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### Introduction

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# Introduction

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## 1. Argumentation in European politics

In 2013 the *Journal of Argumentation in Context* published a special issue (edited by Lewinski and Mohammed 2013) bringing together theoretical and empirical contributions to the study of argumentation in political deliberative contexts. Almost a decade after this publication, the study of political argumentation has remained as relevant as ever. For one thing, in the field of argumentation theory new analytical and evaluative instruments have been developed, serving to unravel the argumentative patterns (van Eemeren 2017) and the argumentative style (van Eemeren 2021) characteristic of political communication.

On 7 October 2021 we organized a symposium on 'Argumentation in European Politics' at the University of Amsterdam. The main goal of this symposium was to examine how arguments are provided and criticized to achieve sound political decisions, to legitimize those decisions and to increase their acceptability for the general public in the long term. The papers presented at this colloquium are published in this new special issue focusing on argumentation in European politics

This special issue attempts to make a meaningful contribution to understanding, interpreting and assessing political positions and justificatory reasons. While recognizing the vital role of argumentation in every political context all over the world, we zoom in on argumentation as it is employed in European politics. Our motivation is determined by the unique political arena in Europe. Of the more or less 50 countries in Europe at the moment, 27 countries are Member States of the European Union (EU). A substantial tension arises in the relationship between Member States and the EU. Many scholars and political figures alike point at reduced confidence among citizens and the EU as a sphere of governance, and deepening divisions among parts of the population in their country's political order (cf. Majone 2014).

Although this reality has only become more acute (consider, for example, recent events as Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic or the migration crisis), the argumentative dimension of European politics is currently critically under-

investigated, despite arguments being pertinent instruments to justify political action and gain citizen trust. The current reality imposes a robust and convincing use of argumentation in public debates as essential features for a good and effective communication among different parties. From a practical perspective, argumentation is the litmus test for political actors who have to manage particularly complex situations. From a scholarly perspective, understanding their argumentation can generate important knowledge about the functioning of political institutions (cf. Salomonsen & 't Hart 2020).

The contributions in this special issue reflect a variety of political contexts in which argumentation is employed for persuasive purposes. They include European parliamentary debates (van Eemeren, Garssen), public debates (Doury and Casillo), European Commission press releases (Andone), Italian party programs, political speeches, interviews, newspaper editorials and posts (Kienpointner, Brambilla), and Portuguese political campaigns (Mohammed). In their papers, the authors investigate the argumentative style of political actors, the argumentative patterns employed by political organizations to convince addressees, and many linguistic strategies of national political actors, varying from persuasive definitions to personal attacks, arguments based on quotations and fear appeals. The investigations comprise empirical perspectives describing and analyzing argumentation, alongside normative perspectives evaluating the quality of the argumentation. In what follows, we elaborate in more detail on each contribution.

## 2. Overview of the contributions

In the first contribution to this special issue 'Characterizing an MEP's argumentative style', **Frans van Eemeren** argues that there is much more to argumentative style than just the well-known presentational ("linguistic") dimension. Equally important dimensions of the argumentative styles utilized in resolving a difference of opinion are the topical dimension of the selection of the standpoints, starting points, arguments and concluding statements put forward in the discourse and the dimension of the adaptations to the presumed demand of the audience that is to be convinced. In argumentative discourse these three dimensions of argumentative style manifest themselves together in the argumentative moves that are made, the argumentative routes that are chosen and the strategic considerations that are brought to bear. Starting from this perspective, Van Eemeren shows in this article how the argumentative style can be identified that was utilised by a Member of the European Parliament in a plenary debate on labelling fruit juices. He concludes that despite the fact that the contribution by the MEP shows certain

signs of detached style, the general style utilised by the MEP can be characterised as engaged.

**Emanuele Brambilla** analyses in 'Antifascist argumentation in Giacomo Matteotti's 1924 speech to the Italian Parliament' the speech delivered by the socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti to the Italian Parliament in 1924 in order to characterize his argumentative style. The results of Brambilla's analysis indicate that Matteotti's argumentation against the fascists hinged on facts and rules as premises of argumentation. Furthermore, Matteotti supported his arguments with factual evidence and organised them in a multiple argumentation structure. In addition, he "dressed up" his speech, apparently characterised by a detached argumentative style, with traits of a more engaged style, whose combination has turned Matteotti's invective against the fascist regime into an argumentative masterpiece.

In 'The argumentative style of the opening speech in a debate in the European Parliament' **Bart Garssen** gives a characterisation of the argumentative style utilised in an opening speech of a plenary debate in the European Parliament. Following a legislative proposal sent by the European Commission to the European Parliament, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) debate in order to arrive at an informed vote. This debate is initiated through an opening speech in which the rapporteur of a parliamentary committee presents the European Commission's proposal, as well as the amendments and the arguments to support them. As it is the rapporteur's aim to gain broad parliamentary agreement with the proposal, the opening speech is vital to the debate, because all contributions of the MEPs relate directly to the argumentation put forward by the rapporteur. Garssen analyses the argumentative style that is utilized by the rapporteur in his opening speech of the Parliamentary debate on the food supply chain in Europe. Garssen identifies the argumentative patterns in the argumentation in the opening speech. Next, he analyses the strategic design and the underlying the argumentation of the rapporteur. Based on this analysis, he characterises the argumentative style of the rapporteur as predominantly detached.

In her contribution on 'Arguing through quotations: the case of European Commission press releases,' **Corina Andone** examines how press releases accompanying recommendations to Member States function as an integral element of the attempt to raise public awareness about the EU as a whole, and the values and policies of the Commission in particular. Central to the press releases are quotes from Commission officials, providing arguments about the urgency, necessity, desirability and efficiency of implementing the proposed course of action. Andone demonstrates that the argumentative pattern characteristic of this communicative practice is potentially not fully convincing, because the employed quotes function as weak authority arguments that are not likely to be accepted by the addressees if they are not further supported by other argument types.

With its focus on the argumentative features of press releases, this research provides valuable knowledge into an overlooked but omnipresent and highly influential element of EU communication. Moreover, the study paves the ground for EU drafters of press releases to devise such communication instruments based on sound and effective argumentation with a high potential to convince.

In her paper ‘The argumentative potential of attacks in election political campaigns’ **Dima Mohammed** examines the argumentation in negative political campaigns. She starts from the observation that there are mixed results as concerns the impact of negative campaigning. While some scholars believe that negative campaigning is not informative at all for the voters and consists merely of personal attacks, others claim that the criticisms in negative campaigning contribute to the exercise of accountability, especially when used by the opposition against incumbent candidates. Mohammed adopts an argumentative approach to examine attack ads and argues that such an approach will enable us to ultimately distinguish between legitimate attack ads and illegitimate ones. She illustrates her findings by examining the strategic management of the argumentation in a few examples from the 2021 local elections in Portugal.

In ‘*Viva la libertà!* On Persuasive Definitions of “Liberty” within Contemporary Italian Political Discourse,’ **Manfred Kienpointner** provides a detailed account of the Italian lexeme *libertà* within political discourse. Based on a corpus of Italian party programs, political speeches, interviews, newspaper editorials and posts, Kienpointner designs a list of argumentative strategies concerning explicit and implicit definitions of *libertà* which is subsequently critically evaluated. He demonstrates that the core meaning of *libertà* is close to “positive freedom,” that is, to be able to act in a self-determined way, following one’s own aims and goals. Furthermore, Kienpointner points out that some of the persuasive definitions based on more specific meanings of *libertà*, which are given by various protagonists in contemporary Italian politics, do not stand a critical testing process and are therefore fallacious. Finally, he makes a plausible assumption that the most effective act of defining is the implicit definition, serving as persuasive means for differing strategic goals.

**Marianne Doury** and **Ilaria Casillo** focus in their contribution on ‘Prescribed argumentation, actual argumentation, reported argumentation. The management of argumentation in a public debate in France.’ Their study examines how argumentation is employed in participatory democracy debates to improve the quality of the democratic processes, to make decisions more legitimate, and to improve a project’s acceptability. By relying on an elaborate analysis of Montagne d’Or, a gold mine project in French Guiana, as a case study, Doury and Casillo highlight the necessity of exchanging reasons through discussion (‘prescribed argumentation’) as part of the public debate, unravel the problematic exercise of argumentation.

tion by the participants ('actual argumentation'), and a distorted presentation of the argumentative dynamics in the final synthesis documents explaining the participatory process ('reported argumentation'), thus questioning the capacity of a participatory democracy process to achieve its objectives.

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