that multicollinearity between both interactions could be a problem here as the tolerance levels (VIF) are high. However, I choose to add this control interaction for theoretical reasons, making this model more conservative and the results more convincing.

## REFERENCES

- Aarts, K. and Thomassen, J. (2008) 'Satisfaction with democracy: do institutions matter?', *Electoral Studies* 27(1): 5-18.
- Almond, G. and Verba, S. (1964) *The Civic Culture*, Boston: Little Brown and Company.
- Alvarez, R.M. and Franklin, C. (1994) 'Uncertainty and political perceptions', *Journal of Politics* 56: 671-89.
- Anderson, C. J. (1998) 'When in doubt, use proxies: Attitudes to domestic politics and support for the EU', *Comparative Political Studies* 31: 569-601.
- Anderson, C. J. and Guillory, C.A. (1997) 'Political institutions and satisfaction with democracy: A cross-national analysis of consensus and majoritarian systems', *American Political Science Review* 91(1): 66-81.
- Bennet, S. (1996) 'Know-Nothings', *Political Behavior*, 18(3) : 219-33.
- Blais, A. and Gélinau, F. (2007) 'Winning, losing and satisfaction with democracy', *Political Studies* 55(2): 425-41.
- Boomgaarden, H., Schuck, A., Elenbaas, M. and De Vreese, C. (2011) 'Mapping EU attitudes: Conceptual and empirical dimensions of euroscepticism and EU support', *European Union Politics*, doi:10.1177/1465116510395411
- Brug, W. van der, Eijk, C. van der, and Franklin, M. (2007) 'EU support and party choice' in W. van der Brug and C. van der Eijk, *European elections and domestic politics: lessons from the past and scenarios for the future*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Burgoon, B. (2009) 'Social nation and social Europe: Support for national and supranational welfare compensation in Europe', *European Union Politics*, 10(4): 427-55.
- Christin, T. (2005) 'Economic and political basis of attitudes towards the EU in Central and East European Countries in the 1990s', *European Union Politics*, 6(1): 29-57.
- De Vreese, C., Spanje, J. van, Schuck, A., Boomgaarden, H., Vliegenthart, R., Azrout, R. and Elenbaas, M. (2010) *2009 European Election Campaign Study, Scenario I: Data and Documentation*, Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.
- De Vries, C., Brug, W. van der, Egmond, M. van and Eijk, C. van der (2011) 'Individual and contextual variation in EU issue voting: the role of political information', *Electoral studies*, forthcoming.
- De Vries, C. and Tillman, E. (2010) 'European Union issue voting in East and West Europe: the role of political context', *Comparative European Politics*, forthcoming.

- Easton, D. (1975) 'A re-assessment of the concept of political support', *British Journal of Political Science* 5(4): 435-57.
- Echegaray, F. and Elordi, C. (2001) 'Public opinion, presidential popularity and economic reform in Argentina, 1989-1995', in S. Stokes (ed.), *Public Support for Market Reforms in New Democracies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 187-214.
- Eichenberg, R. C., & Dalton, R. (1993) 'Europeans and the European community: The dynamics of public support for European integration', *International Organization*, 47(4), 507-34.
- Gabel, M., & Palmer, H. (1995). Understanding variation in public support for European integration. *European Journal of Political Research*, 27, 3-19.
- Gabel, M. (1998a) 'Public support for European integration: An empirical test of five theories', *Journal of Politics*, 60(2), 333-54.
- Gabel, M. (1998b) 'Economic integration and mass public: Market liberalization and public attitudes in the European Union', *American Journal of Political Science* 42(3): 936-53.
- Goldstein, H. (2003) *Multilevel Statistical Models*, London: Arnold.
- Hobolt, S. (2009) *Europe in question: Referendums on European integration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Janssen, J. (1991) 'Postmaterialism, cognitive mobilization and public support for European integration', *British Journal of Political Science* 21(4): 443-68.
- Karp, J., Banducci, S. and Bowler, S. (2003) 'To know it is to love it? Satisfaction with democracy in the European Union', *Comparative Political Studies* 36(3), 271-92.
- Kaufmann, D., Kraay, A. and Zoido-Labaton, P. (2002) *Governance matters II: Updated indicators for 2000/01*, World Bank.
- Klingemann, H.-D. and Fuchs, D. (1995) *Citizens and the State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Klingemann, H.-D. (1999) 'Mapping political support in the 1990s: A global analysis', in: P. Norris (ed.), *Critical citizens: Global support for democratic government*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 31-56.
- Kritzinger, S. (2003) 'The influence of the nation-state on individual support for the European Union', *European Union Politics*, 4, 219-41.
- Lewis-Beck, M. (1998) *Economics and Elections*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Lindberg, L.N. and Scheingold, S.A. (1970) *Europe's would-be polity: Patterns of change in the European Community*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

- Martinotti, G. and Stefanizzi, S. (1995) 'Europeans and the nation state', in O. Niedermeyer and R. Sinnott, (eds.) *Public Opinion and Internationalized Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 163-59.
- McGraw, K. M. and Pinney, N. (1990) 'The effects of general and domain-specific expertise on political memory and judgment', *Social Cognition* 8: 9-30.
- Meyer, C. (1999) 'Political legitimacy and the invisibility of politics: Exploring the European Union's communication deficit', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 37: 617-39.
- Mishler, W. and Rose, R. (1997) 'Trust, distrust and skepticism: Popular evaluations of civil and political institutions in post-communist societies', *Journal of Politics* 59: 418-51.
- Reif, K. and Schmitt, H. (1980) 'Nine second-order national elections: a conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results', *European Journal of Political Research* 8(1): 3-44.
- Rohrschneider, R. (2002) 'The democracy deficit and mass support for an EU-wide government', *American Journal of Political Science*, 46: 463-75.
- Rose, R. and Mishler, W. (2002) 'Comparing regime support in non-democratic and democratic countries', *Democratization* 9(2): 1-20.
- Rose, R., Mishler, W. and Haerpfer, C.W. (1998) *Democracy and its Alternatives: Understanding Post-Communist Societies*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Sánchez-Cuenca, I. (2000) 'The political basis of support for European integration', *European Union Politics* 1(2): 147-71.
- Schmitt, H. (2005) 'The European Parliament elections of June 2004: Still second-order?', *West European Politics* 28(3): 650-79.
- Scheuer, A. (2005) *How Europeans see Europe: Structure and dynamics of European legitimacy beliefs*, Amsterdam: Vossiuspers UvA.
- Snijders, T.A.B. and Bosker, R.J. (1999) *Multilevel Analysis*, Newbury Park, California: Sage.
- Stokes, S. (2001) 'Introduction: Public opinion of market reform. A framework', in S. Stokes (ed.), *Public support for market reforms in new democracies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-32.
- The World Bank Group (2010) *Governance and Anti-Corruption*, Retrieved from [http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/mc\\_countries.asp](http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/mc_countries.asp).
- Wagner, A. F., Schneider, F. and Halla, M. (2009) 'The quality of institutions and satisfaction with democracy in Western Europe - A panel analysis', *European Journal of Political Economy* 25: 30-41.

Weatherford, S. M. (1991) 'Mapping the ties that bind: Legitimacy, representation and alienation', *Western Political Quarterly* 44: 251-76.

Zaller, J. R. (1992) *The nature and origins of mass opinion*, Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.



## **Chapter 2: The content of the message, and the role of disagreement: Effects of media and interpersonal communication on EU evaluations**

One of the major conclusions of Chapter 1 was that political knowledge moderates the impact of national institutional quality on EU evaluations: the more people know about politics, the more they use national institutional quality as a yardstick for the evaluation of European institutions. In this chapter, I will further explore the crucial role of political information in the context of the European Union: where do European citizens get their political knowledge from?

In modern politics, mass media and interpersonal communication are the principal sources of information (Beck, Dalton, Greene, & Huckfeldt, 2002). They are important types of collective experiences, which, together with personal experiences, are crucial in the development of (political) attitudes and opinions (Mutz, 1998). The impact of media and interpersonal communication is an ‘old theme’ but there is renewed interest in the persuasive potential of both types of communication (see Southwell & Yzer, 2009). Only few scholars have studied the effects of mass and interpersonal communication simultaneously (Schmitt-Beck, 2003). For many decades, scholars have treated mass and interpersonal communication as unrelated and distinct channels of information, a separation which has, according to Reardon and Rogers (1988), little theoretical justification. There is an urge to further the understanding of the intersection of conversation and campaigns (Southwell & Yzer, 2009). Morley (1990) suggested that scholars should “reframe the study of political communication in the media within the broader context of domestic communication (involving the interdiscursive connections of broadcast and other media, family dynamics, and gossip networks)” (p. 123).

Some scholars have started systematically exploring the intersection between interpersonal and mass media communication, and how it affects political attitudes and behavior. Mixed results have given rise to a divergence between two seemingly contradictory theoretical perspectives: a model of competition and a model of reinforcement of the effects of media and interpersonal communication (Lenart, 1994). Other scholars, confronted with these mixed results, studied whether different variables might be at play, such as the existence of disagreement within the interpersonal communication. Networks of political discussion are assumed to be homogeneous. Exposure to contrasting views may weaken the existing effect

of political discussion. The effect of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations might differ when discussants disagree on the matter. Therefore, I add disagreement within interpersonal communication to the model as a potential moderator of the effects of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations.

### **Democratic performance evaluations in a European context**

Recent research on the nature of this interaction effect between mass media and interpersonal communication has been mainly done in the context of political knowledge (Beaudoin, 2004; Eveland & Scheufele, 2005; Lenart 1994; Scheufele, 2002) and political participation (Chaffee & Mutz, 1988; Gamson, 1992; Beck et al., 2002; Schmitt-Beck, 2003; Eliasoph, 1998; Scheufele 2000). But research thus far has not investigated the effects on political evaluations including public assessments of the democratic performance of a polity. The dependent variable will be evaluations of democratic performance, which concerns the evaluation of the actual functioning of a democratic political system. It contains judgments about the quality of institutions and democratic procedures. I focus in particular on the European Union (EU) where democratic performance evaluations dig more specifically into the domain of the communication and democratic deficit of the Union, often described as one of the most problematic issues for further European cooperation (Anderson & McLeod, 2004; Katz, 2001; Meyer 1999). These evaluations serve as building blocks towards future support, and are as such crucial considerations in the process of opinion formation (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000; Rohrschneider, 2002).

The democratic quality of the EU has been one of the central issues in the EU during the last decades. As European citizens do not experience the democratic performance of the EU firsthand, evaluations of the democratic performance of the EU completely depend on collective experiences, and therefore on information gathered through interpersonal and mass media communication. It is perhaps surprising that few studies have examined the effect of media and interpersonal communication within the context of the European elections (Peter, 2003). Research has shown that media coverage on issues involving the EU is centered on big events, such as the European Council meetings, and the elections for the European Parliament (EP) (de Vreese, 2001; de Vreese, Lauf, & Peter, 2007). At the same time, conversational timing is related to the conversation's potential to impact the effect of campaign messages (Hardy & Scheufele, 2009). A conversation the day after or before a major debate/campaign event might be more likely to involve citizens who are less involved than conversations held at any random other point in time. Evaluations about EU institutions are likely to be based on the information gathered through these short periods. The EP-elections are the most obvious

incentive for people to think about their supranational institutions, therefore, changes in EU evaluations are most likely to appear within the campaign period.

I will focus on the direct persuasive effect of evaluative messages from both mass media and interpersonal communication, in the context of the 2009 European Parliamentary elections. I combine data from a two-wave panel with data from a content analysis, both gathered in 21 European countries. The first wave of the survey was executed three weeks before the European Parliamentary election, the second wave was done immediately after the EP-elections. Data for the content analysis were gathered during those three weeks. This combined dataset allows us to not only measure change in institutional evaluations and to determine individual media consumption, it provides us with information about the specific content of the most important news media during the campaign. Furthermore, it grants us more information about the content of interpersonal communication as well. It enables us to address the specific research questions: *how does the content of mass media and interpersonal communication affect citizens' evaluations of European democratic performance? What role does disagreement between discussants play in this process?*

### **Mass media effects on EU democratic performance evaluations**

In the context of European democratic performance evaluations, the media are likely to be important as they are the primary source for information about the democratic performance of the EU. During the three weeks preceding the EP elections, the EU is more often in the news, and a larger proportion of the citizens is (at least slightly) more attentive to EU news, motivated by the upcoming election day and the imposed voting duty. Previous research has shown that the coverage of political actors plays an important role in shaping citizens' opinions about political issues (Druckman & Parkin 2005). Zaller (1996) has shown that slanted message flows in the media can affect political evaluations. A more negative tone has often been associated with more negative opinions and even cynicism about politics (Valentino, Beckmann, & Buhr, 2001). When the subject is rather distant and unknown (e.g. the EU) the tone of evaluative news content has more persuasive potential on the audience (Page & Shapiro, 1992).

Several scholars reported evidence of the tone of EU coverage affecting people's opinion on EU matters (Norris, 2000; Banducci, Karp, & Lauf, 2001; Peter, 2003). Peter (2003) found that the tone of coverage affected attitudes towards European integration positively in a consonant context and de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006b) showed that a one-sided media message flow affects public support for EU enlargement. Norris (2000) pointed at the systematically negative tone in media coverage of EU related issues as a

plausible contributor to “a growing disconnect between European leaders and the public” (p. 184). She emphasized that the effects depend on sufficient visibility of EU issues in the news, a condition which is almost uniquely fulfilled during the election campaign. The reception of a larger number of evaluative messages can cumulate into an exposure effect, through which media can influence gradually citizens’ predispositions (Zaller, 1992). If exposure to those evaluative messages changes EU evaluations during the campaign, the tone of those messages will be essential to determine the direction of those changes. I expect a positive effect of EU positive media messages on EU evaluations, and a negative effect of EU negative media messages on EU evaluations.

Hypothesis 1: The more positive (or negative) the evaluative tone of the EU news a citizen is exposed to, the more positive (or negative) citizens’ EU evaluations will become.

### **Interpersonal communication within homogenous networks**

Another important source for relevant political information is interpersonal communication. According to Glynn, Herbst, O’Keefe and Shapiro (1999), most studies on the effects of political communication leave out interpersonal conversation. It may, however, have a substantial impact on public opinion. People engage in interpersonal conversations far more often than they watch television news or read newspapers (Kirchler, 1989). Interpersonal communication may expose people to a different set of politically-relevant information and stimuli than they possess individually (Huckfeldt, 2001; Mutz, 2002). This exchange of information plays a significant role in shaping individuals’ opinions and political attitudes (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; MacKuen & Brown, 1987; Pattie & Johnston, 2001; Fishkin & Laslett, 2003). According to MacKuen and Brown (1987), political discussions influence citizens’ evaluations of parties and candidates. This is particularly the case during election campaigns, because both increased media coverage and political mobilization by political elites motivate citizens to engage in personal discussion about politics (Beck, 1991). Individuals develop and reinforce their pre-existing political dispositions through social experiences such as political discussion (Dawson, 2001; Cho, 2005). It is considered by some scholars as the most influential source of attitude change (Mondak, 1995). In the context of European integration, de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006a) found that interpersonal discussions affect EU enlargement support. I expect that the content of interpersonal communication affects democratic performance evaluations. Being exposed to positive interpersonal messages will change these EU evaluations positively.

However, not only the content of the message affects the effect of interpersonal communication. According to Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995), networks of social relations are

primarily responsible for the communication of political information and expertise among and between groups and individuals. Furthermore, people have the tendency to create homogenous interpersonal discussion networks, by selecting people with similar political viewpoints (Beck, 1991; Huckfeldt & Sprague 1995). “Given this homogenous nature of political discussion, it is plausible to expect that individuals develop and reinforce their pre-existing political dispositions through political discussion.” (Cho, 2005, p. 300). These politically homogeneous personal environments then serve as social anchors for opinions and attitudes (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, p.44).

Hypothesis 2: The more one engages in interpersonal discussions about EU politics, and the more positive (negative) one is in those conversations, the more positive (negative) one’s EU evaluations will become.

### **Media + IPC: reinforcement or rejection?**

The conceptualization of this relation between mass media and interpersonal conversation has instigated a division between two seemingly contradictory theoretical perspectives (Mutz, 1998). The most accepted relationship is one of *competition* between media and interpersonal information (Lenart, 1994). The results of the Erie County study (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948) are illustrative for this model, where media and interpersonal sources are independent main effects that compete for influence over the individual. Most studies following this competitive model find that, whatever the potential effects of the media, interpersonal conversation usually overrides the influence of the media (for an overview, see Lenart, 1994). “In short, the source competition argument posits substantively disjunctive main effects, with interpersonal processes being stronger and more important for the individual. Moreover, a possible interaction exists between the two sources of information, such that increased interpersonal communication should serve to weaken the impact of the media” (Lenart, 1994, p.40). The second theoretical perspective on media versus interpersonal sources uses a model of *reinforcement* (for an overview, see Lenart, 1994). More interpersonal conversation about media information will increase the total media impact (Chaffee & Mutz, 1988; Scheufele, 2002). Mass media stimulate interpersonal discussions about politics that might otherwise not take place (Katz & Feldman, 1962). Instead of being neutralized by the influence of interpersonal conversation, as in the competitive model, here media effects are reinforced by those interpersonal conversations which tend to revolve around media-generated content (Scheufele, 2002). In this model of “differential gains”, put forward by Scheufele (2001), interpersonal communication compensates the shortcomings of media coverage, which can be overly complex and ambiguous.

Schmitt-Beck (2003) found that while media and interpersonal communication can be similarly influential on vote choice, yet an indirect effect can be traced as well. When voters receive cues from the mass media, they frequently talk about them with peers. Depending on the political preferences of those peers, and its concordance to the media message, the latter will be reinforced or rejected by the former (Schmitt-Beck, 2003). In this study, I believe that the content of the message and its congruence to the dominating political preference within the interpersonal network determines whether political discussion reinforces or rejects the media message.

Hypothesis 3: When the directional bias of the media message is congruent with the dominant political values within the social network, interpersonal discussion will reinforce the effect of the media message.

### **The role of disagreement**

As mentioned before, I expect a positive effect of positive EU messages from media and interpersonal communication on EU democratic performance evaluations. When messages from media and interpersonal communication are similar (both EU positive or both EU negative), interpersonal communication will reinforce the effect of media messages. I assumed that most interpersonal discussion networks were homogenous, due to the tendency of people to select equal-minded discussants within their networks (Beck, 1991; Huckfeldt & Sprague 1995). This rather strong assumption excludes the possibility of heterogeneous networks. Therefore, it is essential to control for disagreement within those conversations. When people tend to disagree on EU evaluations within their conversations, a different effect might occur. Several scholars have shown that disagreement within interpersonal conversations has a negative effect on participation (Belanger & Eagles, 2007; McClurg, 2006; Mutz, 2006). According to Mutz (2006), exposure to disagreement leads to awareness of the rationales behind the opposing view, which, in turn, makes people's cognitions about specific objects less one-sided (Huckfeldt, Johnson & Sprague, 2004; Parsons, 2010). This ambivalence, or confusion (Eveland & Scheufele, 2005), reduces opinion certainty and attitude strength (McGraw & Bartels, 2005). Similarly, Lee (2012) found that disagreement tends to undermine the direct effect of discussion. I will adopt this "interaction-effect approach" (p.555), as it provides a more precise analysis of the impact of political discussions (Feldman & Price, 2008; Kwak, Williams, Wang & Lee, 2005). I expect disagreement with the discussant to mitigate the effect of tone of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations.

Hypothesis 4: The more disagreement within interpersonal discussions, the less effect interpersonal discussions will have on EU evaluations.

## **Method**

### **Data Collection**

I test the hypothesis on the basis of data from a two-wave panel survey<sup>1</sup>, in combination with data from an analysis of media content between the two waves.

**Two wave panel survey.** A two-wave panel survey was carried out in 21 European Union member states<sup>2</sup>. Respondents were interviewed about one month prior to the June 4-7 2009 elections for the European Parliament and immediately after the elections. Fieldwork dates were 6-18<sup>th</sup> of May<sup>3</sup> and 8-19<sup>th</sup> of June<sup>4</sup> 2009. The survey was conducted using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI). The fieldwork was coordinated by TNS Opinion in Brussels and involved TNS subsidiaries in each country. All subsidiaries comply with ESOMAR guidelines for survey research. A total of 32,411 respondents participated in wave one and 22,806 respondents participated in wave two<sup>5</sup>. On average, 1,086 respondents per country completed the questionnaires of both waves, varying from 1,001 in Austria to 2,000 in Belgium<sup>6</sup>. In each country, a sample was drawn from a TNS database. These databases rely on multiple recruitment strategies, including telephone, face-to-face, and online recruitment. The samples show appropriate distributions in terms of gender, age and education. As I am mostly interested in the underlying relationships between variables, I consider the deviations in the sample vis-à-vis the adult population less problematic and I exert appropriate caution when making inferences about absolute values. The questionnaire was developed in English and translated into the original languages. It was then back translated into English. The translation was supervised by the research team and it was carried out by TNS (which also executes and translated the Eurobarometer surveys). Irregularities and problems arising from this process were resolved by deliberation.

**Content analysis**<sup>7</sup>. The content analysis was carried out on a sample of national news media coverage in the same 21 EU member states. I focus on national television and newspapers because these media are consistently listed as the most important sources of information about the EU for citizens in Europe. I include the main national evening news broadcasts of the most widely watched public and commercial television stations. I also include two ‘quality’ (i.e. broadsheet) and one tabloid newspaper (or the most sensationalist-oriented other daily newspaper) from each country. These media outlets were selected to provide a comprehensive idea about the news coverage in each country<sup>8</sup>. The content analysis was conducted for news items published or broadcast within the three weeks running up to the

election. All relevant news outlets were collected either digitally or as hardcopies. With regard to story selection, for television, all news items have been coded; for newspapers, all news items on the title page and on one randomly selected page as well as all stories pertaining particularly to the EU and/or the EU election on any other page of the newspaper have been coded. In total, 36,881 news stories have been coded in all 21 EU member states of which 13,866 stories dealt specifically with the EU, its institutions, policies or the election campaign. Coding was conducted by a total of 42 coders at two locations, the University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands) and University of Exeter (UK), using an online survey tool. All coders were native speakers of the respective languages, and received extensive training during a two-week intensive coder training course. The unit of analysis and coding unit was the distinct news story<sup>9</sup>.

**Combining the two wave panel data and the content analysis data.** A crucial aspect of the design is to link the panel survey with a media content analysis. Following the recommendations and examples by Kleinnijenhuis and de Ridder (1998), Slater (2007) and de Vreese and Semetko (2004), I determined for each medium the percentage of news items (about the EU) which were evaluative, and within this categorization, whether the evaluative tone was positive, negative or mixed, based on the content analysis. I merged these news content variables with the level of news media exposure (based on the panel data). For each medium, I connected the level of evaluative EU news to the extent to which the individual actually used it during the campaign. For each item where the democratic state of the EU was evaluated, a rate was given based on the content, ranging from very negative (-3), via balanced (0), to very positive (+3). From this, the mean evaluation of the democratic state of the EU in each media outlet could be inferred (see de Vreese & Semetko, 2004), by subtracting the negative scores from the positive scores per outlet. For every respondent, the exposure to each medium was registered, ranging from 0 to 7 days a week. The tone of evaluative news was then multiplied by the individual exposure, which yielded the evaluative news content exposure per medium per respondent. By summing the different exposure scores per respondent, and dividing it by the total media exposure, I calculated an average percentage of evaluative news content exposure per respondent.

## **Measures**

**Dependent variable.** In the extant literature, democratic performance evaluations of the EU have been operationalized in several ways. Some scholars used support for integration (Janssen, 1991; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000) to test citizens' attitudes towards the EU. Other scholars used satisfaction with (European) democracy as their variable of interest (Anderson



& Guillory, 1997; Karp, Banducci, & Bowler, 2003; Aarts & Thomassen, 2008). Attitudes towards European governance are structured along related but distinct dimensions (Rohrschneider, 2002; Scheuer, 2005). To fully capture the multi-dimensionality of EU attitudes, studies of public opinion about the EU should reflect on these different types of support. Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas and de Vreese (2011) distinguished the democratic performance dimension from four other dimensions of EU attitudes. This resulted in a scale of four items (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.828; Explained variance = 66.047 %; Eigen value = 2.642), which will serve as the dependent variable, measuring evaluation of the EU's democratic performance (see also Desmet, van Spanje & de Vreese 2012/Chapter 1). The first item measures the satisfaction with European democracy: *How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in the European Union?* Respondents could choose between seven categories, ranging from 'not at all satisfied' (1) to 'very satisfied' (7). For the other three items, respondents had to indicate to what extent they agreed with the following statements: (a) *The European Union functions according to democratic principles.* (b) *The decision making process in the European Union is transparent.* (c) *The European Union functions well as it is.* Again, respondents could choose between seven answer categories, ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) till 'strongly agree' (7). By averaging the responses to these items per individual, I created a democratic performance scale, ranging from 1 to 7.

**Evaluative media.** Within the content analysis, Articles articles with explicit mentioning of evaluations of the democratic performance of the EU<sup>10</sup> were coded. The mentioning and the tone of the evaluation in the news item were both coded. Every media outlet was given a score indicating the frequency and the tone (negative versus positive) of these evaluations. By combining these scores with data on individual exposure per media outlet, we were able to calculate an individual score of the probability for every respondent of being confronted with (positive or negative) evaluations of the EU. I refer to this variable as 'evaluative media content' in the tables.

**Interpersonal communication (IPC).** Respondents were asked whether they had discussions during the campaign about EU politics, and if so, whether they took a positive or negative position in those discussions: *When you talk to your family, friends, or colleagues about European issues, do you more often take a positive or a negative position towards the European Union?* Answering categories ranged from -3, 'very negative', to 3, 'very positive'.

Furthermore, they were asked to indicate how many interpersonal conversations they had during the three weeks preceding the EP-elections: *How often do you discuss EU politics with your family, friends or colleagues?* Answering categories ranged from 1, 'never' towards

7, ‘very often’. By multiplying these two, I acquired a variable containing information about the content and the frequency of these conversations, ranging from frequent negative towards frequent positive conversations about the EU.

**Disagreement within IPC.** Respondents were asked whether they encountered disagreement within their interpersonal conversations about the EU: *When you talk to your family, friends or colleagues about the EU, do you generally encounter opinions that are close to your own or far from your own opinion?* Answering categories ranged from 1, ‘never’, towards 7, ‘very often’.

**Table II.1: Descriptives of the variables**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
EU evaluations wave 2 (DV)	22,806	1.00	7.00	3.5657	1.21727
EU evaluations wave 1	32,410	1.00	7.00	3.5914	1.20384
Evaluative media	32,413	-5.09	3.24	-.1438	.64653
IPC	19,829	-21.00	21.00	1.1776	6.24424
Disagreement	19,829	1.00	7.00	3.52	1.251
Valid N (listwise)	19,829				

## Analysis

In order to test the hypotheses, I combined the individual media content exposure measure and the interpersonal conversation measure in one OLS regression model, with democratic performance evaluations from wave 2 as the dependent variable, and controlling for democratic performance evaluations from wave 1<sup>11</sup>.

## Results<sup>12</sup>

First, I look at the effect of evaluative media content. As displayed in Table II.2, there is a significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) effect of evaluative media messages on democratic performance evaluations (a change of tone [of media coverage that a respondent is exposed to] of one unit is associated with a change of 0.072 on the 1-7 democratic performance scale). Citizens are more positive about the democratic quality of EU institutions when the evaluative tone of the message is more positive. This supports hypothesis 1. Similarly, I found confirmation in the second model that frequent political discussion within homogenous networks has an effect on EU evaluations. The more one talks about politics, the more (0.051 on a scale from 1 to 7) positive one tends to be about the EU ( $p < 0.001$ ). This supports hypothesis 2. Apart from these

main findings, the results also report a change in N between the first and the second model. When I incorporate interpersonal communication in the model, I lose about 1/7 of the respondents. These were the respondents who reported not to talk about the EU at all<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, the findings about the effect of interpersonal communication are not applicable for those who reported not to have any interpersonal conversations about the EU. Second, R Square changes 0.056 when interpersonal communication is added to the model, while R Square only changes 0.002 when the media variable is added to the model<sup>14</sup>. The direct influence of interpersonal communication appears to be much more substantial than the direct influence of evaluative media messages.

**Table II.2: Effect of evaluative media and IPC on EU evaluations**

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Empty model</b>	<b>Model 2.1</b>	<b>Model 2.2</b>	<b>Model 2.3</b>
	B (St. E)	B (St. E)	B (St. E)	B (St. E)
Constant	.981 (.018)***	1.021 (.018)***	1.389 (.020)***	1.426 (.020)***
Wave 1	.719 (.005)***	.712 (.005)***	.596 (.005)***	.589 (.005)***
<u>Main Effects</u>				
Evaluative media		.072 (.007)***		.067 (.007)***
IPC			.051 (.001)***	.050 (.001)***
<u>Model Summary</u>				
R Square (adjusted)	.513	.515	.571	.573
N	22,806	22,806	19,829	19,829

Note: levels of significance: \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \* =  $p < .05$ .

I assumed, however, that interpersonal communication moderates the effect of evaluative media messages, depending on the concordance of those messages with the political values within the network. The results in Model 3.1 (Table II.3) did not confirm the hypothesis: the effect I found was not significant ( $p = .071$ ). One could explain this lack of significant effects to the measurement: the direct effect of evaluative media messages I found was quite small.

**Table II.3: Effect of the interaction between evaluative media and IPC on EU evaluations**

Independent Variable	Model 3.1
	B (St. E)
Constant	1.425 (.020)***
Wave 1	.589 (.005)***
<u>Main Effects</u>	
Evaluative media	.066 (.007)***
IPC	.051 (.001)***
<u>Interaction Effects</u>	
Media x IPC	.002 (.001)
<u>Model Summary</u>	
R Square (adjusted)	.573
N	19,829

Note: levels of significance: \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \* =  $p < .05$

However, as mentioned, I assumed that these interpersonal networks are homogenous. To control for potential heterogeneity within the interpersonal networks, I add disagreement to the model (Table II.4). I expected that disagreement within interpersonal discussion would moderate the direct effect of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations, in a negative direction. Having EU conversations with dissimilar others would have a different effect on EU evaluations than having EU conversations with similar others: the more similar the discussant, the stronger the effect of interpersonal communication. I found confirmation for hypothesis 4 (Model 4.2): the more one disagrees within interpersonal communication, the smaller (-0.003) the effect of frequent interpersonal communication on EU evaluations ( $p < 0.001$ )<sup>15</sup>.

**Table II.4: Effect of evaluative media, IPC and disagreement on EU evaluations**

Independent Variable	Model 4.1	Model 4.2
	B (St. E)	B (St. E)
Constant	1.390 (.026)***	1.386 (.026)***
Wave 1	.589 (.005)***	.587 (.005)***
<u>Main Effects</u>		
Evaluative media	.066 (.007)***	.065 (.007)***
IPC	.051 (.001)***	.060 (.002)***
Disagreement	.010 (.005)*	.015 (.005)***
<u>Interaction Effects</u>		
IPC x Disagreement		-.003 (.001)***
<u>Model Summary</u>		
R Square (adjusted)	.573	.574
N	19,829	19,829

Note: levels of significance: \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \* =  $p < .05$

### Discussion

In this study, I explored the effect of media and interpersonal communication messages on EU democratic performance evaluations. An increasing number of scholars have studied mass media and interpersonal communication simultaneously during the last decade, however, due to ambiguous results, the nature of this interaction between mass and interpersonal communication is still rather unclear.

First, I tested the direct effect of evaluative news content on citizens' evaluations, during an EP election campaign. The results show that exposure to positive EU evaluations in the media has a positive effect on individual EU evaluations (H1). The more citizens are exposed to positive EU evaluations through the news media, the more positive they become about the democratic performance of the EU and its institutions. In this study, I only focused on direct persuasive effects of tone and content. The effects might be accompanied by cognitive effects. These results confirm the central position of news media in the European common space (Kantner, 2004; de Vreese, 2007), and can have important implications for the communication policy of the EU and its institutions. Mass media still have a certain influence on the public opinion, and the tone of news can have an impact on popular evaluations of European institutions and policies. By engaging actively with the media, the EU might benefit from positive media attention. This requires a pro-active media policy and PR strategy from

the EU, especially around the big events. Aside from the news media, people are exposed to political information and opinions within their own social network. In doing so, citizens are exposed to a different set of politically-relevant information. Having positive conversations about the EU makes people more positive about the democratic performance of European institutions (H2). Similar to the media strategy, the EU could be more pro-active towards its citizens via social media. Furthermore, existing EU youth organizations could be included as well in this ‘interpersonal strategy’.

Having established this basic idea that evaluative tone has an effect on political evaluations, I focused on the combined effect of media and interpersonal communication. How do they interact? Does the conversation weaken the media effect, or is there a surplus value of the combination of both influences? Scholars have established a clear link between both (Lenart, 1994; Mutz, 1998; Schmitt-Beck, 2003). People have the tendency to talk about what they received from the media (Schmitt-Beck, 2003). No consensus has been reached about the effect of this combination (for an overview, see Lenart 1994). Some scholars follow the competitive model, where media and interpersonal sources are independent main effects that compete for influence over the individual, while others state that media effects are reinforced by interpersonal conversations which tend to revolve around media-generated content (Lenart, 1994; Scheufele, 2002). My expectation that tone congruence between media and interpersonal communication determines whether the effect of the media message is reinforced or neutralized by interpersonal communication, was not supported by the results (H3). This could be explained by the methodological design. I was not able to measure the exact content of those interpersonal conversation. A content analysis of interpersonal communication would offer better information.

I also expected disagreement to moderate the effect of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations. I found evidence for this expectation. The influence of interpersonal communication is weakened when the discussants perceive disagreement between one another (H4). When people are confronted with deviating opinions on the EU, their cognitions on the EU become less one-sided, and more ambivalent (Huckfeldt, Johnson & Sprague, 2004; Parsons, 2010). This ambivalence reduces their opinion certainty (McGraw & Bartels, 2005). As such, disagreement tends to mitigate (Lee, 2012) the effects of interpersonal communication.

This study demonstrates the importance of investigating the combined effect of media and interpersonal messages (Robinson & Levy, 1986; Morley, 1990; Beck et al., 2002; Schmitt-Beck, 2003). The results from Chapter 1 demonstrated that national institutional

quality functions as a yardstick for EU evaluations, depending on the level of political knowledge. In this chapter, I showed empirically that the information context is crucial as well. Evaluative media messages and interpersonal communication do have a direct effect on EU evaluations. Furthermore, I found evidence for the impact of disagreement within those interpersonal conversations. The more one disagrees with the discussant, the weaker the effect of interpersonal communication will be on EU evaluations. I was not able to confirm the expectation that tone congruence between media and interpersonal communication determines whether they reinforce one another. Gathering more information about the content of interpersonal conversation would be the next step forward.

In the next chapter, I will study the same research questions from a different methodological perspective, while increasing the control of the message. By conducting an experiment, I will be able to manipulate the tone of both the media and the interpersonal message. This will allow us to account for the effect of tone congruence between both forms of communication. Furthermore, I want to validate and further challenge the findings from the real world in this experimental setting.

#### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The study was funded by the Dutch National Science Foundations (VICI grant) and additional grants from the Danish Science Foundation, the University of Amsterdam, and the Swedish Riksbanken Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> The countries were Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Ireland, Austria, Portugal, Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Netherlands, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia & Bulgaria. The country selection includes larger and smaller member states, countries from North, South, East and West, and long term and new members to the Union. The country selection was finalized based on feasibility.

<sup>3</sup> In Britain and Ireland data collection finished on May 11, in France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Greece, Czech Republic, Austria, Portugal, Netherlands, Finland and Slovakia on May 12, in Hungary, Poland and Latvia on May 13, in Denmark and Belgium on May 14, in Lithuania on May 15 and in Bulgaria on May 18.

<sup>4</sup> In Slovakia and Bulgaria data collection finished on June 11, in Italy, Germany, Sweden, Czech Republic, Lithuania, and the Netherlands on June 12, in Ireland and Britain on June 13, in France, Poland and Austria on June 14, in Spain, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Finland, and Latvia on June 15 and Belgium on June 19.

<sup>5</sup> The age limit in Austria was 16 as voting age in Austria is 16 whereas it is 18 in other countries.

<sup>6</sup> In Belgium, 1,000 Flemish respondents and 1,000 Walloon respondents completed both waves of the survey.

<sup>7</sup> The study was carried out within the framework of PIREDEU ([www.piredeu.eu](http://www.piredeu.eu)), Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the European Union. PIREDEU is funded by the European Union's FP 7 program. For further information, see Schuck, A., Xezonakis, G., Banducci, S., & de Vreese, C. (2010). *EES (2009) Media Study Data Advance Release Documentation*, 31/03/2010. University of Amsterdam and University of Exeter.

<sup>8</sup> Belgium was treated as two media systems (one Dutch and one French speaking). Therefore in total ten outlets were coded, four television news outlets (two Dutch speaking, two French speaking), and six newspapers (three Dutch language and three French language). For Germany, four news outlets were coded (two public and two commercial). For Spain, three television news outlets were coded.

<sup>9</sup> Intercoder reliability for the evaluative media measure: Krippendorff's alpha = 0.60 (based on 35 randomly selected newsstories which were coded by 53 coders at both locations (Amsterdam and Exeter))

<sup>10</sup> Two other variables could have been used as well: EU evaluations and EP-evaluations. Using these did not change the results, neither in the first nor in the second model. Interaction with interpersonal communication generated the same outcome (main effect and level of significance)

<sup>11</sup> The results confirm the existence of a (modest) change between wave 1 and wave 2 in the evaluation of EU democracy. 15.02% became more than one point more positive (one a scale from 1 to 7) between wave 1 and wave 2, 13.48 % became more negative in their EU evaluation.

<sup>12</sup> In all models, I controlled for age, education and gender. In none of the models, the results changed significantly by adding these variables.

<sup>13</sup> In the survey, people who answered "not at all" (0) on the question: *How often do you discuss EU politics with your family, friends or colleagues?* did not have to answer the next item (*When you talk to your family, friends, or colleagues about European issues, do you more often take a positive or a negative position towards the European Union?*), and are therefore excluded from the IPC measure.

<sup>14</sup> The comparison between the R Square of Model 2.1 and Model 2.2 was done with the same N (19829).



<sup>15</sup> The R Square Change when adding this interaction to the model is significant, but very modest (.001). This could be due to the measurement of interpersonal communication. I will seek confirmation for this result in an experimental setting in Chapter 3.

## References

- Aarts, K., & Thomassen, J. (2008). Satisfaction with democracy: Do institutions matter? *Electoral Studies*, 27(1), 5-18.
- Anderson, C. J., & Guillory, C.A. (1997). Political institutions and satisfaction with democracy: A cross-national analysis of consensus and majoritarian systems. *American Political Science Review*, 91(1), 66-81.
- Anderson, P., & McLeod, A. (2004). The great non-communicator? The mass communication deficit of the European Parliament and its Press Directorate. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 42(5), 897-917.
- Barber, B. (1984). *Strong democracy: Participatory politics for a New Age*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Banducci, S., Karp, J., & Lauf, E. (2001). *Elite leadership, media coverage and support for European integration*. Paper presented at the regional meeting of the World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR), Hamburg.
- Beaudoin, C. E. (2004). 'The independent and interactive antecedents of international knowledge.' *Gazette*, 66, 459-473.
- Beck, P.A. (1991). Voters' intermediation environments in the 1988 presidential contest. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 55(3), 371-394.
- Beck, P.A., Dalton, R.J., Greene, S., & Huckfeldt, R. (2002). The social calculus of voting: Interpersonal, media, and organizational influences on presidential choices. *American Political Science Review*, 96(1), 57-73.
- Belanger, P., & Eagles, M. (2007). Partisan cross-pressure and voter turnout: The influence of micro- and macro-environments. *Social Science Quarterly*, 88, 850-867.
- Boomgaarden, H., Schuck, A., Elenbaas, M., & de Vreese, C. (2011). Mapping EU attitudes: Conceptual and empirical dimensions of euroscepticism and EU support. *European Union Politics*, doi:10.1177/1465116510395411.
- Chaffee, S.H., & Mutz, D.C. (1988). Comparing mediated and interpersonal communication data. In R. P. Hawkins et al. (Eds.), *Advancing communication science: Merging mass and interpersonal processes* (pp. 19-43). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Cho, J. (2005). Media, interpersonal discussion, and electoral choice. *Communication Research*, 32(3), 295-322.
- Dawson, M.C. (2001). *Black visions: The roots of contemporary African American political ideologies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- de Vreese, C.H. (2001). Europe in the news: a cross-national comparative study of the news coverage of key EU events. *European Union Politics*, 2(3), 283–307.
- de Vreese, C.H. (2007). *The EU as a public space. Living review in the CONNEX series in Governance*. Retrieved from <http://europeangovernance.livingreviews.org/Articles/lreg-2007-3>.
- de Vreese, C.H., & Boomgaarden, H.G. (2006a). How content moderates the effects of television news on political knowledge and engagement. *Acta Politica. International Journal of Political Science*, 41, 317–41.
- de Vreese, C.H., & Boomgaarden, H.G. (2006b). Media message flows and interpersonal communication: the conditional nature of effects on public opinion. *Communication Research*, 33, 1–19.
- de Vreese, C.H., & Semetko, H.A. (2004). *Political campaigning in referendums: Framing the referendum issue*. London: Routledge.
- Druckman, J., & Parkin, M. (2005). The impact of media bias: How editorial slant affects voters. *Journal of Politics*, 67(4), 1030-49.
- Easton, D. (1975). ‘A re-assessment of the concept of political support’, *British Journal of Political Science* 5(4): 435-57.
- Eliasoph, N. (1998). *Avoiding politics: How Americans produce apathy in everyday life*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Eveland, W. P., & Scheufele, D. A. (2005, August). A test of competing models of non-additive effects of political discussion and news media use on political knowledge. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, TX.
- Feldman, L., and Price, V. (2008). ‘Confusion or enlightenment? How exposure to disagreement moderates the effects of political discussion and media use on candidate knowledge’, *Communication Research*, 35: 61-87.
- Fishkin, J. S. (1991). *Democracy and deliberation: New directions for democratic reform*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press
- Fishkin, J.S., and Laslett, P. (eds.) (2003) *Debating deliberative democracy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gamson, W. (1992). *Talking politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Glynn, C., Herbst, S., O’Keefe, G., & Shapiro, R. (1999). *Public Opinion*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public spheres*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Huckfeldt, R. (2001). The social communication of political expertise. *American Journal of Political Science*, 45(2), 425-438.
- Huckfeldt, R., & Sprague, J. (1995). *Citizens, politics, and social communication: Information and influence in an election campaign*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Huckfeldt, R., Johnson, P.E., & Sprague, J. (2004). *Political Disagreement*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Janssen, J. I. H. (1991). Postmaterialism, cognitive mobilization and public support for European integration. *British Journal of Political Science*, 21(4), 443-468.
- Kantner, C. (2004) *Kein modernes Babel: Kommunikative Voraussetzungen europäischer Öffentlichkeit*. Wiesbaden: VS Sozialwissenschaften.
- Karp, J. A., Banducci, S.A., & Bowler, S. (2003). To know it is to love it? Satisfaction with democracy in the European Union. *Comparative Political Studies*, 36(3), 271-292.
- Katz, R. (2001). Models of democracy: elite attitudes and the democratic deficit in the European Union. *European Union Politics*, 2(1), 53-80.
- Katz, E., & Feldman, J. (1962). The debates in light of research: A survey of surveys. In S. Kraus (Ed.), *The great debates: Kennedy vs. Nixon, 1960* (pp. 173-223). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kirchler, E. (1989). Everyday life experiences at home: An interaction diary approach to assess marital relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 2, 311-336.
- Kleinnijenhuis, J., & de Ridder, J. (1998). Issue news and electoral volatility. A comparative analysis of media effects during the 1994 election campaigns in Germany and the Netherlands. *European Journal of Political Research* 33, 413-437.
- Kwak, N., Williams, A. E., Wang, X. R., & Lee, H. (2005). Talking politics and engaging politics: An examination of the interactive relationships between structural features of political talk and discussion engagement. *Communication Research*, 32(1), 87-111.
- Lazarsfeld, P., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H. (1948). *The peoples choice*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lee, F. (2012). Does discussion with disagreement discourage all types of political participation? Survey evidence from Hong Kong. *Communication Research*, 39(4), 543-562.

- Lenart, S. (1994). *Shaping political attitudes: The impact of interpersonal communication and mass media*. London: Sage Publications.
- Lindberg, L.N. and Scheingold, S.A. (1970) *Europe's would-be polity: Patterns of change in the European Community*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- MacKuen, M., & Brown, C. (1987). Political context and attitude change. *American Political Science Review*, 81(2), 471-90.
- McClurg, S.D., (2006). Political disagreement in context: The conditional effect of neighborhood context, disagreement and political talk on electoral participation. *Political Behavior*, 28, 349-366.
- McGraw, K.M., & Bartels, B. (2005). Ambivalence toward American political institutions: Sources and consequences. In S.C. Craig & M.D. Martinez (Eds.), *Ambivalence and the structure of political opinion* (pp. 105-126). New York, NY: McMillan.
- Meyer, C. (1999). Political legitimacy and the invisibility of politics: exploring the European Union's communication deficit. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 37, 617-39.
- Mondak, J.J. (1995). Media exposure and political discussion in the U.S. elections. *Journal of Politics*, 57(1), 62-85.
- Morgan, S. (2009). The intersection of conversation, cognitions, and campaigns: The social representation of organ donation. *Communication Theory*, 19(1), 29-48.
- Morley, D. (1990). The construction of everyday life: Political communication and domestic media. In D. Swanson & D. Nimmo (Eds.), *New directions in political communication: A resource book* (pp.123-146). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Mutz, D. (1998). *Impersonal influence: How perceptions of mass collectives affect political attitudes*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mutz, D. (2002). The consequences of cross-cutting networks for political participation. *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(4), 838-55.
- Norris, P. (2000). *A Virtuous circle: Political communication in postindustrial societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Page, B., & Shapiro, R. (1992). *The rational public*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Parsons, B.M. (2010). Social networks and the affective impact of political disagreement. *Political Behavior*, 32, 181-204.
- Pattie, C., & Johnston, R. (2001). Talk as political context: Conversation and electoral change in British elections, 1992-1997. *Electoral Studies*, 20, 17-40.
- Peter, J. (2003). *Why European TV news matters*. Amsterdam.

- Peter, J., & de Vreese, C. (2004). In search of Europe in search of Europe – a crossnational comparative study of the European Union in national television news. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 9(4), 3–24.
- Reardon, K., & Rogers, E. (1988). Interpersonal versus mass media communication: A false dichotomy. *Human Communication Research*, 15(2), 284-303.
- Robinson, J., & Levy, M. R. (1986). Interpersonal communication and news comprehension. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 50, 160–175.
- Rohrschneider, R. (2002) ‘The democracy deficit and mass support for an EU-wide government’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 46: 463-75.
- Sánchez-Cuenca, I. (2000). The political basis of support for European integration. *European Union Politics*, 1(2), 147-171.
- Scheuer, A. (2005) *How Europeans see Europe: Structure and dynamics of European legitimacy beliefs*, Amsterdam: Vossiuspers UvA.
- Scheufele, D. A. (2001). Democracy for some? How political talk both informs and polarizes the electorate. In R. P. Hart & D. Shaw (Eds.), *Communication and U.S. elections: New agendas* (pp. 19-32). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Scheufele, D. A. (2000). Talk or conversation? Dimensions of interpersonal discussion and their implications for participatory democracy. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 77, 727-743.
- Scheufele, D. A. (2002). Examining differential gains from mass media and their implications for participatory behavior. *Communication Research*, 29, 46-65.
- Schmitt-Beck, R. (2003). Mass communication, personal communication and vote choice: The filter hypothesis of media influence in comparative perspective. *British Journal of Political Science*, 33(2), 233-259.
- Slater, M. (2007). Reinforcing spirals: The mutual influence of media selectivity and media effects and their impact on individual behavior and social identity. *Communication Theory*, 17(3), 281-303.
- Southwell, B., & Yzer, M. (2009). When (and Why) interpersonal talk matters for campaigns. *Communication Theory*, 19, 1-8.
- Valentino, N., Beckmann, M., & Buhr, T. (2001). A spiral of cynicism for some: The contingent effects of campaign news frames on participation and confidence in government. *Political Communication*, 18, 347-367.
- Zaller, J. R. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.



### **Chapter 3: Talking about politics: Effects of media and interpersonal communication on EU evaluations**

“At the heart of a strong democracy is talk” (Barber, 1984, p. 174). Within theories of democracy, interpersonal communication (IPC) has consistently been viewed as a central concept (Scheufele, 2002; Schudson, 1997). However, most research on the effect of interpersonal communication has focused on the composition and characteristics of the interpersonal networks, not on the content of these conversations (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; Chapter 2). Perhaps due to the complexity of everyday conversational behavior (topics, conversational partners), scholars who include interpersonal conversation in their study have been reluctant to account for tone and direction of the conversations (Southwell & Yzer, 2009). “Nonetheless, it may well be that investigation of content-related contingencies is where we need to go next” (Southwell & Yzer, 2009, p. 6). The focus on the content of media and interpersonal communication is an attempt to take that next step.

Furthermore, there has been an urge to combine media messages and interpersonal communication in effects studies. In an attempt to investigate the relationship between interpersonal communication and media exposure, Schmitt-Beck (2003) found an indirect effect of political discussion. Depending on the political preferences of one’s network, and its concordance to the media message, the media message will be reinforced or rejected by the interpersonal communication. Through this indirect effect of political discussion, the ‘meta-communicative’ function, interpersonal communication supplements the mass media (Schmitt-Beck, 2003). The more concordant media messages are to the preferences of the interpersonal network, the more likely it is that they will be taken into account.

Inconsistent findings regarding the relation between interpersonal discussion and media exposure has led some scholars to believe that additional variables might be at play. Although described by some scholars as “essential for a successful democracy” (Barber, 1984; Habermas, 1989; Fishkin, 1991), the effects of the presence of disagreement in networks of political discussion on political opinions have rarely been empirically studied (Feldman & Price, 2008). Similar to Chapter 2, I add the presence of disagreement between discussants within interpersonal communication as a potential moderator for the effect of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations. In this chapter however, I also expect a



moderating effect of disagreement on the reinforcement effect of interpersonal communication on the media effects.

Both interpersonal communication and mass media communication play a central role in the development of political opinions and attitudes. In this study, I attempt to overcome the most important shortcoming I noted in the previous study, i.e. the lack of information about the content of the interpersonal communication (Chapter 2). By conducting an experiment, I can manipulate the tone of the conversation, and as such measure the effects of differences in conversational tone and content. This study contributes to the research field in three ways: first, I will explore the potential effect of tone of both media message and interpersonal communication on EU evaluations. Secondly, this article explores whether tone congruence between media message and interpersonal communication moderates the effect of political discussion and media exposure on EU evaluations. Third, I will add disagreement between discussants as a potential moderator of the effect of political discussion on EU evaluations.

### **Tone effects: the media hypothesis and the IPC hypothesis**

Previous research has shown that the coverage of political actors plays an important role in shaping citizens' opinions about political issues (Druckman & Parkin 2005). Focusing on political evaluations, Mutz (1998) noted that the media have "the capacity to alienate people's political judgments from their immediate lives and experiences and to distance them from a politics rooted in everyday life" (p. 146). A more negative tone has often been associated with more negative opinions and even cynicism about politics (Valentino, Beckmann, & Buhr, 2001). Few attempts have been made by scholars to examine whether the tone of the coverage has an effect on attitudes towards the EU (Exceptions: Norris, 2000; Banducci, Karp, & Lauf, 2001; Peter, 2003). Peter (2003) found that the tone of coverage affected attitudes towards European integration positively in a consonant context and de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006b) showed that a one-sided media message flow affects public support for EU enlargement. In the previous chapter, I predicted that the tone of media messages is essentially determining the direction of changes in EU evaluations among the public (Chapter 2). I found confirmation for this media hypothesis. The negativity or positivity of the tone in the consumed EU news translated into the overall evaluation of the democratic performance of the EU.

Hypothesis 1: The more positive (or negative) the tone of the media message, the more positive (or negative) one's evaluation of the EU will become.

Interpersonal communication may expose people to a different set of politically-relevant information and stimuli than they possess individually (Huckfeldt, 2001; Mutz,

2002). It plays a significant role in shaping (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995; MacKuen & Brown, 1987; Pattie & Johnston, 2001; Fishkin & Laslett, 2003) and changing (Mondak, 1995) individuals' opinions and political attitudes. According to Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995), networks of social relations are primarily responsible for the communication of political information and expertise among and between groups and individuals. Most studies examining the effect of interpersonal communication on political attitudes focused on the composition of the social networks surrounding the individual citizens (for an overview, see Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). In the previous study, I found an effect of frequent interpersonal communication within homogenous networks (Chapter 2). This effect of interpersonal communication diminished when disagreement within the network was perceived.

Instead of focusing on the composition of the social networks, this study looks at the tone of the conversation. As I am conducting an experiment, I can manipulate the tone of the media message and the interpersonal conversation. In the IPC hypothesis, I expect that the tone of interpersonal conversations, in a very similar way as the tone of media messages, will have a direct effect on EU evaluations.

Hypothesis 2: The more EU positive (or negative) the tone of interpersonal communication is, the more positive (or negative) EU evaluations will become.

### **One-sided versus two-sided message flows: the reinforcement hypothesis**

In the extant literature, no consensus has been reached on the nature of the relationship between the effects of media and interpersonal communication on public opinion. The most widely accepted relationship is one of competition between media and interpersonal information (Lenart, 1994). Most studies following this competitive model find that, whatever the potential effects of the media, interpersonal conversation usually overrides the influence of the media (for an overview, see Lenart, 1994). The second theoretical perspective on media versus interpersonal sources uses a model of reinforcement (for an overview, see Lenart, 1994). More interpersonal conversation about media information will increase the total media impact (Chaffee & Mutz, 1988; Scheufele, 2002). In this study, I test the extent to which this effect depends on the content of both messages, and its concordance with one another.

According to Zaller (1992, 1996), attitude change occurs for some individuals as a result of the composition of messages and ideas to which they are exposed. In his model, he distinguishes one-sided information flows from two-sided message flows. In the first scenario, the content of messages provides a consistent directional bias, whereas in the second scenario, the messages contain information with a mixed evaluative content (Zaller, 1992, 1996). Zaller's model initially focused on the role of political elites (1992), which he reframed later in

terms of the effects of mass communication (1996). In this study, I extend this model to the effects of interpersonal communication. Schmitt-Beck (2003) found that while media and interpersonal communication can be similarly influential on vote choice, an indirect effect can be traced as well. When voters receive cues from the mass media, they frequently talk about them with peers. Depending on the political preferences of those peers, and the concordance of those preferences to the media message, the latter will be reinforced or rejected by the former (Schmitt-Beck, 2003). Schmitt-Beck uses the political preferences of the discussants to measure concordance with the media message. In this study, I focus on the content of the conversation, not on the preferences of the network. Tone and directional bias are essential characteristics of conversations, and the analysis of content-related contingencies should be the next step forward (Southwell & Yzer, 2009). As I mentioned in the previous study (Chapter 2), gathering more in-depth information about the content of interpersonal discussions is essential to measure the impact of those conversations on public opinion more precisely. By manipulating the tone of both the media and the interpersonal message, I create situations where people are exposed to congruent (both EU positive or both EU negative) or incongruent message flows. I expect that the tone congruence between the media and the interpersonal message will determine whether interpersonal communication reinforces the effect of the media message. When the tone of the evaluative message from the media differs from the tone of interpersonal conversations, this should then lead to a diminished effect. The reinforcement hypothesis predicts a reinforcement effect of exposure to media content and interpersonal discussion in addition to the main effects of both types of communication.

Hypothesis 3: When the tone of interpersonal communication and the tone of media messages is congruent, their effects on EU evaluations will reinforce one another.

### **The role of disagreement**

Feldman and Price (2008) argued that the presence of disagreement in networks of political discussion guides the interaction between media and interpersonal communication. Despite its theoretical reputation as a requirement of a successful democracy (Barber, 1984; Habermas, 1989; Fishkin, 1991), the effects of the presence of disagreement in networks of political discussion on political opinions has rarely<sup>1</sup> been empirically studied (Feldman & Price, 2008). Feldman and Price (2008) used political networks data to examine the moderating effect of exposure to disagreement on the effect of political discussion and media use on political knowledge within the context of the 2000 presidential primary campaign in the US. They reported a negative interaction between political discussion and disagreement in predicting issue knowledge.

In this study, however, the focus is not on the network of political discussion, but on the content of those political discussions. Most research on the effect of disagreement within interpersonal communication is done in the context of political participation. Theoretically, one might assume a positive effect from disagreement on political participation: where differences of opinion exist, people will be mobilized to represent their own point of view (Dahl, 1989). Psychological models on the other hand suggest that people, due to the conflict-averse nature of individuals, would be discouraged by the exposure to countervailing opinions (Ulbig & Funk, 1999). Recent studies have brought empirical proof for both theoretical views. Some studies have demonstrated the positive effect of exposure to disagreement on participation (Scheufele, Hardy, Brossard, Waismel-Manor, & Nisbet, 2006; Wojcieszak, Baek, & Delli Carpini, 2010), while other scholars have reported a negative effect, in part by the increased uncertainty among citizens (Mutz, 2002; Belanger & Eagles, 2007). “[... O]n the relationship between network disagreement and political participation runs the whole gamut of possible outcomes” (Pattie & Johnston, 2009, 265). One of the possible factors that can explain this variation in findings, is the form of participation being examined. Lee (2012) differentiated between position-taking and non position-taking activities. Disagreement then has a discouraging effect when position-taking activities are involved, whereas with non position-taking activities, disagreement within the interpersonal network does not necessarily affect the level of participation in a negative way. Although EU evaluations cannot be described as an activity, it does carry the position-taking aspect, and therefore, the discouragement-logic could be applicable here. When the evaluative tone of the discussant is different from the own directional bias on the subject, one is confronted with a two-sided message flow, and this ambivalence tends to reduce attitude strength and opinion certainty (McGraws & Bartels, 2005). In a way, disagreement undermines the influence of discussion (Lee, 2012). I expect that disagreement with the discussant will diminish the effect of the tone of the interpersonal communication on EU evaluations.

Hypothesis 4: The IPC hypothesis (H2) is moderated by the presence of (dis)agreement within the conversations. The more disagreement one encounters, the less effect the tone of interpersonal communication will have on EU evaluations.

## **Method**

### **Design**

I conducted an experiment to explore the interplay between interpersonal and mass communication in the context of European Union (EU) evaluations. 230 participants were assigned to the conditions of a 3 (positive EU message, negative EU message, no EU

message) x 3 (EU positive discussant, EU negative discussant, no discussant) design, after which their democratic performance evaluations of the EU were assessed. Each participant received a set of two articles, which they had to read. Every respondent received an article which had nothing to do with the experiment (see Appendix III.D), to ensure that the participants did not realize immediately that the experiment dealt with the European Union. The second article was either the stimulus material or the control article, depending on the condition. One third of the respondents read the control article, two third of the respondents read an article about the democratic performance of the European Union. Within this group, half of the respondents were exposed to an article about the positive assets of the functioning of the EU, the other half were exposed to an article highlighting the negative characteristics of the EU. The control article was about the movie “Twilight”. After reading the articles, the respondents were asked to participate in an online conversation. The tone of this conversation was manipulated by the research assistant, posing as another participant. The participants were told that they were talking with another participant; however, they were actually talking to a research assistant. The participants were asked to chat about three statements that were proposed by the admin. One third of the participants did not talk about the EU, two thirds of the participants did. In half of the conversations about the EU, the research assistant took a pronounced positive EU perspective, in the other half, the research assistant was pronounced negative about the EU<sup>2</sup>. The discussion lasted on average for five minutes.

### **Questionnaire**

Immediately after the experiment took place, participants were asked to fill out an online questionnaire. I incorporated the democratic performance evaluation scale along with a variety of other questions, some of which had nothing to do with the purpose of the current study.

### **Measures**

**Dependent variable.** In the extant literature, democratic performance evaluations of the EU have been operationalized in several ways. Some scholars used support for integration (Janssen, 1991; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000) to test citizens’ attitudes towards the EU. Other scholars used satisfaction with (European) democracy as their variable of interest (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Karp, Banducci, & Bowler, 2003; Aarts & Thomassen, 2008). Attitudes towards European governance are structured along related but distinct dimensions (Rohrschneider, 2002; Scheuer, 2005). To fully capture the multi-dimensionality of EU attitudes, studies of public opinion about the EU should reflect on these different types of support. Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas and de Vreese (2011) distinguished the democratic

performance dimension from four other dimensions of EU attitudes. This resulted in a scale of four items (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.828; Explained variance = 66.047 %; Eigen value = 2.642), which will serve as the dependent variable, measuring evaluation of the EU's democratic performance (see Desmet, van Spanje & de Vreese, 2012/Chapter 1 and 2). The first item measures the satisfaction with European democracy: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in the European Union? Respondents had to rate on a seven-point scale, ranging from 'not at all satisfied' (1) to 'very satisfied' (7). For the other three items, respondents had to indicate to what extent they agreed with the following statements: (a) The European Union functions according to democratic principles. (b) The decision making process in the European Union is transparent. (c) The European Union functions well as it is. Again, respondents could choose between seven answer categories, ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) till 'strongly agree' (7). By averaging the responses to these items, I created a democratic performance scale, ranging from 1 to 7.

**Message exposure.** As mentioned in the description of the design, participants had to read two articles. The first article was about a natural phenomenon, the second article was either the manipulation article (for two thirds of the participants) or the control article (for one third of the participants).

**Interpersonal communication.** For practical reasons, I chose to organize the chat conversation online. In an earlier study on the different gains model, Hardy and Scheufele (2005) found that computer-mediated interaction can replace face-to-face interpersonal discussion, while producing the same moderating effects. Regardless of the medium in which the discussion takes place, chatting about politics had the same moderating effects as face-to-face conversation. In this study, participants were randomly assigned to three conditions: one third of the participants did not talk about the EU, two thirds did, half of them were confronted with a EU positive discussant, the other half had to talk with a EU negative discussant.

**Disagreement.** After the online chat conversation, respondents were asked whether they perceived disagreement or not within their conversation, on a scale from 1 (no disagreement at all) to 4 (much disagreement). If they did not discuss the EU, they had to choose 0 (I did not discuss the EU at all).

**Table III.1: Descriptives of the variables**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
EU evaluations (DV)	269	1.00	7.00	3.6803	.93866
Article (media)	269	-1.00	1.00	.0186	.82613
EU positive article (dummy)	269	0.00	1.00	.2965	.45745
EU negative article (dummy)	269	0.00	1.00	.2808	.45008
Conversation (IPC)	269	-1.00	1.00	-.0149	.81484
EU positive conversation (dummy)	269	0.00	1.00	.2744	.44694
EU negative conversation (dummy)	269	0.00	1.00	.2871	.45311
Disagreement	269	0.00	4.00	1.7313	1.22192
Valid N (listwise)	269				

### Results<sup>3</sup>

First, I look at the main effect of the article (media) and the conversation (IPC). As shown in Table III.2 (Model 2.1), the article had a significant effect on EU evaluations (H1). An EU positive article yielded more positive EU democratic performance evaluations by the participants. Similarly, as shown in Model 2.2, the conversation had a significant effect on EU evaluations (H2). A conversation with an EU positive discussant made the participants 0.374 more EU positive on a scale from 1 to 7. The effect of the conversation appears to be stronger (.374 versus .214 on a scale from 1 to 7) and more substantial (R Square change: article (.032) versus conversation (.102)) than the effect of the article.

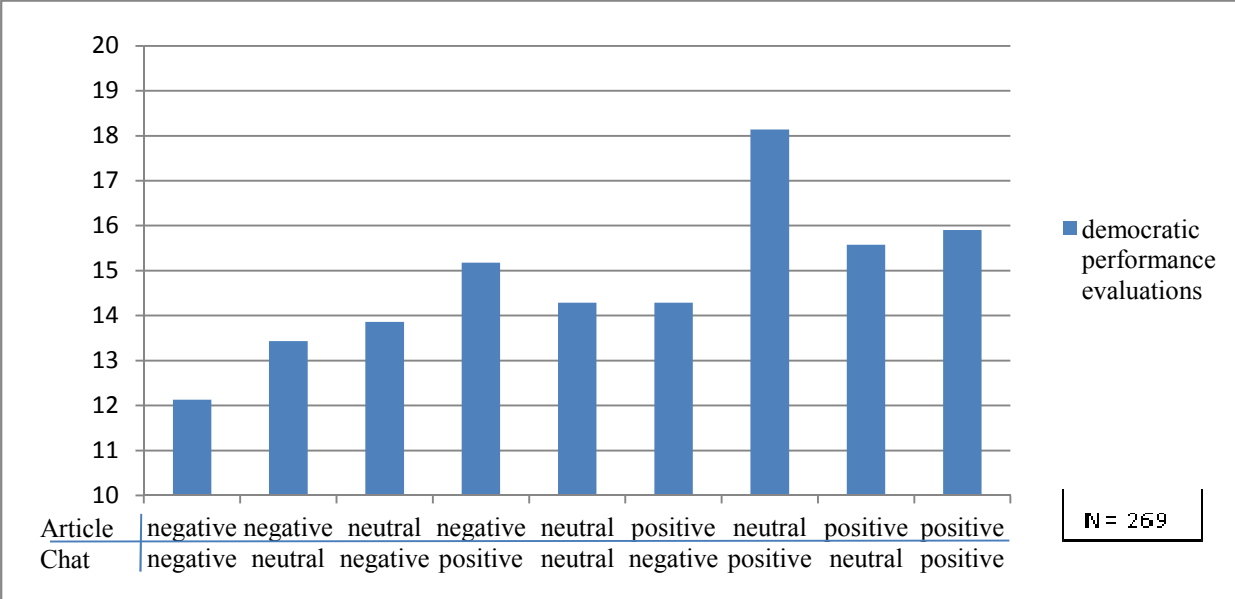
**Table III.2: Effect of the article and the conversation on EU evaluations**

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>Model 2.1</b>	<b>Model 2.2</b>	<b>Model 2.3</b>
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Constant	3.676 (.056)***	3.686 (.054)***	3.682 (.026)***
<u>Main Effects</u>			
Article (Media)	.214 (.068)***		.210 (.065)***
Conversation (IPC)		.374 (.067)***	.371 (.066)***
<u>Model Summary</u>			
R Square (adjusted)	.032	.102	.133
N	269	269	269

Note: levels of significance: \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \* =  $p < .05$

To get an idea of the effect of the manipulation on the respondents, I compared the estimated means of each of the nine conditions. Figure III.1 shows us that evaluations of EU democratic performance tend to be more positive in the conditions where at least one of the messages (media or interpersonal communication) is EU positive. Furthermore, the effect of interpersonal communication in all positive IPC conditions is indeed more substantial than the effect of media in all positive media conditions. The condition that differs significantly from all other conditions is the condition where a neutral article (not about the EU) was followed by a EU positive chat. The three most negative conditions (negative article and neutral chat, neutral article and negative chat, and negative article and negative chat) differ significantly ( $p < 0.001$ ) from the three most positive conditions (positive article and neutral chat; neutral article and positive chat; positive article and positive chat). What is remarkable in Figure III.1 is the fact that the most positive condition (positive article and positive chat) does not have the most positive effect on EU democratic performance evaluations. I expected the opposite: the most positive condition should have had the most positive effect on EU democratic performance evaluations. This does not bode well for the reinforcement hypothesis (H3), which I will discuss later in this section.

**Figure III.1: Estimated means of EU democratic performance evaluations after being exposed to an EU article (negative, neutral or positive) and engaging in an online EU conversation (negative, neutral or positive).**





In order to analyze the specific impact of EU positive and EU negative messages, I replaced the main variables by dummies<sup>4</sup>, as shown in Table III.3. In the EU positive condition (Model 3.1), only the EU positive conversation had a significant effect on peoples' EU evaluations. In the EU negative condition (Model 3.2), both manipulations appear to be significant ( $p < .001$ ). The effect of the EU negative conversation (-0.486 on a scale from 1 to 7) is slightly bigger than the effect of the EU negative article (-0.438 on a scale from 1 to 7). The positive EU article condition just fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance ( $p = 0.067$ ); which might be due to the small N.

**Table III.3: Effect of the article and the conversation on EU evaluations (dummies)**

Independent Variable	Model 3.1	Model 3.2
	B (SE)	B (SE)
Constant	3.404 (.077)***	3.990 (.076)***
<u>Main Effects</u>		
EU positive article (media)	.209 (.114)	
EU negative article (media)		-.438 (.115)***
EU positive conversation (IPC)	.627 (.116)***	
EU negative conversation (IPC)		-.486 (.115)***
<u>Model Summary</u>		
R Square (adjusted)	.102	.104
N	269	269

Note: levels of significance: \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \* =  $p < .05$

Next, I look at the potential reinforcement effect of the article and the conversation on EU democratic performance evaluations (H3). As displayed on Table III.4 (Model 4.1 and Model 4.2), I only tested the interaction effect for those situations where the tone of the article and the conversation was congruent (both negative or both positive). I cannot confirm the existence of a reinforcement effect for the positive condition. On the contrary: as hinted to in the interpretation of Figure III.1, I found the opposite effect. Tone congruence between the article and the conversation had a diminishing effect on the EU evaluations. Compared to Model 3.1 (Table III.3), the effect of an EU positive conversation on EU evaluations is stronger when the participant was not exposed to a EU positive article (Model 4.1) (0.834 versus 0.627 on a scale from 1 to 7). For the negative condition, I did not find any significant effect. Tone congruence does not have a reinforcement effect on EU negative media and

interpersonal communication, but neither does it diminishes the existing negative effects, as tone congruence did in the positive condition.

**Table III.4: Reinforcement effect of tone congruence between article and conversation**

Independent Variable	Model 4.1	Model 4.2
	B (SE)	B (SE)
Constant	3.757 (.120)***	3.693 (.124)***
<u>Main Effects</u>		
EU positive article (media)	.401 (.137)**	
EU negative article (media)		-.412 (.142)**
EU positive conversation (IPC)	.834 (.142)***	
EU negative conversation (IPC)		-.460 (.141)***
<u>Interaction Effects</u>		
EU positive article x EU positive conversation	-.597 (.241)*	
EU negative article x EU negative conversation		-.076 (.243)
<u>Model Summary</u>		
R Square (adjusted)	.119	.101
N	269	269

Note: levels of significance: \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \* =  $p < .05$

When disagreement within the interpersonal communication is added to the model (see Table III.5), I find a significant effect of the moderation effect of disagreement on the effects of interpersonal communication, both in the positive ( $p < 0.001$ ; Model 5.1) and in the negative ( $p < .01$ ; Model 5.2) condition. This confirms the fourth hypothesis. Disagreement undermines the positive effect of positive EU conversations on EU democratic performance evaluations. Similarly, disagreement undermines the negative effect of negative EU conversations on EU democratic performance evaluations.

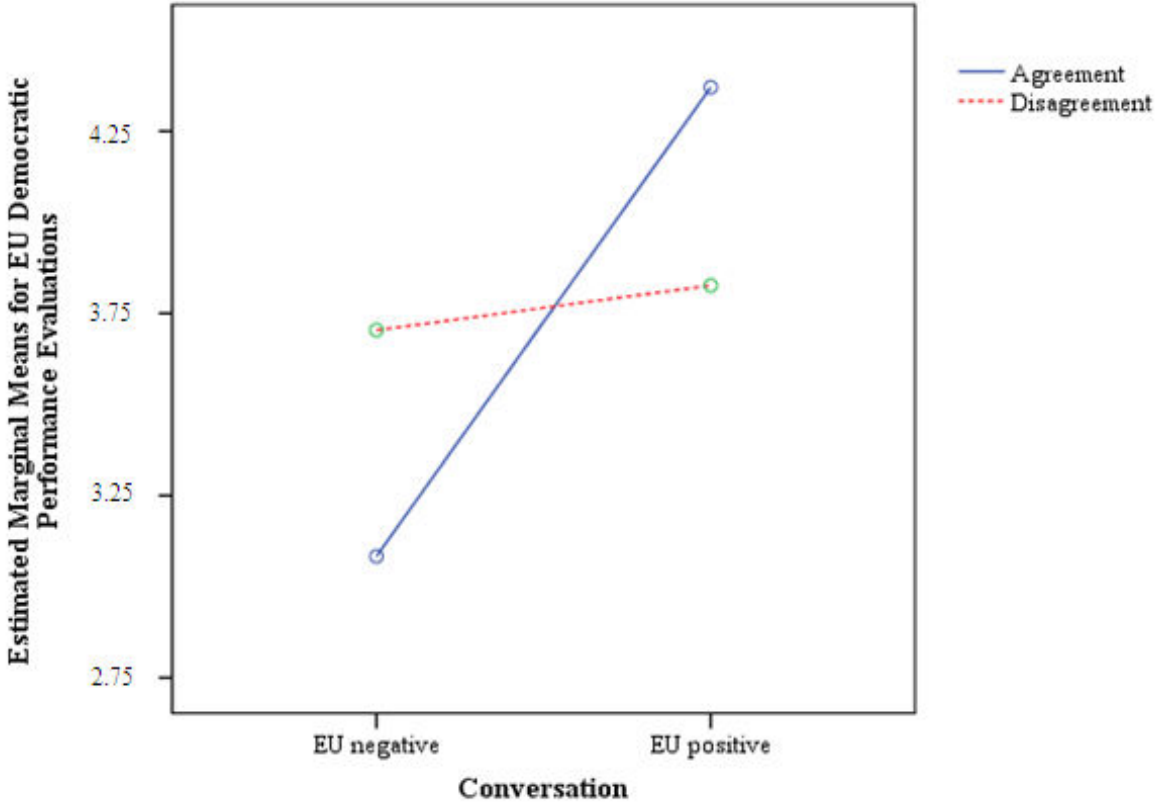
**Table III.5: Effect of disagreement within the conversation on EU evaluations**

Independent Variable	Model 5.1	Model 5.2
	B (SE)	B (SE)
Constant	3.436 (.108)***	1.386 (.026)***
<u>Main Effects</u>		
EU positive article (media)	.174 (.111)	
EU negative article (media)		-.465 (.112)***
EU positive conversation (IPC)	1.571 (.280)***	
EU negative conversation (IPC)		-1.437 (.291)***
Disagreement	-.005 (.053)	.045 (.050)
<u>Interaction Effects</u>		
EU positive conversation x disagreement	-.394 (.115)***	
EU negative conversation x disagreement		.391 (.123)**
<u>Model Summary</u>		
R Square (adjusted)	.142	.157
N	269	269

Note: levels of significance: \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \* =  $p < .05$

The moderation effect of disagreement on the direct effect of interpersonal communication is illustrated in Figure III.2. I rescaled the disagreement item (0-4) into a dichotomous variable<sup>5</sup>. On the solid line, one can see the difference between the chat conditions (negative, neutral or positive), when the discussants perceived no disagreement. The positive condition differs significantly ( $p < .001$ ) from the negative condition. On the dotted line, one can find the difference between the chat conditions when the participants perceived disagreement. When discussants disagree with one another, the difference in effect between the most negative and the most positive chat condition is no longer significant. The perception of disagreement does weaken the direct effect of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations.

**Figure III.2: Moderation effect of disagreement on the effect of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations**



**Discussion**

In this study, I experimentally tested the importance of tone congruence between media messages and interpersonal communication about the EU. Previous studies already showed the importance of combining media exposure and interpersonal communication in public opinion effect studies (Beaudoin, 2004; Eveland & Scheufele, 2005; Lenart 1994; Scheufele, 2002; Chaffee & Mutz, 1988; Gamson, 1992; Beck et al., 2002; Schmitt-Beck, 2003; Eliasoph, 1998; Scheufele 2000). Due to the complexity of everyday conversational behavior (topics, conversational partners), scholars who include interpersonal conversation in their study have been reluctant to account for tone and direction of the conversations (Southwell & Yzer, 2009). This study demonstrates the important role of tone and directional bias in these studies. Furthermore, I add disagreement between discussants to this model, as a moderator of the effects of interpersonal communication.

I started off by studying the effect of both manipulations individually. As expected, I found a tone effect of both the media message and the interpersonal conversation. The more negative the article was about the democratic performance of the EU, the more negative the

participant became about the democratic performance of the EU after reading it (H1). Similarly, the more negative the discussant was about the EU democratic performance, the more negative the participant became after having this short conversation (H2). These results are quite intuitive, and form the basis of this study. People tend to be influenced by their social and media environment. The impact of online forms of political communication were not the subject of this study, however, as Boomgaarden (2012) argues, online forms of political communication might “blur the distinction between mass and interpersonal communication and may serve as an impetus for a renewed interest in integrative approaches to mass and interpersonal political communication” (p. 1).

In the research field, no consensus has been reached about the combined effect of media exposure and interpersonal communication (Mutz, 1998; Lenart, 1994; Boomgaarden, 2012). Some scholars believe that interpersonal communication neutralizes media effects, others stated that media effects are reinforced by interpersonal communication. Mixed results on this matter made some scholars believe that other variables might be determinant in this process. In the previous study (Chapter 2), I expected tone congruence between media message and interpersonal communication (Schmitt-Beck, 2003) and disagreement within the interpersonal network (Feldman & Price, 2008; Lee, 2012) to be moderators in this model. However, as I did not possess in-depth information about the content of those conversations, I was not able to show the link between the tone of the media message and the tone of the interpersonal conversation, nor to study the potential moderating role of disagreement on the effects of both interpersonal and media messages. The experimental setting enabled us to manipulate the tone of both media and interpersonal message.

I did not find conclusive evidence for a reinforcement effect of tone congruence between media and interpersonal communication on EU evaluations on EU evaluations (H3). On the contrary, the results indicate that, within the positive condition (exposure to a EU positive article and a EU positive conversation), tone congruence diminishes the positive main effects of both on EU evaluations. Similarly, I found exposure to a neutral article, followed by a EU positive conversation, to be the manipulation with the most positive effect on EU evaluations. Participants seemed to be more open for positive arguments on the democratic functioning of the EU when exposed to them for the first time. Were the participants in the most positive condition reluctant to be “persuaded” for the second time? Or does interpersonal communication need an “open flank” to fully reach its persuasive potential?

Turning to the fourth expectation, I confirmed the claim made by some scholars that disagreement within interpersonal communication moderates the effect of interpersonal

communication (H4) (Feldman & Price, 2008; Lee, 2012; Chapter 2). When disagreement with the discussant is perceived, interpersonal communication has a less outspoken effect on evaluations of European democratic performance. People are confronted with arguments and opinions which they perceive as different from their own directional bias on the subject. The ambivalence thus created reduces their opinion certainty (McGraw & Bartels, 2005). This perception of disagreement undermines the effect of the evaluative tone of the interpersonal conversation on EU evaluations.

In this chapter I have demonstrated that content-related contingencies are worth to investigate when studying the effects of interpersonal communication on political opinions. It enables scholars to measure congruence between different types of messages in a better way. Furthermore, these results also indicate that the perception of agreement with the discussant is an important factor in this process. People seek confirmation for their own ideas when looking for new information in media or their interpersonal network. The strength of the effect of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations is largely dependent on the perception of agreement with the discussant. People seem to be more open for someone's opinions when they have the feeling to be on the same side.

#### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Exceptions: Mutz, 2002; Price, Capella, & Nir, 2002; Huckfeldt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2004

<sup>2</sup> In every conversation, both participants (respondent and research assistant) had to discuss their position on three statements, and motivate this position towards the other. The research assistant motivated his opinion in every conversation with the same arguments. In the EU positive conversations, the three statements were: (1) The EU functions well; (2) Life is possible on the moon; (3) Without the EU, our situation would be worse. In the EU negative conversations, the three statements were: (1) The EU does not function well; (2) Life is possible on the moon; (3) We are better off without the EU. In the neutral conversations, the three statements were: (1) Life is possible on the moon; (2) I like science fiction; (3) Space exploration is an interesting topic. I deliberately chose not to select three statements about the EU in the EU conversations, firstly, to keep the participants interested and involved, and secondly, to improve the personal sympathy between both discussion partners. For the second statement (about the moon), the research assistant waited for the participant to answer, and then enthusiastically agreed with his or her opinion.

<sup>3</sup> I controlled for chat behavior (In a normal week, how often do you chat?), and media trust, but adding these variables to the model did not significantly change any of the results.

<sup>4</sup> I constructed dummy variables for both the conversation and the article variable. For the article variable, I constructed “EU positive article” (0 = neutral article and negative article; 1 = positive article), and “EU negative article” (0 = neutral article and positive article; 1 = negative article). For the conversation variable, I constructed “EU positive conversation” (0 = neutral conversation and negative conversation; 1 = positive conversation), and “EU negative conversation” (0 = neutral conversation and positive conversation; 1 = negative conversation).

<sup>5</sup> I rescaled the disagreement variable (0-4) into a categorical variable. Answers 1 (no disagreement at all) and 2 (little disagreement) were rescaled into 0 (no disagreement). Answers 3 (disagreement) and 4 (much disagreement) were rescaled into 1 (disagreement). Participant who answered 0 (we did not talk about the EU) were not included in this Figure, which explains the lower N (one third of the participants did not chat about the EU).

## References

- Aarts, K., & Thomassen, J. (2008). Satisfaction with democracy: Do institutions matter? *Electoral Studies*, 27(1), 5-18.
- Anderson, C. J., & Guillory, C.A. (1997). Political institutions and satisfaction with democracy: A cross-national analysis of consensus and majoritarian systems. *American Political Science Review*, 91(1), 66-81.
- Anderson, P., & McLeod, A. (2004). The great non-communicator? The mass communication deficit of the European Parliament and its Press Directorate. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 42(5), 897-917.
- Barber, B. (1984). *Strong democracy: Participatory politics for a new age*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Banducci, S., Karp, J., & Lauf, E. (2001). *Elite leadership, media coverage and support for European integration*. Paper presented at the regional meeting of the World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR), Hamburg.
- Beck, P.A. (1991). Voters' intermediation environments in the 1988 presidential contest. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 55(3), 371-394.
- Beck, P.A., Dalton, R.J., Greene, S., & Huckfeldt, R. (2002). The social calculus of voting: Interpersonal, media, and organizational influences on presidential choices. *American Political Science Review*, 96(1), 57-73.
- Belanger, P., & Eagles, M. (2007). Partisan cross-pressure and voter turnout: The influence of micro- and macro-environments. *Social Science Quarterly*, 88, 850-867.
- Boomgaarden, H., Schuck, A., Elenbaas, M., & de Vreese, C. (2011). Mapping EU attitudes: Conceptual and empirical dimensions of euroscepticism and EU support. *European Union Politics*, doi:10.1177/1465116510395411.
- Chaffee, S.H., & Mutz, D.C. (1988). Comparing mediated and interpersonal communication data. In R. P. Hawkins et al. (Eds.), *Advancing communication science: Merging mass and interpersonal processes* (pp. 19-43). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Cho, J. (2005). Media, interpersonal discussion, and electoral choice. *Communication Research*, 32(3), 295-322.
- Dahl, R. (1989). *Democracy and its critics*. New Have: Yale University Press.
- Dawson, M.C. (2001). *Black visions: The roots of contemporary African American political ideologies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- de Vreese, C.H. (2001). Europe in the news: a cross-national comparative study of the news coverage of key EU events. *European Union Politics*, 2(3), 283-307.



- de Vreese, C.H. (2007). *The EU as a public space. Living review in the CONNEX series in Governance*. Retrieved from <http://europeangovernance.livingreviews.org/Articles/lreg-2007-3>.
- de Vreese, C.H., & Boomgaarden, H.G. (2006a). How content moderates the effects of television news on political knowledge and engagement. *Acta Politica. International Journal of Political Science*, 41, 317–41.
- de Vreese, C.H., & Boomgaarden, H.G. (2006b). Media message flows and interpersonal communication: the conditional nature of effects on public opinion. *Communication Research*, 33, 1–19.
- de Vreese, C.H., & Semetko, H.A. (2004). *Political campaigning in referendums: Framing the referendum issue*. London: Routledge.
- Druckman, J., & Parkin, M. (2005). The impact of media bias: How editorial slant affects voters. *Journal of Politics*, 67(4), 1030-49.
- Easton, D. (1975) ‘A re-assessment of the concept of political support’, *British Journal of Political Science* 5(4): 435-57.
- Eliasoph, N. (1998). *Avoiding politics: How Americans produce apathy in everyday life*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Eveland, W. P., & Scheufele, D. A. (2005, August). A test of competing models of non-additive effects of political discussion and news media use on political knowledge. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, TX.
- Feldman, L., and Price, V. (2008). ‘Confusion or enlightenment? How exposure to disagreement moderates the effects of political discussion and media use on candidate knowledge’, *Communication Research*, 35: 61-87.
- Fishkin, J. S. (1991). *Democracy and deliberation: New directions for democratic reform*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press
- Fishkin, J.S., and Laslett, P. (eds.) (2003) *Debating deliberative democracy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gamson, W. (1992). *Talking politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Glynn, C., Herbst, S., O’Keefe, G., & Shapiro, R. (1999). *Public Opinion*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public spheres*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Huckfeldt, R. (2001). The social communication of political expertise. *American Journal of Political Science*, 45(2), 425-438.
- Huckfeldt, R., & Sprague, J. (1995). *Citizens, politics, and social communication: Information and influence in an election campaign*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Janssen, J. I. H. (1991). Postmaterialism, cognitive mobilization and public support for European integration. *British Journal of Political Science*, 21(4), 443-468.
- Kantner, C. (2004) *Kein modernes Babel: Kommunikative Voraussetzungen europäischer Öffentlichkeit*. Wiesbaden: VS Sozialwissenschaften.
- Karp, J. A., Banducci, S.A., & Bowler, S. (2003). To know it is to love it? Satisfaction with democracy in the European Union. *Comparative Political Studies*, 36(3), 271-292.
- Katz, R. (2001). Models of democracy: elite attitudes and the democratic deficit in the European Union. *European Union Politics*, 2(1), 53–80.
- Katz, E., & Feldman, J. (1962). The debates in light of research: A survey of surveys. In S. Kraus (Ed.), *The great debates: Kennedy vs. Nixon, 1960* (pp. 173-223). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kirchler, E. (1989). Everyday life experiences at home: An interaction diary approach to assess marital relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 2, 311-336.
- Lazarsfeld, P., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H. (1948). *The peoples choice*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lee, F. (2012). Does discussion with disagreement discourage all types of political participation? Survey evidence from Hong Kong. *Communication Research*, 39(4), 543-562.
- Lenart, S. (1994). *Shaping political attitudes: The impact of interpersonal communication and mass media*. London: Sage Publications.
- Lindberg, L.N. and Scheingold, S.A. (1970) *Europe's would-be polity: Patterns of change in the European Community*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- MacKuen, M., & Brown, C. (1987). Political context and attitude change. *American Political Science Review*, 81(2), 471-90.
- McGraw, K.M., & Bartels, B. (2005). Ambivalence toward American political institutions: Sources and consequences. In S.C. Craig & M.D. Martinez (Eds.), *Ambivalence and the structure of political opinion* (pp. 105-126). New York, NY: McMillan.

- Meyer, C. (1999). Political legitimacy and the invisibility of politics: exploring the European Union's communication deficit. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 37, 617–39.
- Mondak, J.J. (1995). Media exposure and political discussion in the U.S. elections. *Journal of Politics*, 57(1), 62-85.
- Morgan, S. (2009). The intersection of conversation, cognitions, and campaigns: The social representation of organ donation. *Communication Theory*, 19(1), 29-48.
- Morley, D. (1990). The construction of everyday life: Political communication and domestic media. In D. Swanson & D. Nimmo (Eds.), *New directions in political communication: A resource book* (pp.123–146). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Mutz, D. (1998). *Impersonal influence: How perceptions of mass collectives affect political attitudes*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mutz, D. (2002). The consequences of cross-cutting networks for political participation. *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(4), 838-55.
- Mutz, D. (2006). *Hearing the other side*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Norris, P. (2000). *A Virtuous circle: Political communication in postindustrial societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Page, B., & Shapiro, R. (1992). *The rational public*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Pattie, C., & Johnston, R. (2001). Talk as political context: Conversation and electoral change in British elections, 1992-1997. *Electoral Studies*, 20, 17-40.
- Pattie, C., & Johnston, R. (2009). Conversation, disagreement and political participation. *Political Behavior*, 31, 261-285.
- Peter, J. (2003). *Why European TV news matters*. Amsterdam.
- Peter, J., & de Vreese, C. (2004). In search of Europe in search of Europe – a crossnational comparative study of the European Union in national television news. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 9(4), 3–24.
- Reardon, K., & Rogers, E. (1988). Interpersonal versus mass media communication: A false dichotomy. *Human Communication Research*, 15(2), 284-303.
- Robinson, J., & Levy, M. R. (1986). Interpersonal communication and news comprehension. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 50, 160–175.
- Rohrschneider, R. (2002) 'The democracy deficit and mass support for an EU-wide government', *American Journal of Political Science*, 46: 463-75.
- Sánchez-Cuenca, I. (2000). The political basis of support for European integration. *European Union Politics*, 1(2), 147-171.

- Scheuer, A. (2005) *How Europeans see Europe: Structure and dynamics of European legitimacy beliefs*, Amsterdam: Vossiuspers UvA.
- Scheufele, D. A. (2002). Examining differential gains from mass media and their implications for participatory behavior. *Communication Research*, 29, 46-65.
- Scheufele, D.A., Hardy, B.W., Brossard, D., Waismel-Manor, I.S., & Nisbet, E. (2006). Democracy based on difference: Examining the links between structural heterogeneity, heterogeneity of discussion networks, and democratic citizenship. *Journal of Communication*, 56, 728-753.
- Schmitt-Beck, R. (2003). Mass communication, personal communication and vote choice: The filter hypothesis of media influence in comparative perspective. *British Journal of Political Science*, 33(2), 233-259.
- Schudson, M. (1997). Why conversation is not the soul of democracy. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 14, 297-309.
- Slater, M. (2007). Reinforcing spirals: The mutual influence of media selectivity and media effects and their impact on individual behavior and social identity. *Communication Theory*, 17(3), 281-303.
- Southwell, B., & Yzer, M. (2009). When (and Why) interpersonal talk matters for campaigns. *Communication Theory*, 19, 1-8.
- Ulbig, S.G., & Funk, C.L. (1999). Conflict avoidance and political participation. *Political Behavior*, 21, 265-282.
- Valentino, N., Beckmann, M., & Buhr, T. (2001). A spiral of cynicism for some: The contingent effects of campaign news frames on participation and confidence in government. *Political Communication*, 18, 347-367.
- Wojcieszak, M., Baek, Y.M., & Delli Carpini, M.X. (2010). Deliberative and participatory democracy? Ideological strength and the process leading from deliberation to political engagement. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 22, 154-180.
- Zaller, J. R. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Zaller, J.R. (1996). 'The myth of massive media impact revived: New support for a discredited idea'. In Mutz, D.C., Sniderman, P.M. and Brody, R.A. (eds) *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press)

## CONCLUSION

When I started this project back in 2009, I did not expect the European Union to be such a ‘hot’ news item in 2012. Attention to the European Union used to be concentrated around to big events, such as the European Council and the EP elections (Peter, 2003; Boomgaarden, Vliegenthart, de Vreese, & Schuck, 2010). EU news seems to be part of the daily news menu nowadays, although this is partly driven by the increase in the amount of ‘big EU events’ as well. The Greek crisis might be primarily a Eurozone crisis, but I learned during the experiments conducted in Chapter 3 that people do not really make the distinction between the EU and the Eurozone. Furthermore, a crisis within the Eurozone logically has its repercussions for the whole European Union. As a consequence, opinions on the EU are more outspoken than ever. Europe was a prominent theme in the French presidential elections. During the Dutch parliamentary elections of 2012, right-wing populist Geert Wilders declared Europe, Europe and Europe as the three most important election themes. Similarly, in the recent Greek and Hungarian elections, the relation between the nation state and the EU played a central role in the campaign. One might expect the next European Parliamentary elections in 2014 to be about Europe itself. Anno 2012, the evaluation of the EU democratic performance seems to be more relevant than ever.

In this conclusion, I will shortly recapture the main findings, the methods used and the added value they bring to the research field. Next, I will suggest some directions for future research, based on the findings. I conclude by discussing the implication of these results for “the real world”: what lessons could be learned?

### **Main findings**

In the first chapter, I set out to explain differences in EU democratic performance evaluations at the macro level. A first analysis showed remarkable differences in EU democratic performance evaluations between the EU member states. The European Union is a remarkable case, as it is the only supranational institution where decision-making is split between two levels: the national and the supranational. As Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) showed, evaluations of a supranational policy level depend on the interplay between national and supranational institutions.

A first finding here is the negative relation between national institutional quality and democratic performance evaluations of the EU. Citizens of countries with high-quality institutions are less satisfied with the democratic functioning of the EU than citizens of countries where institutional quality is low. This effect is moderated by political knowledge.

The more one knows about domestic politics, the more high institutional quality correlates with lower EU evaluations.

If political knowledge affects democratic performance evaluations of the EU, then where do people get this political knowledge from? Research has shown that news media are the primary sources of information about political matters (Beck et al., 2002). The evaluative tone of media messages has a persuasive effect on people's opinions about the EU (Norris, 2000; Banducci, Karp, & Lauf, 2001; Peter, 2003). As hypothesized in Chapter 2, exposure to positive EU messages from the media has a positive effect on people's evaluations of EU democratic performance. Similarly, people receive politically-relevant information through interpersonal conversations. Frequently engaging in EU positive interpersonal conversations also has a positive effect on EU evaluations. I did not find conclusive evidence for a moderation effect of interpersonal communication on the effect of media on EU evaluations. However, the effect of interpersonal communication itself is weakened when discussants perceive disagreement within the conversation. Thus, disagreement moderates the effect of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations. The more one disagrees within the conversation, the weaker the effect of interpersonal communication will be on EU evaluations.

The results of Chapter 2 were based on two-wave panel data complemented with data from a media content analysis, gathered in 21 member states within the three weeks preceding the EP-elections of 2009. This dataset did not provide specific information on the contents of interpersonal communication. In Chapter 3, I conducted an experiment, to further analyze whether the combined effect of media and interpersonal messages on EU evaluations depends on tone congruence between both types of communication. The experimental setting allowed us to manipulate the messages. Participants were exposed to a media message which was either EU positive, EU negative, or EU neutral. Then, they had to engage in a chat conversation with a discussant who was either EU positive, EU negative, or EU neutral. With this experimental dataset, I tested the same hypotheses as in Chapter 2. First, I found confirmation for the findings from Chapter 2: both evaluative media and interpersonal messages had an effect of EU democratic performance evaluations. Second, this manipulation allowed us to measure the effect of tone congruence (and incongruence) between media and interpersonal messages in a better way. I found conclusive evidence for a reinforcement effect of EU positive interpersonal communication on EU positive media messages. Due to the tone congruence between both, the positive effect on EU evaluations increases. I did not find evidence for the negative condition. Finally, I also tested the moderating effect of

disagreement within interpersonal communication. The more one perceives disagreement within interpersonal communication, the more the initial effect of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations diminishes.

In the experiment in Chapter 3, I found very similar answers to the research questions as in Chapter 2, where I tested the same expectations in a real-world setting. The main effects of both evaluative media and interpersonal communication were confirmed. Similarly, I found confirmation for the diminishing effect of disagreement on the main effect of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations. No conclusive evidence was found for the reinforcement hypothesis about the role of tone congruence between media and interpersonal messages, and its effect on EU evaluations, in Chapter 2. The fact that I found (partial) results for this hypothesis in Chapter 3 (which contradicts my expectations) can be assigned to the improved measurement of the content of interpersonal communication.

### **What I did add to the research field**

Evaluations of the democratic performance of the EU was the central concept in this dissertation. I primarily wanted to differentiate this dimension from other dimensions of EU attitudes, and define its most important antecedents. I chose to study the effect of national institutional context, media, and interpersonal communication. This differentiated and multi-methodological focus on EU democratic performance evaluations made this dissertation unique, and elevated the knowledge on EU democratic performance evaluations in several ways.

First, there is the multilevel approach towards the effect of national institutional quality on EU evaluations, which allowed us to test the moderating effect of an individual-level characteristic (political knowledge) on the effect of an aggregate-level variable (national institutional quality) on EU evaluations. I was able to demonstrate that domestic political knowledge moderates the effect of national institutional quality on EU democratic performance evaluations, a new and unique finding. Furthermore, I constructed a measure of national institutional quality, beyond corruption (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000) and subjective measures of national institutional quality (Rohrschneider, 2002).

Second, I gathered evidence from both a real-world and an experimental setting for the influence of evaluative media and interpersonal communication content on EU evaluations. This focus on evaluative content is not unique, but the different methods I used to demonstrate these effects can inspire other scholars to assess the evaluative content of both media and interpersonal messages more precise. I answered the urge from several scholars to focus more on these content-related contingencies in order to take the study of interpersonal

communication effects to a higher level (Southwell & Yzer, 2009). Furthermore, I demonstrated the importance of combining media and interpersonal communication in public opinion effects studies. Third, the results demonstrated the importance of disagreement as a moderator of interpersonal communication effects. Both in the real-world (Chapter 2) and the experimental (Chapter 3) setting, I found conclusive evidence for the mitigating effect of disagreement on the effect of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations. Based on these results, I strongly recommend the inclusion of disagreement in interpersonal communication effect studies.

### **Limitations of this dissertation**

Naturally, this dissertation has its shortcomings as well. I was not able to measure the impact of specific knowledge about European politics in the multilevel model from Chapter 1. The differential impact of domestic versus EU specific political knowledge would have been a nice addition to the model. However, the measurement of EU political knowledge in the survey was insufficient for far-reaching conclusions. Furthermore, in the second and third chapter, I did not find conclusive evidence for the reinforcement effect I expected. On the contrary, the only significant result I found for this hypothesis (in the positive condition from Chapter 3) contradicted my expectation: EU positive tone congruence between media and interpersonal communication did not have a reinforcement effect on EU evaluations. Finally, it is important to put the results in the right perspective. The media effects I found in Chapter 2 were significant, but very small. Despite the large number of data (N=19826), the models did not change greatly when the media variable was added to the analysis. This could be explained by the rather small number of EU evaluative messages in the news media during the election campaign. Despite these limitations, I am confident that this dissertation has got an added value to the research field. I believe that future research could benefit from some of the theoretical and methodological progress that was made.

### **Directions for future research**

**The national context.** The national context does matter. Member states differ from one another in several ways, and these differences affect the relation with the supranational level. In this dissertation, I limited myself to the effect of differences in national institutional quality. While I suggest other scholars to use institutional characteristics as well, I also would advocate the use of other potential factors. First, I would suggest the use of economic parameters. The survey data suggest that European citizens still consider the EU mainly as an economic institution. Expectations towards the division of policy responsibility on economic matters could have an impact on perceptions of European performance. Another factor that



appeared to matter is the media context. In this dissertation, I was not able to address the potential macro effects of the media context. I did show the short-term impact of media effects on individuals, but I did not account for long-term public opinion changes at the national-level as previous scholars did (e.g. Vliegenthart, Schuck, Boomgaarden, & de Vreese, 2008). However, future research could benefit from adding both individual- and macro-level media variables when investigating the dynamics of EU evaluations.

**Combining media and interpersonal communication.** For a long time, most scholars have treated mass and interpersonal communication as unrelated channels of information. Several scholars suggested to further the understanding of the intersection between media and conversation, and as such reframe political communication in the broader context of domestic communication (Reardon & Rogers, 1988; Morley, 1990; Southwell & Yzer, 2009). Those scholars who investigated the combined effects of mass and interpersonal communication, did not reach consensus on the nature of this effect. Some believe in a competitive relation between both types of communication, with substantively disjunctive main effects that compete for influence over the individual (Lenart, 1994). Others believe that media effects are reinforced by those interpersonal conversations which tend to revolve around media-generated content (Scheufele, 2002). I believe that reinforcement and competition could be two sides of the same coin. Depending on the context, the dependent variable, and some content-related characteristics, interpersonal communication can either reinforce or neutralize the effects of media messages. In line with Schmitt-Beck (2003), I investigated the effects of tone congruence. Similarly, I followed scholars such as Feldman and Price (2008) and Lee (2012) by adding disagreement within interpersonal communication to the model. When investigating the role of media and interpersonal communication, I suggest to take those specific characteristics into account, such as disagreement and tone congruence, which theoretically might explain a difference between reinforcement and competition.

Furthermore, as Boomgaarden (2012) argues, the emergence of online forms of political communication and its impact on political attitudes and behavior, trigger a renewed interest in the integration of mass media and interpersonal communication in effect studies. “Online political communication blurs the division line between IPPC [interpersonal political communication] and MMPC [mass mediated political communication]” (p. 19).

**(How to) Focus on the content.** Most studies, including the one in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, rely on self-reported measures for the measurement of interpersonal communication. Although satisfactory for some research questions, this approach is not

ideally suited for theoretical advancements of interpersonal communication (McLeod, Kosicki, & Pan, 1991). Although I did use a two-wave dataset, I was not able to gather information about the actual content of the interpersonal discussions that were reported by the respondents. The experimental approach was an attempt to tackle this issue. By manipulating the tone of the discussant, I acquired some insights on the effect of tone congruence between media and interpersonal communication. Of course, experimental research has its limitations as well. Combining multiple waves of data collection with an intensive content analysis of (preferably online) discussions offers more possibilities.

## **Discussion**

### **A Europe of nation states**

National institutional quality matters, and the strength of this effect depends on peoples knowledge on domestic political matters. The quality of national institutions is partially a result of the political past (traditions, institutions) and partially a result of the context in which these institutions have to function. Along with the development of democratic traditions, institutions and policies, people's expectations evolve. Despite many similarities, the current democratic regimes in the different EU member states are the result of very specific historical and contextual characteristics. Political culture differs from country to country. Therefore, the expectations towards a democratic regime are very different and very specific per country. If people are to evaluate democratic institutions, they use a yardstick, something familiar, as a starting point: their national institutions. The better these national institutions function, the harder it is for European institutions to be as adequate. And the more people are aware of this national quality, the more critical they will be about the supranational institutions.

According to Sanchez-Cuenca (2000), it is exactly this differentiated interplay between national and supranational institutions that explains the lack of coherent belief in the European Union. One could conclude then that the most efficient way to gather more support among European citizens for the European Union, is a further harmonization of national institutions across the EU. The introduction of the Euro could be a model for this harmonization effort. Before a country could introduce the Euro, several conditions had to be met. The Eurocrisis demonstrates, though, that when strict conditions are set, countries also should be controlled in how far they have met those conditions. Further harmonization is a crucial step for further integration. Especially with 27 countries.

### **To know it is to love it?**

The effect of political knowledge on EU evaluations has been debated in the literature. Anderson (1998) argues that, due to a lack of knowledge and confused by the complexity of the European policy level, people are not able to distinguish between national and European politics, and therefore base their EU evaluations on their opinions on national politics. According to Karp et al. (2003), more knowledge on EU matters does not necessarily enhance the probability of evaluating the EU more positively. In this study, they investigated Inglehart's (1970) claim that more knowledgeable people tend to like the EU more than less knowledgeable citizens: the more people know about the European Union, the more they are familiar with it, and the more they appreciate its performance. Karp et al. (2003) argued that people are capable of distinguishing between national and supranational institutions. Furthermore, they demonstrated that politically aware citizens tend to be more skeptical, certainly on legitimacy issues.

In this study, I modeled political knowledge as a moderator of the effect of national institutional quality. The more citizens know about their own national politics, the more they use this knowledge as a yardstick for evaluation at supranational level. The fact that political knowledge strengthens the national institutional effect on EU evaluations gives a more complex image. First, one can find confirmation for both theories in the results. The correlation between satisfaction with national democracy and European democracy is high (When in doubt, use proxies). There is also a positive correlation between education level and EU evaluations (Cognitive mobilization and European Identity). These effects, however, depend on the national context. In countries with high institutional quality (such as Denmark and the Netherlands), people tend to "love Europe less" when acquiring more political knowledge. These people actually do evaluate the EU institutions and are more critical about them (To know it is to love it?). In countries with less institutional quality (such as Bulgaria and Poland) acquiring more political knowledge leads to more positive EU evaluations. The positive effect of acquiring political knowledge appears to have a ceiling, depending on the national institutional quality of one's country.

### **Flows of information**

The fact that political knowledge matters for EU evaluations is a first indication of the dynamic nature of these evaluations. One-sided news flows can make a difference. And since news media and interpersonal communication are the primary sources of information about the EU, they are crucial antecedents for EU evaluations. I found confirmation for this logic in Chapter 2 and 3. Evaluative media messages do matter, and so does interpersonal talk, even in

a “second-order” campaign. The amount of evaluative messages in the media I found throughout the whole European dataset might explain why the significant effects I found, were still small. What are I to expect when EP-elections are actually about the EU, and its democratic performance? A tsunami of opinion change?

There is reason to expect a different campaign in 2014. The EP-elections might actually be about the EU. First, in recent national elections in France, Greece, Hungary and the Netherlands, Europe was a prominent theme. Political parties, even small, one-issue parties, have to express their position on EU policy. Furthermore, the European Parliament has more legislative power since the adaptation of the Lisbon treaty. The European policy level is more visible than ever, with the “European President” and the “Secretary of Foreign Affairs”. Third, European politics were never covered as much as during the first part of this legislation. I can expect an increase of campaign coverage during the 2014 EP elections. I might expect an increase of evaluative messages about the EU as well, and subsequently, following the logic of Chapter 2 and 3, more fluctuation in EU evaluations.

### **An all-inclusive media strategy**

The results in Chapter 2 and 3 confirm the impact of media and interpersonal communication on public opinion. Both within a real-world and an experimental setting, media messages and interpersonal communication directly and indirectly affects peoples’ opinions on the European Union. According to Meyer (1999), the EU suffers from a ‘communication deficit’. The ratification crisis (2004-2009) was at least partially attributed to the lack of public debate about European integration (Baun, 1996). The results confirm that an all-inclusive media strategy is essential for the EU to “win back its citizens”. By engaging actively with the media, the EU might benefit from positive media attention. Especially around big events, such as EU council meetings and EP-elections. A well-organized PR strategy might enable the EU to influence the tone of media coverage, and therefore the evaluations of the citizens. Interpersonal communication appears to fulfill several functions: acquisition of new information, interpretation of new information (acquired from news media), and reconfirmation of predispositions. Investing in social media could be another effective way for the EU to reach its citizens. The existing youth organizations in the EU could play a crucial role in this social media strategy. It might be the most cost-effective way to communicate with a certain proportion of the EU population, and enhance the image of the EU through this interpersonal contact. Furthermore, online social networks are increasingly influential on the bits of news people consume through recommendation by others in their network. “[Online] social networks are probably a bigger influence now than ever before on

the type of news of which people are exposed, and this influence is likely to become even stronger in the future” (Mutz & Young, 2011, p. 1036).

### **To agree or not to agree**

Disagreement appears to undermine the effect (positive or negative) of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations. When a discussant perceives a lack of agreement with the discussion partner, he or she is less inclined to accept (let alone adopt) the point of view of the other. This result can also be interpreted as a confirmation of the differentiation Lee (2012) made between position- and non position-taking forms of participation with respect to the effect of disagreement in interpersonal communication. Nonetheless, in the specific context of EU politics, this raises some questions. People’s knowledge of and interest in EU matters is in general lower than their knowledge of and interest in national politics. European citizens do not report to have regular conversations about the EU. And in the few conversations they do have, they seem to be discouraged by the exposure to a countervailing opinion. One could argue that people would be more inclined to adopt different views on a policy level that they perceive as unknown and abstract. The perception of agreement between discussants appears to be a determining factor for the influence of interpersonal communication on EU evaluations.

### **Take away message**

In this dissertation, we learned that EU democratic performance evaluations are variable across countries and dynamic over time. National institutional quality is used as a yardstick to evaluate the democratic performance of the EU, especially by people who are knowledgeable about domestic politics. Evaluative media messages and interpersonal communication about the EU do have an effect on EU evaluations. Over the course of an election campaign, media do reach European citizens with evaluative messages. Similarly, and even to a greater extent, interpersonal communication helps people to form and change their opinions on the democratic performance of the EU. However, the influence of interpersonal communication depends on the level of mutual agreement discussants perceive.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, C. J. (1998) 'When in doubt, use proxies: Attitudes to domestic politics and support for the EU', *Comparative Political Studies* 31: 569-601.
- Banducci, S., Karp, J., & Lauf, E. (2001). *Elite leadership, media coverage and support for European integration*. Paper presented at the regional meeting of the World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR), Hamburg.
- Boomgaarden, H. G. (forthcoming). Interpersonal and mass mediated political communication. In C. Reinemann (ed.) *Handbook of Communication Science: Political Communication*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton
- Boomgaarden, H., Schuck, A., Elenbaas, M. and De Vreese, C. (2011) 'Mapping EU attitudes: Conceptual and empirical dimensions of euroscepticism and EU support', *European Union Politics*, doi:10.1177/1465116510395411
- Feldman, L., and Price, V. (2008). 'Confusion or enlightenment? How exposure to disagreement moderates the effects of political discussion and media use on candidate knowledge', *Communication Research*, 35: 61-87.
- Inglehart, R. (1977). *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Karp, J., Banducci, S. and Bowler, S. (2003) 'To know it is to love it? Satisfaction with democracy in the European Union', *Comparative Political Studies* 36(3), 271-92.
- Lee, F. (2012). Does discussion with disagreement discourage all types of political participation? Survey evidence from Hong Kong. *Communication Research*, 39(4), 543-562.
- Lenart, S. (1994). *Shaping political attitudes: The impact of interpersonal communication and mass media*. London: Sage Publications.
- McLeod, J. M., Kosicki, G. M., & Pan, Z. 1991. On understanding and misunderstanding media effects. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research*: 126–152. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Morley, D. (1990). The construction of everyday life: Political communication and domestic media. In D. Swanson & D. Nimmo (Eds.), *New directions in political communication: A resource book* (pp.123–146). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Mutz, D., & Young, L. (2011). Communication and Public Opinion: Plus ça change? *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 75, 1018-1044.
- Norris, P. (2000). *A Virtuous circle: Political communication in postindustrial societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Peter, J. (2003). *Why European TV news matters*. Amsterdam.
- Reardon, K., & Rogers, E. (1988). Interpersonal versus mass media communication: A false dichotomy. *Human Communication Research, 15*(2), 284-303.
- Sánchez-Cuenca, I. (2000). The political basis of support for European integration. *European Union Politics, 1*(2), 147-171.
- Scheufele, D. A. (2002). Examining differential gains from mass media and their implications for participatory behavior. *Communication Research, 29*, 46-65.
- Schmitt-Beck, R. (2003). Mass communication, personal communication and vote choice: The filter hypothesis of media influence in comparative perspective. *British Journal of Political Science, 33*(2), 233-259.
- Southwell, B., & Yzer, M. (2009). When (and Why) interpersonal talk matters for campaigns. *Communication Theory, 19*, 1-8.
- Vliegthart, R., Schuck, A., Boomgaarden, H., & de Vreese, C. (2008) News coverage and support for European integration, 1990-2006. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 20*(4), 415-439.

### **Appendix I.A: Political Knowledge**

*Domestic Political Knowledge.* (1) What is the name of the current [NATIONALITY] Minister of Foreign Affairs? *STANDARD ANSWER CATEGORIES:* (a) [current Minister of Foreign Affairs] (b) [former Minister of Foreign Affairs] (c) [current Secretary of State for European Affairs] (d) [current Minister of Finances] (e) [current Minister of Defense]

(2) What is the formal length of a single term of a member of the national parliament, [NAME PARLIAMENT]? (a) 3 years. (b) 4 years. (c) 5 years. (d) 6 years. (e) 8 years. (f) Don't know.

*EU specific Political Knowledge.* (1) How many seats will the European Parliament have **AFTER** the 2009 election? (a) 385. (b) 412. (c) 651. (d) 736. (e) 867. (f) Don't know.

(2) What is the current number of member states of the European Union? (a) 15. (b) 22. (c) 25. (d) 27. (e) 29. (f) Don't know.



## Appendix I.B: Survey

The fieldwork was coordinated by TNS Opinion in Brussels and involved TNS subsidiaries in each country. All subsidiaries comply with ESOMAR guidelines for survey research. A total of 32,411 18 year old+ respondents participated. In each country, a sample was drawn from a TNS database. These databases rely on multiple recruitment strategies, including telephone, face-to-face, and online recruitment. Quotas on age, gender and education were enforced in sampling from the database. The average response rate (AAPOR RR1) was 31%. An overview of the composition of the sample vis-à-vis census data per country showed no differences between the adult population and the sample in terms of gender in Austria, Ireland, Slovakia and Spain. The mean difference between the population and the sample was 2.76% (SD=3.43%). Small deviations occurred, (0-8%), with sometimes women being overrepresented and sometimes men. In general, young voters were slightly overrepresented in the samples. The share of young voters (under 35) deviated 9.62% on average (SD=8.95%), with a minimum of 1% absolute deviation (overrepresentation) in Italy and Sweden, and a maximum of 34% (overrepresentation) in Greece. The largest underrepresentation of younger voters was found in Latvia (14%). The share of older voters (55+) was not entirely accurately reflected in the sample in the countries (M=16.57%, SD=9.91%), with deviations ranging from 1% in France and Britain (overrepresentations) to 33% (underrepresentation in Greece). Most countries had slight underrepresentation of older voters. The German sample had the largest overrepresentation (2%). In terms of education (collapsed in three categories, following the European Social Survey), the sample reflected the population in Ireland and Spain, while deviations (M=8.12%, SD=8.37) were found in other countries with higher educated voters being overrepresented in the samples. Underrepresentation was found in Greece (1%), France (6%), Slovakia (5%) and Sweden (11%). In sum, the samples show appropriate distributions in terms of gender, age and education. As I am mostly interested in the underlying relationships between variables, I consider the deviations in the sample vis-à-vis the adult population less problematic and I exert appropriate caution when making inferences about absolute values. The questionnaire was developed in English and translated into the original languages. It was then translated back into English. The translation was supervised by the research team and it was carried out by TNS (which also executes and translated the Eurobarometer surveys). Irregularities and problems arising from this process were resolved by deliberation.

## Waarom Lissabon uiteindelijk wel een historische stap voorwaarts bleek

**In de schaduw van de eurocrisis werd recentelijk een voorstel aanvaard in het kader van het Poolse voorzitterschap van de Europese Unie. Op die manier wordt voortaan meer transparantie verzekerd bij het toepassen van EU regelgeving(en). Het is een van de vele maatregelen die, in de nasleep van het verdrag van Lissabon, werden goedgekeurd om de vooropgestelde doelstelling, meer openheid en transparantie, daadwerkelijk toe te passen.**

De weg naar Lissabon wordt ook door Michel Fillon, hoofd van de Europese denktank “New Direction” als stormachtig omschreven: “Aan het begin van de eenentwintigste eeuw leek de Europese Unie niet klaar voor haar meest dringende uitdaging: het verkleinen van de kloof met de burger. Op de koop toe hadden de Europese instellingen hun institutionele huiswerk niet af toen in 2004 maar liefst tien lidstaten op hetzelfde moment werden toegelaten tot de Unie. Maar toen was daar Lissabon.”

### Lissabon als uitweg uit de crisis

Hoofddoel van het verdrag van Lissabon was het verkleinen van de kloof tussen de Europese instellingen en haar onderdanen, de Europese bevolking. Een permanente voorzitter (president, nvdr) van de Europese Raad zou worden aangesteld, en de macht van het Europees Parlement zou worden versterkt. Het Burgerinitiatief zou mogelijk maken dat gewone burgers wetsvoorstellen kunnen indienen, mits dit voorstel gesteund wordt door voldoende burgers uit verschillende Europese lidstaten. Tot slot zou het besluitvormingsproces een stuk transparanter worden.

### “Een ware ommekeer”

Het verdrag van Lissabon werd een indrukwekkende bundeling van ambitieuze wetsvoorstellen dat de institutionele werking van de EU grondig zou gaan wijzigen. Dat de ratificatie ervan, in iedere lidstaat, moeizaam verliep, was niet onvoorspelbaar. Maar sinds de inwerkingtreding ervan, in 2009, verliep de overgang naar een transparanter en democratischer Europa opvallend vlot. Fillon spreekt van een ware ommekeer: “Het Europees Parlement werd een stuk invloedrijker dankzij haar nieuwe bevoegdheden, de rechtsgang en de besluitvorming werden een stuk transparanter, en de aanstelling van een eerste ‘president’ (Herman Van Rompuy, nvdr) versterkte het beeld van een slagkrachtige en eensgezinde politieke unie, ook in tijden van economische crisis.” Volgens professor Guiseppe Massarenti, van de universiteit van Bologna, is de Europese bevolking het daar grotendeels mee eens: “Het vertrouwen in de Europese instellingen is voor het eerst gegroeid sinds het begin van de eenentwintigste eeuw. De kloof met de Europese burger lijkt een stuk kleiner te zijn geworden. Die vaststelling op zich is voldoende om van een historische stap voorwaarts te spreken.”

## Appendix III.B: Article 2 (EU negative)

### Waarom Nederland nog steeds nee zegt tegen de Europese Unie

Toen maar liefst 62% van de Nederlandse bevolking tegen de invoering van de Europese grondwet stemde in 2005, leek de pro-Europese houding van Nederland definitief tot het verleden te behoren. Onmiddellijk werd geopperd dat de afwijzing voornamelijk te maken had met nationale kwesties en als een afstraffing van de regeringspartijen moest worden geïnterpreteerd. Uit analyses bleek echter dat de afwijzing wel degelijk gericht was tegen het bestaande Europese beleid en de werking van haar instellingen. Deze Grondwet leek niet in staat het verre Brussel dichterbij de Europese burger te brengen. Op de koop toe had de uitbreiding met tien Oost-Europese lidstaten het geloof in meer inspraak, transparantie en efficiëntie geen goed gedaan.

### Lissabon

Na een ‘periode van reflectie’ kwamen de Europese leiders bijeen in Lissabon voor een laatste reanimatiepoging van het afgekeurde verdrag. Intussen waren ook Roemenie en Bulgarije toegetreden tot de Unie, wat de vraag naar institutionele aanpassing zo mogelijk nog dringender maakte. Het verdrag van Lissabon, voor 96% identiek aan de afgekeurde Grondwet volgens de Britse denktank “Open Europe”, trad na een moeizaam ratificatieproces eind 2009 in werking. Dat op Ierland na geen enkel land het aandurfde dit verdrag opnieuw voor te leggen aan de bevolking in een referendum deed niet veel goeds vermoeden over de beoogde democratiseringsmaatregelen.

### “Oude pijnpunten niet verholpen”

Twee jaar later is men er onder het Poolse voorzitterschap eindelijk in geslaagd een wetsvoorstel dat meer transparantie garandeert bij de implicatie van EU regelgeving in de lidstaten goed te keuren. Helaas is dit een van de weinige lichtpunten. Ten tijde van het referendum was het gebrek aan transparantie en democratische legitimiteit het vaakst genoemde negatief beoordeelde aspect van de Europese Unie. De aangepaste versie van de Grondwet, het verdrag van Lissabon, was gericht op het versterken van die legitimiteit, onder andere door het verstevigen van de positie van het Europees Parlement en het aanstellen van een permanente voorzitter van de Europese Raad, een soort president van de Europese Unie. Volgens Michel Fillon, hoofd van de Europese denktank “New Direction”, zijn de oude pijnpunten niet verholpen: “Het aanstellingsproces van de eerste ‘president’ (Herman Van Rompuy, nvdr) verliep niet bepaald transparant. Van het zogenaamde Burgerinitiatief (gewone Europeanen zouden via deze weg wetsvoorstellen kunnen indienen, nvdr) is er nog steeds geen sprake, en het enige democratisch verkozen orgaan van de Unie, het Europees Parlement, lijkt nog steeds een machteloze toeschouwer.” Professor Guiseppe Massarenti, van de universiteit van Bologna, bevestigt deze analyse: “De Europese Unie is er allerminst in geslaagd de kloof met de burger te verkleinen. Het verdrag van Lissabon is een amalgaam geworden van halve maatregelen en gefnuikte idealen.”

## The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn (part 1)

**Eindelijk gaat het gebeuren! Drie delen heeft ze erop moeten wachten, maar Bella Swan zal eindelijk het bed delen met haar vampier Edward.**

Wie de boeken of filmfranchise niet gevolgd heeft, vraagt zich vermoedelijk af waar alle opwinding vandaan komt. Dames en meisjes met een zucht naar romantiek hoef je niets uit te leggen. Die hebben genoeg aan de broeierige blik van Edward (Robert Pattison) de vampier. Of aan de fraaie tors, natuurlijk, van weerwolf Jacob Black (Taylor Lautner). Nog geen minuut na aanvang van *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn - part 1* gaat het shirt alweer uit. Het was de reden waarom Bella (Kristen Stewart) al vanaf het eerste deel in 2008 moeite had te kiezen tussen de bloedzuiger en het wilde beest.

### Bevend verlangen

Aan haar twijfel kwam vorig jaar een einde in *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*. Het lekkerste werd echter voor nu bewaard. Edward was al die tijd zo bang dat hij Bella zou beschadigen in het vuur van zijn passie, dat er van seks niets kwam. *Breaking Dawn* doet het netjes zoals het hoort: eerst trouwen, dan de huwelijksreis en dan... Traditie werkt zeker in het voordeel van *Breaking Dawn*. Geen rare plotwendingen nodig; het overzichtelijke script volgt gewoon iedere volgende stap in het huwelijksbootje. Regisseur Bill Condon (*Dreamgirls*) kan zich zo volledig concentreren op waar het écht om gaat: bevend verlangen en gelukkig zuchten.

### Bekijk de trailer

In de scène bijvoorbeeld waarin de derde man in Bella's leven, vader Charlie, haar naar het altaar begeleidt. Je zit dan zo dicht op haar huid, dat je haar bijna kunt horen trillen en kokhalzen van spanning. Condon maakt een speciale camerabeweging om ons te laten zien hoe mooi de rug van haar bruidsjurk is. In de eerste helft hoeft *Breaking Dawn* nauwelijks een verhaal te vertellen om zijn publiek te behagen. Je kunt je gewoon rondwentelen in die sprookjeswereld. Pas wanneer blijkt dat Bella zwanger is van Edward komt iedereen in actie. Wat wordt dat voor kind? Zwanger én graatmager wacht Bella de bevalling af, onzeker of ze die wel zal overleven.

### Wegdromen

Dat *The Twilight Saga* clichématig is en ouderwets, het zal best, maar er is helemaal niets mis met wegdromen in een fantasiewereld. De kracht van de serie werd nog het beste samengevat in deel één, in dat beeld van die prachtig fonkelende vampier. Dat sprak wereldwijd tot de verbeelding. Helaas zul je zo'n magisch moment in *Breaking Dawn* niet vinden. De vampiers en weerwolven zijn inmiddels van alle mysterie ontdaan en celebs geworden in een banale soap. En al had de franchise hier best kunnen eindigen, in soapseries is er altijd reden voor een Part 2. Die staat gepland voor november 2012.

## **Sporen van water op maan gevonden**

**HOUSTON - Amerikaanse wetenschappers hebben met drie afzonderlijke onderzoeken sporen van water op de maan gevonden. De bevindingen worden vrijdag gepubliceerd in het wetenschappelijke tijdschrift Science.**

Onderzoekers van de Brown Universiteit hebben gegevens van de Indiase maansatelliet Chandrayaan-1 onderzocht. Ze troffen watermoleculen en hydroxyl - een mengsel van waterstof en zuurstof - aan op de zonzijde van de maan.

Bij de polen van de maan was de hoeveelheid het grootst. "Maar bij water op de maan praten we niet over meren, oceanen of zelfs maar poelen. Water op de maan betekent moleculen", benadrukte hoofdonderzoekster Carle Pieters.

De ontdekking werd bevestigd door twee andere onderzoeken, van de Universiteit van Maryland en de US Geological Survey.

### **Stations**

Ruimtevaartorganisaties willen in de toekomst bemande stations bouwen op de maan. Om een lang verblijf van de mens mogelijk te maken, is water echter een eerste vereiste.