

ISSA Proceedings 2002 - Rhetorical Criticism Of The Debate On The Future Of The European Union Strategic Options And Foundational Understandings



1. Introduction

With the formation of the European Convention, which was set up at the Laeken Summit of the European Council on the 14th and 15th of December 2001, the debate on the future of the EU has been institutionalised. The members of the Convention will be considering a number of broad questions about the possible future developments, and the result of their discussions will be recommendations for a new treaty, a treaty, which must be drafted, refined and ratified before the end of 2004[i]. The Convention does not begin the debate from scratch, but picks up on agendas and ideas, which have been put forward by national leaders and other significant participants in the less formally structured, but no less significant discussions that led to the formation of the Convention.

In this paper, I investigate two of the earlier contributions to the debate on the future of the EU in order to explore how the debate was shaped. I work within a dual analytical framework, arguing that any rhetorical utterance must be seen as both a result of the strategic options from which the speaker can choose, and of the foundational understandings that sets limits on the speaker's choices. The first part of the paper is a presentation of the theoretical argument for the proposed method of rhetorical criticism. The second and main section is an application of that method to two comparable speeches by the Spanish Prime Minister, José María Aznar, and his British counterpart, Tony Blair. These two speeches have been chosen for analysis, because I see them as being central to and representative of the formative stages of the debate on the EU's future. In the third and final section, I shall present particular conclusions about the two speeches and generalise my claim to state that rhetorical criticism is a valuable

tool to understanding and improving the ongoing European debate.

2. *Rhetoric as response to a situation and as construction of meaning*

In the view of Lloyd F. Bitzer, rhetoric is situational, meaning that rhetorical utterances arise as responses to situations, and that they are given significance by the particular situation from which they arise. In Bitzer's opinion, an utterance is rhetorical only in so far as it can be used to solve a problem, and the function of each utterance as well as the form and content of the utterance originates from the situation to which the utterance is a response (Bitzer 1968/1992: 5-6). "Not the rhetor and not the persuasive intent, but the situation is the source and ground of rhetorical activity - and, I should add, of rhetorical criticism" (Bitzer 1992: 6). The rhetorical situation according to Bitzer consists of three elements: the first element, the *exigence*, is the reason why the speaker must speak, the problem which the utterance attempts to resolve. The second element is the *audience* who does not consist of all potential listeners, but only those who can be influenced by the discourse and can mediate the actions desired by the speaker. The third and final element is the *constraints*, which are all such things that can influence the outcome of the utterance. Constraints is a label covering a large number of different factors, which vary a lot from situation to situation and consist of both elements that are internal to the speech and elements that cannot be influenced by the speaker (Bitzer 1992: 6-7). Constraints may be the audience's prior knowledge and opinion of the subject and of the speaker, other speakers' utterances on the matter, the exact time and location in which the speech is delivered, the stylistic and argumentative choices made by the speaker, etc.

Understanding the rhetorical situation as the starting point for rhetorical practice, entails a view on rhetoric that is both functionalistic, the utterance solves a problem raised by the situation, and deterministic, the situation dictates what sort of utterance can solve the problem. While the pragmatic aspect of Bitzer's view on rhetoric is often applauded, his theory has been criticised thoroughly for its deterministic tendencies. This criticism has been levelled most squarely by Richard E. Vatz who turns the concept of the rhetorical situation on its head by stating that: "I would not say that 'rhetoric is situational,' but that situations are rhetorical" (Vatz 1973: 159). Vatz' claim is that rhetoric is not a reaction to situational demands, but an activity, which is genuinely constitutive of meaning. In Vatz' opinion, rhetoric does not mirror reality, but on the contrary

plays a decisive role in creating the human understanding of it. The speaker selects which situational elements should be attributed what significance, thus bringing order and understanding to the elements that are seen as being arbitrary and meaningless before the rhetorical treatment of them. "Rhetoric is a *cause* not an *effect* of meaning. It is antecedent, not subsequent, to a situation's impact" (Vatz 1973: 160).

3. *The dual perspective of the common place*

I believe that the controversy over whether rhetoric is situational or situations are rhetorical can be illuminated through the two different metaphorical understandings of topics, which have been suggested by William L. Nothstine. Nothstine suggests that topics, the *topoi* or *loci communes* of classical rhetoric, can be understood as either "... a 'place' where an objectively-present line of argument, idea, or memory may be found, quite independent of any subjective intention toward it" (Nothstine 1988: 154), or "the 'place' metaphor may refer to a position affording a particular point of view, a perspective, from which one regards one's world" (Nothstine 1988: 155). Since Bitzer claims that all the elements of the utterance are materially available to the speaker prior to the formulation of the utterance, his conception of the rhetorical situation is in line with the understanding of *topoi* as being 'out there,' materially present to the speaker. Bitzer also fits this understanding of the *topoi* by claiming that the arguments used and positions taken by the speaker can be evaluated as being objectively right or wrong. Bitzer does not think that the speaker chooses randomly between the available means, rather the circumstances exert a demand on the speaker to address certain issues and present his or her views in certain ways. The speaker's task, according to Bitzer, is to perceive correctly what the most fitting response to the situation would be: "one might say metaphorically that every situation prescribes its fitting response; the rhetor may or may not read the prescription accurately" (Bitzer 1992: 10). The arguments already exist; it is a matter of finding the right ones.

Contrarily, Vatz sees the rhetorical utterance as the creation of meaning, as the construction of argument or the establishment of a perspective, thus aligning himself with the understanding of *topoi* as perspectives, as ways to view the world. However, there is one major difference between Vatz' notion and the implications of the second interpretation of the place metaphor. Vatz stresses the rhetor's freedom to create meaning, to decide which elements should be given

significance, and what sense should be made, that is to construct the perspective of the utterance (Vatz 1973: 158). However, Nothstine emphasises that the utterance not only presents a perspective, but is also constituted from a particular point of view: "... a topos is a stance one takes that allows certain things to be seen while necessarily causing others to disappear from sight" (Nothstine 1988: 157).

In both interpretations of the 'place' metaphor, situatedness is central to the creation of the rhetorical utterance. But whereas the first interpretation points outwards to the rhetorical situation as conceived by Bitzer, the second interpretation points inwards toward the hermeneutical situation of the speaker. The concept of the hermeneutical situation[**ii**] is used to designate the broad context of possibilities and limitations that human comprehension is always situated within and that facilitate both the comprehension and its articulation (Hyde & Smith 1979/1998: 69). In the understanding advocated by Hyde and Smith and followed by Nothstine in his second interpretation of the place metaphor, the central situational theme of rhetoric is no longer a matter of adapting utterances to features of the objectively existing outside world. Rhetoric is now situational in so far as the possibilities of creating meaning in the world, of revealing the speaker's understanding and opinion, are always set within the horizon of that speaker's hermeneutical situation. Although Hyde and Smith stress the pre-set boundaries of the speaker's horizon of understanding, they also recognise Vatz' notion that rhetoric represents the possibility of choice: "If the hermeneutical situation is the 'reservoir' of meaning, *then rhetoric is the selecting tool for making-known this meaning*" (Hyde & Smith 1998: 71).

The three different notions of how meaning is brought into the rhetorical utterance, which have emerged from this comparison of Vatz' and Bitzer's opinions with Nothstine's exploration of the different possible interpretations of the place metaphor are not incompatible. On the contrary, they can be combined to create a fuller understanding of the sense-making and persuasive rhetorical activity. From the options that are available within the speaker's hermeneutical situation, he or she chooses the themes, lines of argument and stylistic strategies that seem best suited to the task of convincing the audience of the correctness and goodness of the meaning the speaker constructs.

4. Implications for rhetorical criticism

The revised understanding of the rhetorical situation influences the conceptualisation of all three situational elements. However, I will focus on the

impact the dual theoretical perspective has on the *constraints*[iii]. The understanding of constraints, which guides the present study, is that they both represent the possibility of and the limits on the utterance. Constraints arise from the specific circumstances of the utterance and from the broader background, which includes the speaker's horizon of understanding and the discursive field[iv] that he or she enters into dialogue with. The particular meaning of the utterance is constituted through the intricate relationship between the specific and broad limitations and possibilities, which in a sense are present prior to the statement, but only emerge in and through their articulation.

The focus of the type of rhetorical criticism, which is informed by the dual theoretical perspective of rhetorical and hermeneutical choices and limitations, is the utterance itself. However, the reading of the text aims at understanding how the speaker creates meaning in and of the specific and broad contextual settings. I understand the comparative approach as a means of bringing both context and intertext into the textual study. The utterances that I have singled out for analysis, are part of the same discursive context, the debate on the future of the EU, but are uttered by speakers with significantly different political and cultural backgrounds, Spanish and British. The comparison of the two texts will both facilitate the exploration of arguments and topics that are common to the debate and the discovery of differences that may be explained through reference to the speaker's different points of entrance into the debate.

5. Exigence

The speech by the Spanish Prime Minister, José María Aznar, was held on the 26th of September 2000 at the French Institute of Foreign Relations, and British PM, Tony Blair, spoke at the Polish stock exchange on the 6th of October 2000. The speeches are part of a wave of major policy statements given by heads of state or other leading politicians that swept over Europe after Joschka Fischer, German Foreign Minister, on the 12th of May 2000 presented his vision of Europe's future at the Humboldt University in Berlin. In his speech, Fischer repeatedly stated that he was expressing his personal views, not those of the German government. However, no one was in doubt of the significance of Fischer's initiative, and soon all the leaders of Europe went in search of an appropriate podium from which to express their views on what would be the most desirable development of the EU.

The statements by Fischer, Aznar, Blair and the other European leaders shared

the general exigence of getting the debate on the future of the EU under way. Although Blair and Aznar speak as the official representatives of their countries and present their opinions on the different points of dispute in the guise of national visions on the EU, these two particular statements cannot in themselves influence the eventual outcome of the debate directly. Rather than being attempts at cutting the debate short, the speeches by Aznar and Blair should be seen as presentations of the matters of dispute and the different opinions on these matters, and thus they are powerful statements of the agenda of the debate. Once the leaders of the EU member states have come to terms with what sorts of discussions are needed, which matters are to be decided and which alternative stances are available, it is very hard for anyone else to change that agenda.

When the speeches are placed within the duality of the found and the constructed exigence, two tendencies emerge. Blair and Aznar on the one hand both respond to an already existing expectation that they should present their opinions, thereby positioning themselves and their nations in the emerging debate on the future of the EU. On the other hand, they also contribute to the construction of the common understanding of the exigence. The speeches take a number of issues for granted; issues that in principle could be doubted, but are now constructed as really existing exigencies. The commonly perceived exigence holds two premises: the EU is in need of reform, and extensive debate is the means of ensuring that the changes eventually made will be the most appropriate.

6. Audience

The immediate audiences of the two speeches, the people physically present when the speeches were delivered, can hardly be seen as audiences in the strict sense that Bitzer uses the term. Aznar addresses himself to a primarily academic assembly, while the people attending Blair's speech are representatives of the Central European countries applying for membership of the EU. Neither audience has the competency to decide on the matters discussed by the speakers, but given that it is not the purpose of the speeches to put an end to the discussion, that may not be a problem. In fact, the immediate context of the speeches may serve primarily as a platform for making the speakers' views known to a larger audience and for influencing the ongoing debate on the future of the EU. And the immediate audience may be seen as a necessary framing for the speech, whereas the possibility of inducing change lies with the broader public and political circles that constitute the debate and will eventually decide on the contested issues.

The broader audience can only be reached indirectly through the mediation of the speech and of the speaker's viewpoints, and the choice of the specific speech situation is not unimportant to the chances of having the speech broadly publicised. Speaking to a primarily academic assembly like the one chosen by Aznar, may signal a willingness to present points of view openly and to discuss them freely that will be appreciated by some members of the larger audience. But the academic setting is not very unusual, and it does not attract much attention outside of the tight circles of scholars and politicians dealing professionally with the EU. The specific situation chosen by Aznar does not present a very powerful springboard into the larger circles of popular debate. The setting chosen by Blair is more complicated than Aznar's and more attention has to be paid to the interests and opinions of the immediate audience. However, the more unique and more politically binding setting may help draw more attention to the speech in larger circles, and the speech has the chance of making a larger impact on the ongoing debate.

7. Constraints

The constraints will be treated in two turns: first, I focus on the speakers' use of and reference to the broader context of the debate on the EU. These elements I understand as the 'places' where the speaker may go to find his arguments, the limits and possibilities surrounding the speaker. Secondly, I turn to the backgrounds of the two speakers in order to analyse how the relationship between their respective nations and the EU is constructed. Here I find both indications of how the speakers make known their own positions, and of how their understanding is limited by those positions.

8. Common places of the debate on the future of the EU

The speeches display many similarities in the topics discussed and the mode of discussion. This overlap points to the existence of a broader consensus about the nature of the debate on the future of the EU, and both speakers display high levels of acceptance of the existing terms and topics for discussion; they reproduce the established agenda of the debate. The major items on the list of common themes and conceptualisations are: enlargement, the need for institutional reforms, the possibility of a constitution for the EU, qualified majority voting as a means of making decisions, enhanced cooperation as a way in which some states can proceed with developments entailing further integration without the unanimous acceptance of all member states and the question of how the

people's support for the European project is ensured.

Although there are differences of opinion, which is only to be expected of two different contributions to the same debate, the overall impression of the two speeches is very similar. The almost perfect agreement about what should be on the agenda contributes greatly to this impression, but also the similar way in which many of the themes are treated, is of great importance. For example enlargement is a central theme to both speakers, and is in each case conceived as an opportunity rather than a problem[v]. Also, both speakers see enlargement as a matter of dual commitment by the current member states and the applying countries[vi]. Finally, the speakers agree that the enlargement is half of the reason why reform is needed, and they also share the other half of the explanation: the EU is taking on more and more tasks which have hitherto been reserved for the nation state. All in all both speakers see the simultaneous deepening and widening of the EU as the major reason for the necessity of reform and as the basic framework for the discussion of possible reforms[vii].

It is not only through the equal treatment of similar topics that the two speakers' use common points of reference drawn from the context of the debate on the future of the EU. The speakers also make explicit reference to the viewpoints of other political leaders. Curiously, both speakers choose to quote other national leaders on the same matter, namely enhanced cooperation, and they choose to quote different leaders, but to the same effect. Aznar declares himself to be in agreement with the French President, Jacques Chirac, who "insists on the necessity of understanding enhanced cooperation as a factor of integration and not of segregation[viii]." Blair refers to the Belgian Prime Minister on the matter and states: "I agree with Guy Verhofstadt that enhanced cooperation is an instrument to strengthen the Union from within, not an instrument of exclusion." This high level of overlap suggests that the two speakers have common understandings not only of what should be discussed, but also of how the given themes should be conceived and articulated. However, one can raise the question of how deep the unanimity is. This question has several layers, the first of which concerns direct disagreement between the speakers: on what matters do they explicitly disagree? What are the causes for disagreement? The second layer involves the possibility of unperceived or unmentioned disagreements: do the two speakers have the same understandings of the shared concepts? Or might they use the same concepts to create different meanings?

9. Speakers' perspectives

In order to answer the questions raised in the previous section, I will first present the speakers' constructions of the relationship between the member states, their own in particular, and the EU. Taking these constructions as markers of the speakers' perspective on the EU, of the places from where they look at the different issues of the debate, I shall then investigate each speaker's understanding and evaluation of some central concepts and study the meaning created through the use of these concepts.

Although both speakers conceive of the relationship between the member states and the EU as a careful balance between national and common interests[**ix**], they place their emphasis on opposite sides of the national-European scale. One of Blair's major concerns is "...how we stop Europe focussing on things that it doesn't need to do, the interfering part of Europe that antagonises even Europe's most ardent supporters." In contrast to this Aznar states that "on their part, the member states should be ready to accommodate their national interests...to the common interest of the Union. It is true that this process of reciprocal accommodation supposes denouncements on the part of the member states; but this should not be seen simply as a loss or a turnover, but as the common take-over of what before was done unilaterally and solely...[**x**]"

The different concerns, which the two speakers display, arise from fundamentally different accounts of the democratic flows between the EU and the nation. Blair understands democratic impulses to be stemming from each member state: "The truth is, the primary sources of democratic accountability in Europe are the directly elected and representative institutions of the nations of Europe - national parliaments and governments. That is not to say Europe will not in future generations develop its own strong demos or polity, but it hasn't yet." Aznar, on the contrary, indicates that the EU is a means of democratising the member states: "My country is, naturally, open and pluralistic. The Constitution of 1978 meant the release of an unused potential that we guarded within; but how far wouldn't we be from this image of Spain without the spur of European integration during these last years, which attracts us as much now as in the first day of entry into the Community[**xi**]."

In Aznar's statement, there is an indication of how his own national perspective influences his understanding of the general relationship between the EU and its member states. With the constitution of 1978, which Aznar refers to, Spain emerged from the dictatorship of Franco and in 1986 the country entered the EU

as a fully reconstituted democratic state. Thus, Spain has recently undergone the kind of transition that the applicant states are experiencing at the moment, and Aznar explicitly connects the Spanish situation to the enlargement process: "...my government hopes that the enlargement will become reality as soon as possible. It could not wish anything else for Spain, which has seen a long economic transition and a happy political transition[xii]." Spain has benefited greatly from its membership of the EU, but Aznar is careful to explain that the benefits are mutual and do not come without responsibility: "Being Spanish, I say to you that the European idea is not a springboard for strictly national projects, nor is it an insurance of stability for the weakest countries, but an in-grown desire of belonging[xiii]." In sum, Aznar sees the EU as having a democratising effect on its members. He understands the national interests of Spain as being closely entwined with the common interests of Europe, and he identifies the Spanish perspective with that of Europe as such. This last point is emphasised by the historical note on which Aznar ends his account of the Spanish entrance into the EU: "in reality we did not enter Europe because from here we had never gone out. Spain is one of the few countries on the continent that has wished and for centuries has demonstrated that it was European when entering into contact with other civilisations[xiv]."

Blair also presents the particular British relationship to the EU historically, but unlike Aznar's his account is a critical one. In fact, the historic section of Blair's speech is a revision of the historical relationship between Britain and the EU and a vigorous attempt at redefining that relationship. Blair begins his account by stating that "the blunt truth is that British policy towards the rest of Europe over half a century has been marked by gross misjudgements, mistaking what we wanted to be the case with what was the case." Britain was too slow in leaving its position as "benign, avuncular friend," and did not understand the developments that ultimately led to the formation of the EU, as we know it today. "At each stage, Britain thought it won't possibly happen and held back. And at each stage it did happen and we were faced with the choice: catching up or staying out." Blair concludes his historical review with the assertion that, whatever the legacy of the past, today there are no reasons why Britain should opt out of Europe, and no reasons why Europe should not want Britain at its centre: "Britain's future is and will be as a leading partner in Europe."

The redefinition of the hesitant British attitude has two sides to it: on the one hand Blair seeks to stamp the sceptical and reluctant British attitude toward the

Union as historically outdated. On the other hand, he knows that the British resistance to the European project is still very much alive and kicking. Therefore, he tries to appease the concerned Britons by promising that the EU Britain will be a leading partner of, will be different from the EU that Britain was sceptical of. "The problem Europe's citizens have with Europe arises when Europe's priorities aren't theirs. No amount of institutional change - most of which passes them by completely - will change that. Reforming Europe to give it direction and momentum around the people's priorities will. The citizens of Europe must feel that they own Europe, not that Europe owns them." The perspective Blair seeks to construct is one, which is guided by Britain's past experiences and the continued lack of support from the British people. Blair places Britain at the centre of a European project that develops according to the direction of the people's priorities, and such a development not only involves further integration, but also careful limitation of the assignments and the power given to the EU.

10. Construction of meaning

Having established the different perspectives from which the speakers view the possible future developments of the EU, I shall return to the question of whether the two speakers may be creating different meanings using the same expressions. I shall elaborate on only two examples: the catalogue of competencies and enhanced cooperation. The catalogue of competencies is the one proposal for reform on which the two speakers are in overt disagreement. Blair is in favour of the idea of drawing up "...a statement of the principles according to which we should decide what is best done at the European level and what should be done at the national level." Aznar, however, thinks the concept is both limited and limiting: "Being Spanish, I believe that instead of the geometric division of competencies we have to deepen the notion of shared enactment of the competencies. The creation of sealed compartments should not be furthered, but we should favour the common use of forces on different levels toward a common objective[xv]." From Aznar's perspective the interests of the nations are equal to those of the EU, and the only concern is how the common problems are solved most effectively. Therefore, he does not see any benefits in fixing boundaries on the EU's scope of action, but would rather that the exact combination of competencies be worked out from case to case. To Blair such a solution would be unacceptable, since he and his electorate need a guarantee that the EU will not end up participating in all decisions; Blair needs the boundaries, which a catalogue of competencies would afford.

Whereas there is explicit difference in the two speakers' judgement of the catalogue of competencies, their use of 'enhanced cooperation' shows great overlap. Yet their common phrasing reveals a potential for different understandings, which I shall seek to illuminate. Aznar explains enhanced cooperation as "an instrument with which a group of pioneer countries go forward in the construction of a more united Europe, pointing the way to others and encouraging them to walk it by their side. Using biological terms, one could say that the member states who put forward an enhanced cooperation would be precursors whose combination and common force would result in a more elaborate and wider reality[xvi]." And he concludes the explanation by stating that "in this sense, Spain wishes to be one of the precursors on this new road[xvii]." Aznar is aware that enhanced cooperation may cause some problems, and particularly he points to the risk that various centres could be formed, turning Europe into a jigsaw puzzle and allowing each member state to pick and choose from a 'Europe à la carte.' This development must be avoided: "we have to guarantee the common stem and avoid the birth of various Europes[xviii]." In his examination of enhanced cooperation Blair says: "I have no problem with greater flexibility or groups of member states going forward together. But that must not lead to a hard core; a Europe in which some Member States create their own set of shared policies and institutions from which others are in practice excluded. Such groups must at every stage be open to others who wish to join."

Two differences in the speakers' treatments of enhanced cooperation immediately arise. First, Blair's acceptance of the method is somewhat lukewarm, he has no problem with it, whereas Aznar accepts it fully. Second, Aznar explicitly commits Spain to participating in enhanced cooperation; Blair does no such thing. In fact, Blair's whole description of enhanced cooperation displays an attitude of non-participation. He envisions the groups of member states as going forward from the stable centre of the EU, which Britain inhabits, and this perspective explains why he sees the risk of enhanced cooperation in the formation of a hard core. Although Blair has redefined Britain's role in the EU and set the British nation at the centre of the European project, Britain cannot participate in enhanced cooperation, and the nation therefore risks being marginalised once more. Whereas Blair views the developments from the centre, Aznar's perspective is that of a precursor moving forward into new territory and clearing the way for others. Being sure that Spain will participate at the forefront of European development, Aznar's concern is not with the formation of a hard core, but with

the risk that different precursors might move in different directions. Such a development would be harmful to the ever more tightly integrated EU that is the goal of Aznar, but it would be suitable to the ambitions of Blair. To Blair different initiatives of enhanced cooperation with diverging tendencies would be an assurance that Britain was still at the centre of development, whereas the unanimous move towards more integration by a large group of member states would place Britain outside a new centre of gravity.

The examination of the relationship between the common places of the debate on the EU's future and the particular perspectives of Tony Blair and José María Aznar has shown that the two speakers do not necessarily mean the same things when they use similar phrases. Even though they speak of enhanced cooperation in almost the same terms, there are unperceived differences of meaning. Blair and Aznar view the phenomenon from opposite perspectives, and that leads them to different understandings of the potentials and risks entailed by the concept.

11. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the speeches by the Spanish and the British Prime Ministers illustrates the strength of the dual theoretical perspective, which was presented at the beginning of this paper. By taking the proposed theoretical stance, nuances of meaning, which would otherwise be hidden, are brought forth and can be explained. The comparative analysis of two texts, which speak into the same context, but from different backgrounds and perspectives, is a useful tool in constructing the dual analytical perspective needed to gain the novel insights into the meaning of both texts. Yet, further discussion of the method and its theoretical base is necessary in order to secure and strengthen the explanatory potential and theoretical consistency of the method. One issue, which must be resolved, is the method's position in the debate between proponents of close reading (i.e. Michael Leff) and of critical rhetoric (Ray McKerrow, Calvin McGee). Should rhetorical criticism focus primarily on the finished utterance, the product, or on the societal process, which shapes it (Gaonkar 1990: 291)? Is the utterance a whole in itself, which must be studied in its intentional dimension, or is it a fragment, a part of an ideograph, to be investigated extensionally (Leff 1992: 223-224)? My hope is that these seemingly contradictory alternatives can be brought together under the dual understanding of the topical metaphor, thus bringing another productive field of tension into the multiperspectival analytical method. The further development of this notion falls outside the range of this paper, but serves to show the direction, which the theoretical dimension of the

study might take.

Turning to the substantial side of the study, the analysis has presented insights into the two speeches that have implications for the understanding of the debate on the future of the European Union as such. José María Aznar and Tony Blair use the same concepts to refer to the same issues and generally have similar perceptions of the agenda of the debate on the EU's future. However, the scrutiny of their utterances from the dual perspective of internal and external limitations and possibilities has revealed that the two speakers use the issues and concepts to create different meanings. Such illumination of different perspectives, understandings and meanings, which might go unnoticed because they are presented under common labels, is essential to understanding the debate and securing its success. If the debate is to result in a consensus that can be followed through in practice, that consensus must be enacted as a common creation of meaning. If the underlying disagreements are not perceived and discussed in a genuine attempt to establish common horizons of understanding between the participants of the debate, the risk is that the common decisions will be interpreted and implemented differently in each country. The actually existing differences of understanding would in any case show themselves in the implementation, but by then it would be too late, and the EU would have lost the chance of using the reforms to increase its efficiency and legitimacy. If the participants of the European debate use the available strategic options reflexively, carefully examining what each participant means, a genuinely common foundational understanding of the EU may be formed.

NOTES

[i] The composition (members of national and European legislative and executive assemblies), mandate (can make recommendations but has no power to enforce these) and deadline (the Intergovernmental Conference of 2004) of the Convention were all decided at the Council summit of December 2000 (the Laeken Declaration).

[ii] The hermeneutical situation can be split into three elements: 'fore-having', 'fore-sight' and 'fore-conception'. "The fore-having is the realm of linguistic possibilities that a culture makes available to its members 'in advance' of any particular act of interpretation that may be performed by any member of the culture [...] The fore-sight is an abstraction of the fore-having; it originates when members of a culture appropriate the culture's fore-having and, in so doing,

formulate specific 'points of view' which guide the interpretation of a certain object [...] The fore-conception is the way by which one structures the linguistic possibilities of one's fore-sight 'in advance' of an act of interpretation" (Hyde & Smith 1998: 69).

[iii] As pointed out by Carolyn R. Miller, the revised understanding also has large consequences for the definition of exigence as a demand existing prior to the utterance and to which the speaker reacts. Following Kenneth Burke, Miller sees rhetorical utterances as actions with a process of interpretation at their centres. The exigence motivating a rhetorical statement is not perceived, but defined (Miller 1984: 155-156). This definition of exigence is, however, always set within an interpretative context, and it is this context that I wish to draw the attention to by focusing on the constraints rather than the exigence.

[iv] I here use 'discursive field', a term whose foucauldian roots should not be neglected, in a loose sense, meaning a group of utterances that share thematic and stylistic features. For the present purposes the discursive field is taken to be the debate on the future of the EU as such, but in a more comprehensive and detailed study that field would have to be subdivided into many partially distinct, but closely related smaller entities.

[v] Aznar: "Para mí, la ampliación es más una oportunidad que un problema." ("To me, the enlargement is more an opportunity than a problem"). All translations of Aznar's speech are my own and for the purpose of understanding only; the analysis is based on the original Spanish text.

Blair: "Enlargement to the East may be EU's greatest challenge, but I also believe it is its greatest opportunity."

[vi] Aznar: "...creo que el 2003 puede ser el año que dé paso a los vecinos más avanzados, y con esa perspectiva creo que debemos todos, Estados miembros actuales y candidatos, hacer los esfuerzos necesarios para estar en condiciones de dar ese primer paso hacia la reunificación del continente." ("I think that 2003 could be the year that gives passage to the most advanced neighbours, and with this perspective I think that we all, actual Member States and applicants, should make the necessary efforts to be ready to take this first step towards the reunification of the continent").

Blair: "I will be urging Europe's political leaders to commit themselves to a specific framework leading to an early end of the negotiations and to accession." "My message to you is this: there are of course no guaranteed places. Reform is the only entry ticket."

[vii] Aznar: "...me detendré algo más en la cuestión en la que algunos cifran

todas sus esperanzas para resolver el dilema profundización-ampliación...” (“...I will detain myself somewhat longer at the question in which some place all their hopes of solving the dilemma of deepening-widening...”)

Blair: “The most important challenge to Europe is to wake up to the new reality: Europe is widening and deepening simultaneously. There will be more of us in the future, trying to do more. The issue is: not whether we do this, but how we reform this new Europe so that it both delivers real benefits to the people of Europe, addressing the priorities they want addressed; and does so in a way that has their consent and support.”

[viii] “...insiste en la necesidad de entender las cooperaciones reforzadas como un factor de integración y no de segregación.”

[ix] Aznar: “Europa es, para mí, una comunidad atravesada por múltiples trayectorias históricas e intereses confrontados. El gobierno y la administración de la idea europea representan un proceso simultáneo que consiste en apostar por el futuro, consolidando el acervo laboriosamente conseguido” (Europe is, to me, a community crossed by multiple historical roads and conflicting interests. The government and administration of the European idea represent a simultaneous process, which consists of being on guard for the future, consolidating the cultural inheritance laboriously obtained).

Blair: “Europe is a Europe of free, independent sovereign nations who choose to pool that sovereignty in pursuit of their own interests and the common good, achieving more together than we can achieve alone. The EU will remain a unique combination of the intergovernmental and the supranational”

[x] “Por su parte, los Estados miembros deben estar dispuestos a acomodar sus intereses nacionales...al interés común de la Unión. Es cierto que este proceso de acomodo recíproco supone renunciaciones por parte de los estados miembros; pero esto no debe interpretarse como una pérdida o una cesión sin más, sino como la asunción en común de lo que antes se ejercía unilateralmente e incluso...”

[xi] “Mi país es, naturalmente, abierto y plural. La Constitución de 1978 significó la liberación de un potencial desusado que guardábamos en nuestro interior; pero qué lejos estaríamos de esta imagen de España sin el acicate de la integración europea durante estos últimos años, que nos atrae siempre como el primer día del ingreso en la Comunidad.”

[xii] “...mi Gobierno pretende que la ampliación se haga realidad lo antes posible. No podría desear otra cosa para España, que ha conocido una larga transición económica y una feliz transición política.”

[xiii] “Como español. Les digo que la idea europea no es un trampolín para

proyectos estrictamente nacionales, ni un seguro de estabilidad para los miembros más débiles, sino una voluntad inveterada de pertenencia.”

[xiv] “En realidad, no entrábamos en Europa porque de aquí nunca habíamos salido. España es de los pocos países en el continente que ha deseado y demostrado durante siglos que era europeo al entrar en contacto con otras civilizaciones..”

[xv] “Como español, creo que, más que la división geométrica de competencias, hay que profundizar en la noción del ejercicio compartido de las competencias. No debe fomentarse la creación de compartimentos estancos, sino favorecer la puesta en común de esfuerzos a diferentes niveles en pro de un objetivo común.”

[xvi] “...un instrumento mediante el cual un grupo de países pioneros avanzan en la construcción de una Europa más unida, señalando el camino a otros y animándoles así a emprenderlo a su lado. Por utilizar términos de la biología, se podría decir que los Estados miembros que lancen una cooperación reforzada serían precursores cuya combinación y esfuerzo común desembocaría en una realidad más elaborada y más amplia.”

[xvii] “En ese sentido, España desea ser uno de los precursores de esa nueva vía.”

[xviii] “Tenemos que garantizar el tronco común y evitar el nacimiento de varias Europas.”

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