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Delimiting the burden of proof in political interviews

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This paper aims to contribute to an understanding of the politicians' burden of proof in political interviews by explaining how politicians attempt to delimit the burden of proof which they acquire for their standpoints in response to criticism. As politicians always want to give a positive evaluation of their activities, they respond to the critics by delimiting their burden of proof in such a way that their standpoints are easy to defend. The research question to be answered is: How do politicians expediently delimit their burden of proof in political interviews in response to criticism? First, the author characterizes political interviews as accountability practices which by virtue of their institutional traits impose limits on the politicians' burden of proof. Second, the author explains some of the possibilities for delimiting the burden of proof in the communicative practices at issue by analyzing in detail several fragments from a political interview.

Keywords: political interview, burden of proof, strategy

1. Introduction

When taking part in political interviews, politicians usually inform the public of their activities, decisions and plans, advance standpoints in relation to these, and argue for their performance (e.g., Andone 2013, Fetzer 2007, Montgomery 2007). In these standpoints, politicians give a positive evaluation of their political performance by claiming that their activities are up to standard. Their standpoints are more often than not met with doubt and criticism, because the role of the interviewers is precisely to raise questions about the political account (Andone 2013). In response to criticism, politicians incur the obligation to argue, known in argumentation theory as a *burden of proof*.

This paper aims to contribute to an understanding of the politicians' burden of proof in political interviews. Although the fundamental role played by this

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component of argumentation in political interviews is often implicitly recognized, the literature offers more questions than answers with respect to this issue. Apart from illustrating with the help of examples that politicians have an obligation to argue for their positions, no explanation has yet been provided of the way in which the burden of proof is acquired, met and discharged by the politicians who are being interviewed.

In this paper, my interest is to explain how politicians attempt to delimit the burden of proof which they acquire for their standpoints in response to criticism. This interest is triggered by the fact that politicians always want to give a positive evaluation of their activities, and therefore respond to the critics by delimiting their burden of proof in such a way that their standpoints are easy to defend. The research question to be answered in this paper is the following: *How do politicians expediently delimit their burden of proof in political interviews in response to criticism?*

In answering this question, I will concentrate on the stage of a political interview in which the role of the burden of proof is fundamental, namely the initial situation, in which standpoints are put forward and for which a burden of proof is acquired when they are met with doubt. In my explanation, I will follow a pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation by concentrating on the strategies employed by the politicians for the purpose of delimiting the burden of proof.[1] In the first section of the paper, I will characterize political interviews as accountability practices which by virtue of their institutional traits impose limits on the politicians' burden of proof in the initial situation. In the second section, I will explain some of the possibilities for delimiting the burden of proof in the communicative practices at issue by analyzing in detail several fragments from a political interview.

2. Political interviews as argumentative accountability practices

2.1 Account-giving in political interviews

Recent studies on political interviews show that this communicative practice is predominantly argumentative, because at all times politicians advance standpoints and argue for them in response to an interviewer's doubt and criticism

1. In doing so, I do not deny that the burden of proof plays a role at all stages of the discussion: The burden of proof is distributed over the parties at the stage of the discussion at which starting points are established, an attempt is made to meet it when arguments are being advanced, and it is discharged in the concluding stage of a discussion (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002).

(Montgomery 2007, Andone 2013).[2] This view of political interviews is not surprising if one takes into account that political interviews have been established as accountability practices (Mulgan 2003, Montgomery 2007). In these practices, as political scholars show, "a relationship between an actor and a forum [is established], in which the actor has the obligation to explain and justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgment, and the actor might face consequences" (Bovens 2006: 7). The actor is in this case a political official and the forum is a journalist acting on behalf of the general public, acting as the mouthpiece for those who hold a standpoint. Mulgan (2003) explains that the accountability obligation that lies upon the politician in the media is informal, in the sense that he is not formally obliged to render a regular account, as it happens in committees of inquiry, courts or auditors, in accordance with strict rules and obligations.

In Andone (2013: 36), following political scientists such as Bovens (2006: 10), I show that in political interviews the account-giving consists of three phases. The first phase is informative: in this phase the politician informs the journalist and the audience about his retrospective or prospective actions in preparation for the second phase in which the actual debating takes place. In this second phase, the journalist demands answers which explain the politician's conduct, thus enabling the audience at home to make an assessment of the political performance. Mulgan (2003: 9) points out that "forcing people to explain what they have done is perhaps the essential component of making them accountable. In this sense, the core of accountability becomes a dialogue between accountors [note: those giving an account] and account-holders [note: those holding accountors into account]." Finally, in the judgment phase, the journalist suggests an assessment of the politician's performance, which can take the form of approval, denouncing, or public condemnation of the politician's performance. Political interviews, unlike institutionalized forums such as courts or parliaments, lack the authority to impose formal sanctioning, but journalists set, as it were, the ground for the politicians facing consequences later and elsewhere.

The debating phase of political interviews is vital to realizing the purpose for which this communicative practice has been established: In this phase an exchange

2. This recent view on the argumentative character of political interviews contradicts the traditional approach to this communicative practice according to which political interviews are simply informative. Just like many other authors, Clayman and Heritage (2002: 98), for example, claim that the interviewer is institutionally obliged to remain neutral and impartial in the sense that he "cannot express opinions, or argue with, debate, or criticize the interviewee's positions." In Andone (2013: 43–46) I demonstrate that this view is based on a misunderstanding. By closely examining the codified rules in Great Britain, for instance, I show that the interviewer's neutrality amounts only to maintaining a balance in the representation of views.

of standpoints, arguments and criticisms takes place at all times. Without advancing standpoints, the politician does not fulfill his primary role of making his positions clear for the audience at home. Without advancing criticisms, the journalist cannot hold the politician properly to account, because by definition doing so involves asking critical questions that challenge the interlocutor to respond. Without advancing arguments, the politician cannot justify his political performance.

In what follows, I will provide an account of the initial situation of political interviews[3] by explaining the role of the participants to the discussion, the type of difference of opinion in which they are involved, and the issues that are central to political interviews. In the recent pragma-dialectical approach to contextualized argumentation, these three characteristics of the initial situation of a communicative practice are shown to play the most important role for the way in which the discussion proceeds (van Eemeren 2010: 146–151). They shape the definition of the difference of opinion and impose vital constraints on the participants' subsequent arguing. The ultimate purpose of my characterization is to show how these three aspects of the initial situation affect the politician's burden of proof in political interviews.

2.2 The burden of proof in political account-giving

The critical exchange of argumentative moves in political interviews takes place between the politician and the journalist who are the direct participants to the discussion. However, the difference of opinion arising in these discussions takes place in fact between the politician and the audience watching, reading or listening to the interview. The journalist acts in political interviews as a representative of the public for whom the interview is primarily conducted. He gives voice to public concerns by demanding an account from the politician on behalf of the audience at home.[4] Indeed, the quality of the interview depends on whether the journalist does actually represent the general public audience.

3. The initial situation is the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of a critical discussion (van Eemeren 2010).

4. Van Eemeren (2010: 109) emphasizes that in deliberative communicative practices such as political interviews the arguer wants to reach in the first place the general public, who thus becomes the primary audience. The persons instrumental in reaching them, in this case the interviewers, represent the secondary audience. Political interviews implement the type of deliberation that is aimed predominantly at opinion-formation. Fraser (1992: 74–75) explains that in such a case "[political] discourse does not eventuate in binding, sovereign decisions authorizing the use of state power; on the contrary, […] eventuates in 'public opinion,' critical commentary on authorized decision-making that transpires elsewhere."

The difference of opinion arising in the initial situation of the discussion in political interviews is sometimes, though rarely, non-mixed. In pragma-dialectical terms, this amounts to only one party advancing a standpoint which is afterwards doubted by the other party (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004). Since the politician is the party expected to give an account of his performance, and therefore advances a standpoint, he has a burden of proof if challenged to defend his position (Andone 2013: 39–40). The politician is obliged to offer proof for the positive evaluation of his performance which he gives in his standpoint.

This simple situation in which only the politician advances a standpoint is quite rare in political interviews, because more often than not the journalist gives a negative evaluation of the politician's activity which he expresses in a position of his own.[5] After all, he commonly acts as the devil's advocate criticizing his interlocutor even when he knows that the politician's actions are up to the expected standard (Andone 2013: 55). Acting as the forum in the accountability practice of political interviews, the journalist is moreover institutionally obliged to take on a burden of proof for his criticism.[6] By advancing a standpoint of his own, the interviewer puts thoroughly the acceptability of the politician's actions to the test, who no longer has to respond to mere doubt but to criticism. The discussion in political interviews can thus be fairly characterized as a mixed difference of opinion in which both parties advance their own standpoint (Andone 2013: 40). The politician advances a standpoint in which he evaluates positively his political actions, and the interviewer advances a standpoint in which he criticizes the advocated positive performance.

In the initial situation of political interviews, in which standpoints are advanced and met with criticism, the politician acquires a burden of proof as a consequence of the need to respond to criticism against his standpoint if challenged to do so. Houtlosser shows that "advancing a standpoint counts as taking responsibility for a […] position in respect of [an expressed opinion] O, assuming an obligation to

5. There are various strategies which the interviewer employs for presenting a view of his own, most of which are indirect strategies, such as quoting an expert, referring to the words of another politician or commentators or by invoking the public's potential view.

6. Often, if only because of time constraints, the interviewer's burden of proof is lighter in comparison with the politician's burden of proof. The journalist does not hold his own position, but rather quotes others (such as the public) and his responsibility is therefore diminished. He is rarely challenged by the politician to meet this obligation. This can be explained by the asymmetrical relationship between the interviewer (who is expected to ask questions only) and the politician (who may only give answers).

defend the […] position in respect of O if challenged to do so" (2002: 171).[7] Unlike authors such as Rescher (2006) and Kauffeld (2007) who believe that a burden of proof reflects an obligation that a speaker incurs as a consequence of making an assertion, pragma-dialecticians favour a view according to which simply putting forward an assertive is not enough. In their account, only assertives which are met with doubt or criticism — and thus become standpoints — involve a burden of proof (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002). By taking on a burden of proof at the confrontation stage, the protagonist of a standpoint contributes to the critical testing procedure because in this way he helps to define the difference of opinion and thus contributes to realizing the purpose of the confrontation stage.[8]

In view of the fact that advancing a standpoint brings with it an obligation to prove, and in view of the institutional constraint of having to give an account of the political performance, politicians can be said to acquire two types of burden of proof in the initial situation of political interviews. One such type can be called a *probative burden of proof* which involves an obligation to argue for the standpoint once it is advanced. This kind of obligation corresponds to Rescher's 'probative burden of an initiating assertion' (1977: 27, later called 'the probative burden of an original assertion' in Rescher 2006: 15) and Walton's internal burden of proof (1988: 247). As the latter explains, "at the local level of dialogue, where requirements of proof or argument are set relative to one specific move, or pairs of moves" (Walton 1988: 247), a burden of proof is imposed on the arguer. This burden amounts to providing arguments for that which is asserted.

The second type of burden of proof acquired by politicians taking part in interviews can be called a *refutative burden of proof,* as it involves refuting the negative evaluation expressed in the interviewer's criticism. This type of burden of proof, imposed institutionally, corresponds to a great extent to Rescher's 'evidential burden of further reply in the face of contrary considerations' (1977: 27, later called 'the dialectical burden' in Rescher 2006: 16). In Rescher's view, this type of burden of proof takes the argument forward in the light of evidence and counter-evidence in the situation at hand. This kind of obligation resembles Walton's external burden of proof (1988: 246), a term which he uses to refer to the obligation imposed by the rules of procedure and goals of the dialogue. In the absence of this

7. Following the principle of externalization — according to which judgments are to be made on the basis of the externalized commitments — only those objections need to be dealt with by the protagonist that are advanced in the discourse, whether explicitly, implicitly or indirectly (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002: 18).

8. Of course, at this stage a burden of proof arises only in case the protagonist has not already successfully defended the same standpoint against the same discussant on a previous occasion and in case the protagonist has not withdrawn his standpoint (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004: 139).

kind of refutative obligation, the politician does not help to move the discussion forward towards achieving the accountability purpose. In response to the interviewer's negative reaction, the politician cannot afford to do less than refuting the criticism. His political role requires him moreover to direct his rejection not only at the public and the interviewer, but also at his opponents. While addressing the public involves tailoring the maneuvering to the expectations of the public, addressing the opponents involves trying to show that their position is not tenable. The politician is aware of the fact that the audience usually judges the acceptability of the political performance in comparison with the words and actions of political rivals (Andone 2013: 53–54).

The burden of proof, whether probative or refutative, pertains in all cases to issues "of political controversy and matters relating to current public policy" (Andone 2013: 40) which are of major importance for the public.[9] The range of issues for discussion is chosen by the interviewer in such a way that possible public interest is satisfied and a balance of issues is ensured. Because the issues for discussion are multiple, a burden of proof is acquired for all the issues brought up for discussion. In other words, the politician's burden of proof is preconditioned by the various topics that trigger the difference of opinion.

The characteristics of the initial situation of a political interview outlined so far make clear that a politician is obliged to give an account to the public in response to criticism, while also trying to suggest that his political performance is up to the expected standard. Because politicians always try to refute the interviewer's negative evaluation, their ultimate goal is to give the impression that the retrospective and prospective actions for which they argue are in line with public expectations. The need to balance the institutional obligations of giving an account with doing so by casting a positive light on the politician's actions results in an attempt at delimiting the burden of proof in such a way that standpoints are easier to defend. How can the burden of proof be delimited in view of these institutional constraints?

In principle, three types of constraints influence the politicians' burden of proof, corresponding to the three types of constraints of the initial situation of political interviews: audience constraints, issue constraints and the constraints imposed by the type of difference of opinion at issue. Obviously, audience constraints affect the choice of issues, and the type of difference of opinion constrains in turn the other two aspects. Despite this unavoidable influence of one aspect over the others, it is possible to distinguish analytically among various possibilities for delimiting the burden of proof.

9. In Andone (2013: 40–41) I show that these matters are central to political interviews in Great Britain. As Clayman and Heritage (2002) convincingly demonstrate, the same kind of issues are also discussed usually in other countries.

In the initial situation of a political interview, audience constraints impose on the politicians the need to take into account public concerns. After all, the political actions which are at the centre of the discussion are matters of public importance which affect the majority of those watching, reading or listening to the interview. As far as the burden of proof is concerned, politicians will concentrate on delimiting it in such a way that they state a position which they expect to be easily accepted by the general public. One way of doing so is by unequivocally limiting their burden of proof to uncontroversial issues, so that it is not too difficult to meet it at a later stage of the discussion or no defense is after all necessary, as no one can disagree with the advocated position (cf. van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002).

Issue constraints force the politicians to deal with the controversial matters chosen for discussion by the interviewer. Because the issues for discussion always affect some people negatively — after all, no political decision, policy and action can satisfy everyone — politicians will most probably try to emphasize only matters which fit them best. In this way, the scope of the standpoint is very much reduced and no burden of proof is acquired that exceeds this scope.

The type of difference of opinion imposes a probative and/or a refutative burden of proof. Whereas in the former case the politicians have to defend their positions and reject doubt from the interviewer, in the latter case they must moreover refute the opposite standpoint. The burden of proof will be limited to such an extent that instead of concentrating mostly on rejecting doubt or criticism from the interviewer, the politicians will bring to the foreground weak points in the opposite position. In this way, a negative image of the opponents is created and their own political qualities are highlighted.

The institutional constraints just outlined make it possible to predict to some extent the way in which politicians attempt to delimit their burden of proof in such a way that they can more easily defend their standpoints and maintain a positive image for the audience. In what follows, I will analyze in detail several fragments from a political interview with the aim of showing how politicians delimit their burden of proof in argumentative practice. The analysis will bring to light different strategies employed for this purpose.

3. The race for Europe's top job

The empirical material selected for the purpose of this paper[10] is taken from the online English version of *Spiegel* in which European politicians are commonly

10. This interview has been chosen because it is a typical instance of accountability practice in the media.

interviewed with a view to holding them to account for their actions, decisions and plans. In the interview chosen for analysis, dating from March 12, 2014, the journalist discusses with the two leading candidates[11] for the presidency of the European Commission: Jean-Claude Juncker (from Luxembourg) and Martin Schulz (from Germany).[12] The discussion concerns as diverse topics as tax havens in Europe, euro bonds and the European debt crisis. In dealing with these topics, the interviewer asks the two candidates to explain and justify their political performance by comparing it to that of the opponent. In so doing, the two politicians try to emphasize their own qualities while also negatively evaluating the opponent. For this purpose, the two politicians delimit their burden of proof in various ways which my analysis of some fragments from the interview will bring to light.

At the beginning of the interview, the journalist mentions that Luxembourg has already provided the European Commission with two presidents, whereas Germany gave one more than 50 years before. For this reason, he suggests that Schulz might have a higher chance to win the elections, and invites Juncker to comment on this:

> *Spiegel*: There have already been two European Commission presidents from Luxembourg. The last one served 15 years ago. Germany, on the other hand, has only succeeded once in landing the post — and that was over 50 years ago. Could that play to Schulz's advantage?

In his question, the journalist imposes on Juncker an obligation to advance a standpoint concerning Schulz's chances of winning the elections and implicitly, defend it. Since the interview is aimed at giving the public an idea about the most suitable candidate for the job — by asking the politicians to account for their performance — the journalist's question can be fairly interpreted as implicitly asking Juncker to argue for the benefits of having a president from Luxembourg. The arguments, so it is suggested, should refer to the merits of those from Luxembourg.

In reply to this question, Juncker does not question the presupposition of the question that a German candidate could count on an advantage. Instead, he interprets the question as raising an issue related to the nationality of the potential Commission president:

11. It is not uncommon that the interviewer discusses with two politicians in the same interview.

12. In May 2014, it is for the first time that European voters had a say on who becomes the president of the European Commission. This does not mean that the citizens voted directly for the Commission's president. The composition of the European Parliament determine the leader of the European Commission. Under the new rules, European Union government leaders propose a candidate for the post of the Commission President on the basis of the election results.

> *Juncker*: I don't think in national categories. For me it is about concepts and substance. But still, I would still say that it would be better for Europe if the next Commission president were from Luxembourg. My country has always played the role of a mediator in the EU, especially between the Germans and the French. I believe in the power of consensus. Martin Schulz prefers provocation.

Juncker first denies any relevance of the issue of nationality in voting for a candidate (*I don't think in national categories*), thereby trying to create the impression that the focus should lie on the personal and professional qualities of the candidate. This impression is emphasized in saying that 'contents and substance' are what really matters. Having advanced this position, Juncker could reasonably anticipate doubt from some of the audience and should therefore attempt to meet the burden of proof acquired by putting forward his standpoint. Instead he chooses to deny his own views (*but still*) and uses *praeteritio* to put forward a position according to which nevertheless someone from Luxembourg — in this case him — would be a better Commission president.

In order to cover for the weakness of being inconsistent, suggested by the use of *praeteritio*, Juncker immediately lives up to the burden of proof acquired as a result of taking on a position: He emphasizes the consensual approach specific of his country (*My country has always played the role of a mediator in the EU*) and of himself (*I believe in the power of consensus*). This probative burden of proof is complemented by living up to the institutional constraint of arguing against his competitor by suggesting that Germans are more conflicting in their record in the EU history (*My country has always played the role of a mediator in the EU especially between the Germans and the French*) and Schulz in particular is known as someone provocative (*Martin Schulz prefers provocation*). Thus, both a probative and a refutative burden of proof are at issue in this fragment. The probative burden of proof involves a commitment to defend his own qualities, the refutative burden of proof involves rejecting anticipated doubt and arguing for a negative evaluation of the competitor.

Responding to this, Schulz underlines his 'European' character, but does not live up to his burden of proof imposed by advancing a standpoint. He delimits his burden of proof in connection with his standpoint (*I have a European calling and nationality plays no role for me*) as if no arguments need to be put forward, since the European citizens are familiar with his approach (*I think people know that*):

> *Schulz*: […] I have a European calling and nationality plays no role for me. I think people know that.

By avoiding to refer to his own nationality, Schulz goes for a safe strategy, because he certainly satisfies in this way the expectations of a larger number of people than just those of his co-nationals. Unlike Juncker who emphasizes the advantage of someone from Luxembourg, Schulz focuses on the quality of being European, particularly important in the context of elections at European level.

Later in the discussion, Schulz further delimits his burden of proof by shifting the discussion to another issue than the very much controversial issue chosen by the journalist. Because Schulz is currently the president of the European Parliament, many people have called for his resignation as he is campaigning for the European Commission. Asked to comment on this, Schulz replies that he tries to act in a non-partisan manner, but:

> *Schulz*: […] We should instead focus this campaign on debating the right course for Europe.

With this reply, Schulz restricts his burden of proof to issues which fit him best and at the same time need little if any arguing at all, thus evading an answer to the question. No one would deny that Europe needs to take 'the right course' which depends to a great extent on the Commission president. In fact, the discussion on this matter is discontinued by the journalist who proceeds to another matter.

The interview offers more instances of limitations of the burden of proof by the two politicians. At some point, the journalist casts doubt on the seriousness of Juncker's candidacy, because he has already turned down twice the opportunity to become president of the European Commission. In 2004 he preferred to work as prime minister in his own country and in 2009 he chose to become president of the European Council. Juncker's credibility is put to the critical test:

> Spiegel: Mr. Juncker, in 2004, you had the opportunity to become president of the European Commission, but you turned it down. Now, after losing your position as prime minister of Luxembourg, you suddenly seem to be interested in the job. Why should voters find that to be credible?
> *Juncker*: In 2004, the European and Luxembourg elections were held on the same day. At the time, I said I would only take a position in Europe if I was not re-elected prime minister. I was re-elected, so I didn't switch to Brussels.
> *Spiegel*: In 2009, you preferred to become president of the European Council instead of the Commission.
> *Juncker*: I recognize that the German press is speculating that I allegedly don't want to become president of the Commission. This is what I have to say to voters: I am serious about my candidacy.

In his second answer to the critical question doubting his credibility as a candidate, Juncker simply guarantees the acceptability of his standpoint (*This is what I have to say to voters*) without further ado. The weakness of his answer is obvious in the reconstruction of this example: *I am serious because I say so*. Neither a probative nor a refutative burden of proof is even attempted to be met, as if there is no need for this.

The limitation of the burden of proof is also at issue when the discussion turns to the much debated topic of Luxembourg as a tax haven. After several allegations from Schulz that Luxembourg does not do enough for greater transparency, and an angry reaction from Juncker that he is unfairly attacked for tax evasion, several accusations of inconsistencies are launched. Juncker tries to defend his good image by suggesting that Germany does not have the right to criticize him for tax evasion, since they also protect their own automobile industry:

> *Juncker*: I have never given any more support to Luxembourg as a financial center than the German chancellors have to their automobile industry. However, I do agree that we need rules against tax dumping just as we do against social dumping. Europe needs to have a minimum basis of workers' rights.

Juncker's reply indicates that the strategy employed to do away with the criticism consists in making recourse to an accusation of inconsistency by attacking his opponent because his country gives support for their car industry, not in any way different from the support for the tax system in Luxembourg. Juncker makes his critic appear responsible for the very type of act he condemns and thus shifts the burden of proof to Schulz. Schulz's question, so it seems, comes from someone who has acted inconsistently and should therefore not be answered. The burden of proof is limited such that the tax evasion of which he is accused is no longer debated. Because Juncker knows that this answer will hardly do, he concedes something that no one can possibly deny (*I do agree that we need rules against tax dumping just as we do against social dumping*). His formulation helps Juncker to portray himself as Eurocentric, rather than as nationalistic.

But the concession Juncker makes is not sufficient for Schulz who points out, also by means of an accusation of inconsistency, that what he preaches, namely social protection, is not what he practices, by pointing at the situation in Greece when he has not been really socially protective:

> *Schulz*: But the Greek bailout wasn't very social. As president of the Euro Group, you had significant influence on it, Mr. Juncker.

4. Conclusion

Political interviews constitute accountability practices in which the politicians' performance is questioned for its acceptability and an account is provided in which the political actions are explained and justified to the public. The obligation to provide arguments for political actions counts as acquiring a burden of proof. Because this burden of proof is not always easy to meet, an attempt is commonly made to delimit it to such an extent that it is minimized as much as possible.

After explaining in pragma-dialectical terms the procedural view of the burden of proof, I made clear how this component of argumentative discourse is constrained by the context of political interviews. In principle, issue constraints, audience constraints and constraints imposed by the type of difference of opinion at issue affect the acquisition of the burden of proof and determine the strategies to be employed for delimiting it.

The analysis of several fragments from a political interview with two politicians competing in the European elections for the presidency of the European Commission brings to light several strategies for delimiting the burden of proof. One of the strategies consists in reducing the burden of proof to such an extent that it seems as if there is no need for arguing. To do so, the politicians formulate their standpoints in such a way that what they claim is something which everyone would but support (*I think people know that*). Another way chosen by politicians to reduce the burden of proof to a null commitment for defense consists in guaranteeing with their own authority the acceptability of their standpoint (*This is what I have to say to voters*).

A different strategy employed for delimiting the burden of proof concerns arguing for the personal political qualities and bringing to light a negative image of the opponent in response to a request to comment on a possible advantage of the competitor (*I believe in the power of consensus; [My opponent] prefers provocation*). Yet another strategy is to shift the discussion to a less controversial and more advantageous issue (*We should instead focus on […]*) such that a burden of proof is acquired only for a standpoint which is easy to defend. Finally, the burden of proof is immunized by means of an accusation of inconsistency in reply to the opponent's criticism of inconsistency. With this strategy, the burden of proof is shifted to the competitor who apparently has no right to raise a criticism if he is himself guilty of a similar offense.

Obviously, not all strategies employed by politicians to delimit their burden of proof are equally reasonable. Many of the strategies employed by the politicians in giving an account in political interviews are fallacious, because they do not help the discussion to move forward, but rather preclude it. Such instances can be observed when politicians attempt to exclude the opponent from the discussion, as in criticisms of inconsistency. In order to properly evaluate the quality of the employed strategies, clear-cut criteria need to be developed which take into account both argumentative aspects and the institutional context in which they are advanced. An equally important enterprise would be to develop criteria for establishing the effectiveness of these strategies. Open questions remain with regard to the extent to which the outlined strategies contribute to winning the discussion or on the contrary, constitute an obstacle in the process of persuasion. Not less importantly, the generalizability of the observations made in this paper remains a challenge.

More empirical material needs to be analyzed in detail both qualitatively and quantitatively in order to be able to draw more reliable conclusion on the issue at hand.

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