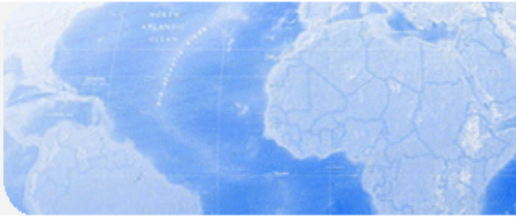




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IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN EUROPE: A DISCURSIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

Proposing a discursive approach to studying identity, this paper presents Positioning Theory as a theoretical framework for conceptualizing the construction of identity in discourse. The Positioning Diamond is employed to analyse the discourse surrounding the Danish Euro referendum. The analysis reveals how identities are constructed in discourse that promotes a 'yes' or 'no' vote in the referendum, highlighting the generally implicit allocation of rights and duties to actors within a specific narrative context. The penultimate section discusses appropriate criteria for evaluating discursive accounts, distinguishing between cases in which truth, normative and ethical criteria are applicable. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of policy considerations and recommendations.

1 Introduction

Concerns about the presence or lack of ‘European identity’ and the ‘legitimacy’ of the European Union (EU) are echoed in the media, political and academic circles alike. Why was the EU Constitutional Treaty rejected by the citizens of some EU member states? Why did Danish citizens vote against joining the ‘euro zone’? Many people expressed particular surprise at the results of Denmark’s euro referendum in 2000. The Danish people’s decision not to join the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) was perhaps most astonishing because their currency, the krone, was already pegged to the euro through the exchange rate mechanism (ERM), which caused the Danish krone to fluctuate with the euro (within a tight margin). Nevertheless, by not officially joining the EMU, Denmark remains without representation in the decision-making process at the European Central Bank (ECB). Countless claims were made that the referendum result had nothing to do with economics but was more a matter of psychology and politics.

Just after Denmark’s vote in 2000 against joining the EMU, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, leader of the pro-euro Venstre party, said that the main worries of citizens, and hence their reasons for voting against EMU membership, had to do with Danish “national identity” and “sovereignty”.² Corroborating these statements are the results of a national survey taken after the referendum, according to which 33 percent of ‘no’ voters said that the reason for their vote was concern for preserving ‘Danish identity’. 23 percent of ‘no’ voters cited a lack of confidence in the EU, and 37 percent favoured less integration with the rest of Europe.³ Consequently, claims that the EU lacks ‘legitimacy’ have proliferated. Yet what do these statements mean? What do the ‘EU’ and ‘Danish identity’ mean to different people? In order to understand the meaning of these concepts, we must take a discursive approach.

A discursive approach to social science, firmly embedded in social constructionism⁴, offers an alternative to various approaches and theories employed in social scientific disciplines, including Social Cognition, Social Identity and Realistic Conflict Theories.⁵ Theories of Social Cognition are premised on a model of human thought (and consequently social interaction) as (fallible) computing, whereby different identities are made salient in different contexts, activated by various sorts of triggers. Social Identity Theory depicts individuals’ emotional needs as the motivation for employing various strategies to promote their “in-group” and de-value the “out-group”. Based upon the assumptions embedded in a socio-biological approach, Realistic Conflict Theory claims that competition over resources causes conflict between ‘in-groups’ and ‘out-groups’. While each of these takes for granted the meaning of the ‘identities’, or how ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ are defined, a discursive approach examines how these identities are defined or given meaning in specific contexts and to what ends. From a discursive perspective, constructing a situation as ‘competition between an in-group and an out-group’ is an achievement – it is a storyline of the social scientist and possibly also of the people being studied. More fundamentally, the difference

² CNN europe 2000.

³ Bering 2000.

⁴ See Harré 1998, 18 for a lucid and brief description of the basic tenants of social constructionism.

⁵ See Abrams and Hogg 1999, on Social Identity and Social Cognition; see Moghaddam 1998; Taylor and Moghaddam 1994 for overviews of all three literatures.

between these approaches is ontological. Rather than attributing causal powers to ‘emotions’, ‘cognitions’, ‘identities’ or other psychological phenomena, in accordance with the discursive approach, the powerful agents used to explain psychological phenomena are persons.⁶

The next section of this paper outlines a discursive approach to the study of identity. It then introduces the Positioning Diamond, which is based on Positioning Theory and offers an analytical framework to systematically study meaning construction and the role of identities therein. The paper proceeds with a presentation of an empirical study of discourse surrounding the Danish euro referendum. The analysis employs the Positioning Diamond to reveal how identities are constructed in discourse that promotes a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ vote in the referendum. The paper concludes with reflections on appropriate criteria for evaluating discourse and some wider applications and implications of the discursive approach presented.

2 A Discursive Approach to Social Science Research

Discursive psychology is the study of how people use language to construct their social and perceptual realities.⁷ A basic tenet of the discursive approach is that language is not used merely to describe social and psychic realities but to create versions of these realities. Thus, discursive psychology focuses on what talking and writing do, on their ‘activity orientation’.⁸ By employing discursive practices, interlocutors co-construct and continuously re-negotiate their social and psychological realities. Through this process, actors jointly define their own and each others’ actions as socially determinate acts⁹, by assigning them meaning. For example, the action of a handshake can be given various meanings: it can be interpreted as a greeting, a bet, or a deal (different sorts of acts). Like actions, objects – for example a cross – are part of the physical realm. However, the meaning of the object must be interpreted as, for example, a symbol of Christianity. While actions and objects constitute the physical realm, acts, symbols and signs constitute the symbolic realm. In studying concepts such as identities, we are concerned with meanings, rather than with objects or actions.

The meaning of a particular action or object cannot be generalized across contexts. Rather, people make their actions and acts determinate in specific situations and for various purposes. The meaning of an ‘identity’ is entirely specific to a particular context in which actors are engaged in activities whereby the meaning is accomplished.

Consequently, understanding of ‘identities’, ‘attitudes’, ‘intentions’, ‘motivations’ and other psychological processes can only be attained through an examination of the rhetorical and situational contexts that illuminate the tasks being accomplished through these and other constructions.¹⁰

⁶ Harré 1998.

⁷ Potter and Wetherell 1987.

⁸ Edwards and Potter 1992; Cole 1996; Harré 1998.

⁹ Davies and Harré 1999.

¹⁰ Cole 1996; Harré 1998.

2.1 Constructing Actors in Discourse

Narrating persons

Since we are interested in meaning, we will be considering not the biological aspect of persons but the meaning given to persons. In philosophy, this aspect has been referred to as ‘selves’.¹¹ Identities are constructed by persons who generate meaning by telling stories and narrative is the organizational form that largely structures human experience.¹² Thus, a person can be seen as a storyteller, who tells stories about him/herself, others, and events. Furthermore, not only does the narrative form structure the content of the stories told by the storyteller, but it also structures the storyteller’s life – how (s)he thinks, feels and acts. Accordingly, thinking is often accomplished by running through a narrative, or telling oneself a story, while stories expressed publicly take the form of speech acts and non-linguistic acts such as gestures and expressions of emotion. Therefore, in order to understand “self”-constructs, we must examine the content and contexts of stories told about persons. In these stories, we can identify various conceptions of identity, the practices used to construct them, and the functions that these constructions serve.¹³

This discursive model of persons is an alternative to a variety of other models that treat “selves” or identities as stable entities, such as a set of traits (trait theory), an actor in a theater (role theory), an information-processing system (social cognition), mechanical contraptions (behaviorism), or biological and other drives (socio-biology and psychoanalytic models). According to the discursive conception of self, each of these models is a different story that people — social scientists and laypersons alike — use to describe themselves and others and that serves various functions. Therefore, the stories are not mutually exclusive but can be employed on different occasions and for different purposes. In one moment, a person might depict himself in trait terms and in another moment in role terms, or he might combine various models.¹⁴ Thus, for the discourse analyst, the question “What is the true nature of self?” is misconceived. In its stead:

Not only do we need to be able to describe the content of representations of people in different contexts or the sheer range of self-images available in ordinary talk, but we also need to ask how these images are used and to what end, and thus what they achieve for the speaker immediately, interpersonally, and then in terms of wider social implications.¹⁵

Narrating other actors

In the same way that ‘selves’ are narrated in discourse, other actors are often ‘theorized’ and attributed various qualities. In everyday acts of personification, actors such as ‘the European Union’, ‘Germany’, ‘Francophones’, and ‘Muslims’ are narrated as doing things and are attributed various characteristics. In such cases, a person always does the speaking or acting, but (s)he claims (or is claimed by another) to be

¹¹ Harré 1998.

¹² Bruner 1990.

¹³ Bruner 1990.

¹⁴ Potter et al. 1984, 45-47.

¹⁵ Potter and Wetherell 1987, 110.

doing so on behalf of another group or entity. Because meanings are constructed for these entities in the same fashion as they are for persons, meanings constructed for all of these types of actors can be considered ‘identities’. Thus, ‘identities’ can be defined as meanings applied to persons or other narrated actors in specific contexts.¹⁶ Both categories (nouns) and attributes (adjectives) are treated as aspects of “identity”. This is concordant with Antaki and Widdicombe’s claim that:

...for a person to ‘have an identity’ – whether he or she is the person speaking, being spoken to, or being spoken about – is to be cast into a category with associated characteristics or features...¹⁷

Methods of inquiry that fail to capture how the meaning of an identity is constructed, and the social tasks accomplished through the construction of the subject of the ‘identity’¹⁸, erroneously reify the concept. For example, in using questionnaires such as the Eurobarometer, people are asked to reply to queries such as, ‘to what extent (on a scale from 1 – 7) do you feel: A) European, and B) Danish?’¹⁹ Participants’ replies are forced into researchers’ categories, the meaning of which is either left obscure or given an interpretation by the researcher.²⁰ The researcher’s interpretations serve to construct a certain social reality. They should not be understood as merely reflecting the reality of the questionnaire respondents. In order to understand others’ understanding of identities, one must examine the discursive contexts in which they construct them, with an eye to what they are accomplishing through their discourse. The same approach is required to understand the wielding of other psychological and social concepts.

2.2 Expressing Attitudes

Attitudes expressed about the EU by EU citizens are sometimes treated as expressions of European identity²¹ and sometimes fundamentally distinguished from attitudes expressed about the EU by external actors.²² In traditional psychology literature, such expressions of opinion have been referred to as ‘attitudes’ and have been analytically distinguished from ‘identity’. Accordingly, attitudes have been defined as ‘an evaluative disposition toward some object’²³, whereby it is asserted that ‘attitudes’ influence behaviour.²⁴ Thus, ‘attitudes’ are assumed to be powerful particulars that can be drawn upon to explain behaviour. In its erroneous ontological assumption, this literature reifies attitudes by treating them as something actors ‘have’ and that can be tapped into, given the appropriate instruments. In the presently advocated approach, expressions of ‘attitudes’ or opinions are treated in the same manner as expressions of identity. In order to understand what people mean when they express an attitude – for example, toward the EU – one must identify what the expression is accomplishing in the given discursive context.

¹⁶ Slocum-Bradley 2008c.

¹⁷ Antaki and Widdicombe’s 1998, 3.

¹⁸ Zehfuss 2001.

¹⁹ See, for example, Egeberg 1999.

²⁰ See also Carey 2002; Cerutti 2001; Risse 2004; Risse et al. 1999; Schild 2001.

²¹ See Cerutti 2001.

²² See Lucarelli and Fioramonti 2009.

²³ Zimbardo and Leippe 1991, 31.

²⁴ Olson and Zanna 1993.

For example, when a person expresses the attitude that ‘the EU lacks legitimacy’²⁵, one must ask what the person is accomplishing with this utterance. The utterance is not a description of a set of facts. Rather, in uttering the statement, the person is constructing an actor, the ‘EU’, as ‘illegitimate’. In this way, ‘legitimacy’, like ‘identity’, is a concept that is used by people – EU citizens and external actors alike – to achieve social tasks.

2.3 Public and Private Conversations

A distinction is commonly made between what people say and what people ‘really think’. Implicit in this distinction is the notion that there is some ‘real’ opinion or attitude, and that this may differ from what is actually said. Following Vygotsky and Wittgenstein, in the discursive approach, private discourse (thoughts) and public discourse (talk) are treated on the same theoretical footing.²⁶ That is, thinking follows the same process as talking. One uses the same discursive tools, and manipulates them in the same ways, privately as one does publicly. In private discourse, these discursive tools are also used to accomplish various tasks. People can and do have private discourses that greatly differ from their public discourse(s). In such instances, what they achieve publicly differs from what they achieve privately; neither discourse can be said to be more ‘real’.

3 Positioning Theory

Positioning Theory²⁷ was developed as a theoretical model for understanding how social acts are accomplished, and how meaning is constructed, discursively. While originally developed to conceptualise interpersonal interactions²⁸, Positioning Theory has also been applied to many other fields such as stereotypes²⁹, inter-group relations³⁰ as well as to other (constructed) actors, such as states and regions.³¹ Recent work has further developed Positioning Theory to capture the role of social identity in meaning-making in a more nuanced fashion³². Emerging from this work is an analytical tool called the Positioning Diamond (see Figure 1), which conceptualizes the role of four mutually influential building-blocks of meaning: social forces of (speech) acts, storylines, identities, and rights and duties. The Positioning Diamond can be employed to systematically study how meaning is constructed. In facilitating a systematic approach, the hallmark of scientific inquiry, employment of this analytical framework distinguishes social science from journalism. In what follows, each of the elements of the Positioning Diamond and their relationships will be considered briefly. An elaborated version of this framework, which specifies three levels of analysis, has been developed³³ but is not employed here due to space limitations.

²⁵ See Cerutti and Lucarelli 2008.

²⁶ Wittgenstein 1953; Vygotsky 1978.

²⁷ Davies and Harré 1990; Harré and Van Langenhove 1999.

²⁸ See also Davies and Harré 1999.

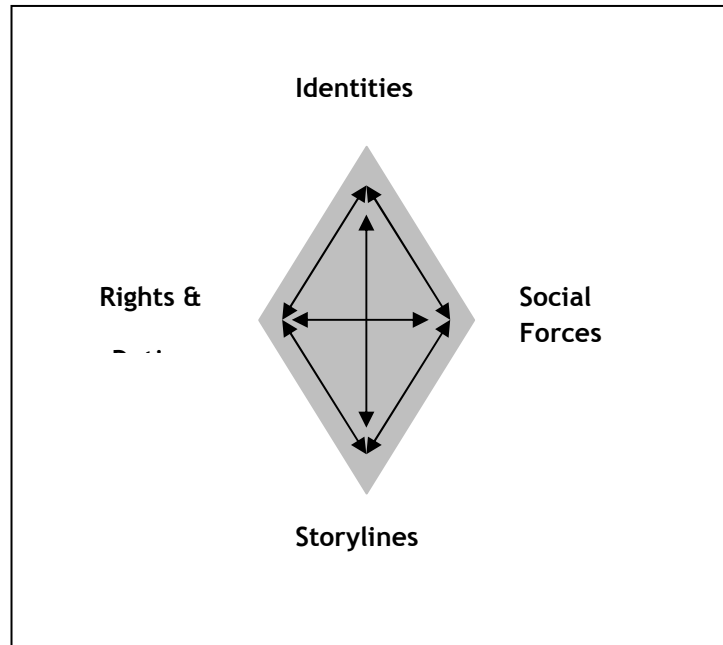
²⁹ Van Langenhove and Harré 1994.

³⁰ Rothbart and Bartlett 2008; Slocum 2001; Slocum-Bradley 2008a; Tan and Moghaddam 1999.

³¹ Harré and Moghaddam 2003; Slocum and Van Langenhove 2004.

³² Slocum-Bradley 2008b and forthcoming.

³³ Slocum-Bradley, forthcoming.



3.1 Facets of the Positioning Demand

Social Forces of (speech) acts

Austin pointed out that words are discursive tools that are used to accomplish various social tasks.³⁴ In order to understand what kind of social tasks words are accomplishing, one must understand the specific social context in which they are being employed. The utterance of words, imbued with meaning, Austin refers to as ‘speech acts’. For example, when a hostess says, ‘Would you please come to the table?’ her speech act accomplishes an invitation to sit down. (Note that despite the fact that the utterance takes the form of a question, it is not designed to inquire.) In a similar manner, non-verbal actions imbued with meaning are also a form of discourse and can accomplish social tasks. The same invitation to sit could also be accomplished with the ringing of a bell or a wave of the hostess’s hand in the direction of the table. These actions, verbal or non-verbal, are attributed a specific meaning – an invitation to sit around the table – in a specific context; this meaning is referred to as the ‘social force’ of the (speech) act. The context specificity of this meaning is reflected in the fact that the same wave of the hand can have a different social force in another context: it may accomplish a greeting. Thus, (speech) acts are discursive tools that actors employ to accomplish tasks; among these tasks is the evocation of storylines, identities, rights and duties.

Storylines

Storylines are the narrative structures used to organize and give meaning to a sequence of past and/or projected future events that are conceived as an episode, such as a ‘visit by a Head of State’ or ‘university instruction’. Certain actions and events can be identified as pertaining to, or even essential to, a given

³⁴ Austin 1961.

episode, while others are deemed irrelevant. For example, ordering and eating food is essential to a ‘dining out’ episode, but specific conversations that may occur within that episode are not intrinsic to it. Rather, the particular exchanges in a discussion over dinner will be conceived as a separate episode; they are not inherent to the ‘dining out’ script. One’s understanding of the relevant episode, or storyline, provides a context that, conversely, can be drawn upon to make sense of various (speech) acts.

Identities

The kinds of ‘identities’ that can be meaningfully evoked in a given episode are restricted by the storyline that is evoked, but not determined by it. Thus, within a ‘university instruction’ storyline, a lecturer’s excellent performance may be attributed by evoking his identity as a ‘male’, as ‘African’ or as a ‘scholar’ from a well-reputed institution. Furthermore, Positioning Theory emphasizes the fleeting nature of episodes and the relational nature of identities. While in one moment an actor may be speaking as a ‘professor’, in the next he may speak as a ‘friend’ to the same interlocutor. Concomitantly, the identity of the interlocutor that is evoked changes from ‘student’ to ‘friend’.

It is useful to distinguish two aspects to evoking identities. First, there is a definition of ‘who’ an actor is. For example, our lecturer can be identified as an individual, ‘Barack’, or an ‘American’. When allocated the right to do so, he may be positioned as acting on behalf of another entity that is positioned as an actor. Thus, a statement uttered by Barack becomes, ‘The United States intends/believes/promises....’ The second aspect of identity entails social, psychological and moral characteristics that are attributed to an actor in a given episode. Sometimes concealed within the wielding of a single metaphor, the two aspects must be teased apart to be made explicit. Which identity is evoked has important implications for the allocation of rights and duties within a context. Furthermore, some of the identity characteristics evoked in a context reflect an (implicit) evaluation regarding the fulfillment of assigned duties. Thus, a ‘professor’ may be further identified as ‘competent’ when she fulfils her duty to convey information and tools to students. In contrast, she may be characterized as ‘selfish’ and ‘disinterested’ if she fails to fulfill her duty to read and adequately reply to students’ work.

Rights and duties

As different identities of actors are evoked, the distribution of duties and rights also changes. As a ‘student’, one has the duty to listen to the ‘professor’, who has the right to be listened to and the duty to provide pedagogically sound instruction. As ‘friends’, both actors share equally rights to speak and duties to listen – notwithstanding other identities that can be evoked to modify this distribution, such as being ‘senior’, or an ‘expert’ on a particular subject. The link between storylines, identities and rights and duties illuminates what Bruner has termed the ‘canonical’ aspect generally implicit in storylines.³⁵ Embedded in storylines is not only the notion of what is happening (descriptive) but also what should happen (normative).

Identities, positions and storylines are evoked through speech acts, and they simultaneously provide the discursive context within which (speech) acts are interpreted. Identities, positions and storylines evoked

³⁵ Bruner 1990.

by one actor can also be rejected or challenged by another actor, who may evoke alternatives. Thus, the construction of social reality is a collaborative process of negotiation.

Challenging Positionings

There are two main ways in which positionings can be challenged. The first is to simply negate, or reject, a positioning by denying its claims. This type of rejection maintains the basic framework and structure of meanings established by the positioning it challenges, but it denies certain specific facets or the purported consequences thereof. A more fundamental challenge occurs when a different framework of meaning is put forward.

4 An Empirical Study of Identity Construction: The Danish Euro Referendum

4.1 Positioning Analyses

This section presents a case study on the debates over whether or not Denmark should join the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), which took place prior to a referendum on the subject in September of 2000. The original study encompassed data from many months prior to the referendum to several months after it and totalled several hundred documents.³⁶ The documentary material included printed press, on-line newspapers and news agencies, publications from international organizations, political websites, and personal interviews. The analysis provided is intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive or representative of all discourse that constituted the conflict.

The part of the analysis presented here is organized around two main storylines that can be abstracted from discourse on the Danish euro referendum. One of the storylines presented was evident in the discourse of those endorsing a ‘no’ vote in the referendum, while the other storyline abstracted provided a context for those promoting a ‘yes’ vote. The analysis reveals how the discourse served to evoke these storylines, construct identities, and attribute rights and duties to actors in the context of endorsing a particular stance on the euro. The analysis also illustrates how various positionings are rejected and elicit counter-positionings.

Storylines	Identities	Rights & Duties	Social Forces
“EU Invasion”	<p><u>EU</u>: Invader, intruder, power-mongrel, predator, aggressive, enemy, threat, undemocratic, immigration, multi-ethnicity, multiculturalism, globalization</p> <p><u>Denmark</u>: vulnerable, prey, victim</p>	<p><u>EU</u>: Duties to respect Danish sovereignty, to be democratic</p> <p><u>Denmark</u>: Right to sovereignty; Duty to protect Danish sovereignty, identity, culture</p>	<p>Promoting a “no” vote</p> <p>Accusations, warnings</p> <p>Against further integration</p>

³⁶ Slocum 2001.

<p>European Integration Promotes Peace</p>	<p>EU: united, dynamic, harmonious, open, democratic, libertarian, respectful of human rights & all cultures, secure, peaceful, prosperous, cooperative</p> <p>Denmark-outside-the-E(M)U: bad Europeans, racist, xenophobic, intolerant, second-rate members, inhibitors of progress, selfish, right-wing</p>	<p>EU: Right & duty to facilitate regional integration</p> <p>Denmark: Duty to facilitate regional integration</p>	<p>Promoting a “yes” vote</p> <p>Endorsements of regional integration</p>
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Table 1 provides an overview of the positioning analysis for the two storylines presented.

4.2 Storyline: the EU invasion

The main storyline evident in expressions by euro-opponents was that the EU was attempting to invade Denmark, thereby violating its sovereignty, obliterating its identity, and destroying its culture. Within the context of this storyline, the EU is identified as an invader, an intruder, and an aggressive and predatory enemy, while Denmark is identified as its victim. The ‘invasion’ metaphor positions Denmark with the right to sovereignty and the EU with the duty to respect that sovereignty. Implicit to the metaphor is the accusation (social force) that the EU has violated this duty. Consequently, Danish citizens are positioned

with the duty to defend their nation against (further) invasion, which is to be accomplished through voting ‘no’ in the referendum. Those Danes who promote a ‘yes’ vote, and thereby ‘aid the enemy’, are accused of violating their duty and thus of committing ‘national treachery’.

In a symbolic manifestation of the ‘EU invasion’ storyline, the Danish People’s Party (DPP) kicked off its anti-EMU campaign on the 60th anniversary of the German invasion of Denmark and accused (social force) their Prime Minister, Poul Rasmussen, of ‘national treachery’ for his pro-euro stance.³⁷ DPP’s members have compared the euro project to Hitler’s failed attempt to foist the Reichsmark on Europe. Mogens Camre, one of the party’s European MPs, said, ‘The technique is about combining power. Hitler wanted to combine power in his hands and the European Commission wants to combine power in its hands’.³⁸ The storyline was vividly evoked by Pia Kjaersgaard, leader of the Danish People’s Party (DPP) when she said:

The essential issue is the preservation of our sovereignty. The euro will erode our national authority and identity at a time when Denmark is already becoming more and more multiethnic and globalized. Do we want to lose control of our lives with more and more decisions made by the European Central Bank in Frankfurt or in Brussels? Do we want this multiculturalism, this multiethnicity, about which the country was never consulted? I say we don’t want either.³⁹

Kjaersgaard constructs the EU as a conglomerate of menaces, which include the euro, ‘immigration’, ‘multiethnicity’/ ‘multiculturalism’, and ‘globalization’. She identifies ‘Denmark’ as constituted only by the ‘Old Danes’; immigrants and their descendents, or so-called ‘New Danes’, are excluded and considered part of the ‘EU’ threat. Linking these threats to the euro, Kjaersgaard suggests that if Denmark joins the EMU, it would be opening its gates to the enemy. The EU (and everything with which it is associated in this storyline, particularly the currency) is thus identified as an aggressive enemy that is poised to consume its vulnerable prey, ‘Denmark’ (read: ‘Old Danes’).

With campaign slogans such as ‘Vote Danish - Vote No’, ‘Keep the Krone - Vote Danish’⁴⁰, and ‘For Krone and Fatherland’⁴¹, the DPP suggests that maintaining a particular currency is essential to preserve Danish identity, culture and values. This is further exemplified in the case made for a ‘no’ vote by DPP board member, Carl Christian Ebbesen:

We don't look at it as an economic project. We are fighting to keep the krone and to keep the values of Danish society. By that we mean keeping control of Danish society in Danish hands. Denmark will have to be like other European countries, and we don't want that. If there is a ‘Yes’ vote, the politicians will create a federal union, but we like to be Danes and do it our way.⁴²

³⁷ Knowles 2000.

³⁸ Osborne, 2000.

³⁹ Cohen 2000.

⁴⁰ Knowles 2000.

⁴¹ Cohen 2000.

⁴² Osborne 2000.

Another example of this positioning comes from Social Democratic Interior Minister Karen Jespersen who, in the middle of the euro campaign said, according to a news service, “that she ‘did not wish to live in’ a multicultural nation ‘where the cultures were considered equal’. She suggested isolating refugees with criminal records on a ‘deserted island’”.⁴³ The speaker thus associates joining the euro zone with refugees, whom she links with crime. She warns (social force) her audience that in joining the EMU, Denmark would be forced to open its doors to more immigrants, other cultures and increased crime.

The “invasion” metaphor is elaborated in accusations (social force) that characterize the EU as undemocratic. Kjaersgaard interpreted the so-called ‘sanctions’ against Austria, which were implemented by the fourteen other EU members when Austria elected Jörg Haider’s Freedom Party to government, as a ‘coup against democracy’. Through the coup metaphor, she identifies the EU as militant and deceitful. Kjaersgaard also accuses the EU of playing ‘Big Brother’, thereby further characterizing it as fascist and oppressive. A Danish newspaper reports:

Accusing the EU of adopting a big brother role of sovereign state, Kjaersgaard claims that the boycott of Austria has revealed the [European] Union’s true colours. ‘And they are not attractive,’ said Kjaersgaard.

Writing in weekly newspaper *Søndagsavisen*, Kjaersgaard interpreted the boycott as a clear message from Brussels that current EU leaders are prepared to abandon democracy without hesitation, if such a move promotes their own political ends.

‘Social Democrats still consider it a cardinal sin for anyone else but a Social Democrat to gain power in Europe. The debate we have entertained here in Denmark during the last decade, as to whether or not the EU will eventually usurp member nations’ sovereignty, has become null and void. With this Austrian boycott, there is nothing left to argue about.’

Kjaersgaard also pointed out that she herself has often been accused of scare mongering because of her repeated warnings that the European Monetary Union - purportedly an economic union - is in fact a thinly disguised political union. ‘Despite endless claims by our Finance Minister, Marianne Jelved, to the contrary. Of course it is a political union. The facts speak for themselves. The fact that fourteen EU nations see no problem whatsoever in suspending democracy in a European country, just because it doesn’t suit them, is both a tragedy and an outrage’.

The identification of the EU as undemocratic and non-transparent is echoed by Dorte Dinesen, local councilor, who said, ‘My concern is that too many decisions in Europe are taken behind closed doors. The bureaucrats aren’t properly accountable’.⁴⁴ Similarly, Ole Andersen, a soldier working for NATO, mentioned the ‘sanctions’ against Austria as evidence of the EU’s disproportionate and threatening power. He also condemns (social force) the EU as the tool of German and French hegemony and warns (social force) of the obliteration of Denmark in the case of a ‘yes’ vote. He said he will be voting ‘no’ because:

⁴³ Schlafly 2001.

⁴⁴ CNN.com 2000.

He thinks Brussels already has too much power. He sees the euro as the next step towards a United States of Europe dominated by the French and Germans, and for him the European Union's interference in Austria's internal affairs was the final straw.

'I don't think they can decide everything in Brussels and that's the way we are going now,' he explained. Vote 'yes', he predicts, and in another 30 years Denmark will hardly exist.⁴⁵

Here, the EU is identified as a power-mongrel intent on usurping Denmark. Using another metaphor, Peter Skaarup, a DPP Member of Parliament, said that there exists 'the growing anxiety that we won't be masters in our own house anymore'.⁴⁶ The EU is thereby identified as undemocratic and unduly powerful in a culture where democracy and the balance of powers are nonnegotiable norms. Within the context of this storyline, to embrace the EU is to forsake Denmark. It is in this way that 'Danish' and 'European' identities are constructed as incompatible.

4.3 Challenging the Positioning

Resisting the identification of Denmark (and other EU member states) as the vulnerable victim of the EU, Lars Kjolbye, international secretary of the Danish Conservative Party,

...insists Denmark will not be giving up sovereignty. 'Do you think the French and Germans would abolish the franc and mark if they thought they were giving away their sovereignty?' he laughs.⁴⁷

Rejecting the assertion that Danish and European identities are incompatible, and that Danish identity would be eroded if Denmark joined the EMU, Denmark's Economics Ministry rushed out a publication demonstrating that a picture of the Danish Queen Margarethe would appear on one side of the euro coins (all euro notes are the same). According to Economics Minister Marianne Jelved, 'The sight of the queen on the coin helps calm fears about loss of identity'.⁴⁸

4.4 Storyline: European integration promotes peace

While the 'EU Invasion' storyline constructs EU and Danish identities as incompatible, in other discursive contexts they are constructed as complementary. The storyline that European integration promotes peace, tolerance, democracy and human rights was evident in the discourse of some proponents of a 'yes' vote. It is also apparent in the Treaty on European Union (the Maastricht Treaty), which established the EMU and was formally inaugurated in November 1993. This concurs with the central notion that provided the rationale for European political integration: that only a supranational organization could eliminate the threat of war between European countries. In accordance with the ideas of Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet, that ever-increasing economic integration is the best approach to

⁴⁵ Fletcher 2000.

⁴⁶ Cohen 2000.

⁴⁷ Osborne 2000.

⁴⁸ Cohen 2000.

political integration (called the functionalist approach). The storyline that provided the meaning for political integration was that only a supranational organization could eliminate the threat of war between European countries and their peoples. Passages from the introduction to the Maastricht Treaty highlight this storyline:

Recalling the historic importance of the ending of the division of the European continent and the need to create firm bases for the construction of the future Europe,

Confirming their attachment to the principles of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law,

Desiring to deepen the solidarity between their peoples while respecting their history, their culture and their traditions,...

Resolved to implement a common foreign and security policy including the eventual framing of a common defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence, thereby reinforcing the European identity and its independence in order to promote peace, security and progress in Europe and in the world,...

Resolved to continue the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity,...

[The members] have decided to establish a European Union...

According to this storyline, European integration promotes an independent European identity that supports liberty, democracy, human rights, peace, security and progress, as well as openness toward and respect between all peoples. In the context of this storyline, advocates of European integration are promoting peace, democracy, and human rights. A common 'European identity' is portrayed as complementary to other (national) identities, in that all Europeans' histories, cultures and traditions are said to be respected. Within the context of this storyline, Europeans are accorded the duty to promote European integration and therefore to vote "yes" in the euro referendum.

This storyline, and the depiction of national and European identities as complementary, are also symbolized on the Euro currency. The European Central Bank website offers the following description of the banknotes:

On the front of the banknotes, windows and gateways symbolise the European spirit of openness and co-operation. The 12 stars of the European Union represent the dynamism and harmony between European nations. To complement these designs, the reverse of each banknote features a bridge. The bridges symbolise the close co-operation and communication between Europe and the rest of the world.

Here, the EU is identified as united, dynamic, harmonious, and open to and cooperative with the rest of the world.

Several people interviewed by CNN before the referendum also positioned the EMU/EU as promoting peaceful relations and tolerance of people from different cultures. For example, Mohammed Qauoom said:

I will vote yes. We are just a small country. We need to be in the euro. We cannot survive outside it on our own. I fear what will happen if Denmark withdraws into itself. It will not be good for people like me. Many people here do not accept me, even though I have been in Denmark for 26 years. I feel that if we pull away from Europe those sorts of sentiments will become stronger.⁴⁹

This man's utterance identifies Denmark and its citizens as intolerant of people from different cultures. He implies that EMU membership would make Denmark more tolerant and accepting, thus constructing an identity for the EU as promoting tolerance. This is echoed by Dorte Dinesen who implies that Denmark, if not part of the EMU, will be more vulnerable to racism and intolerance:

We see a lot of racism and intolerance in Europe, and I think the best way of tackling that is to have greater integration.⁵⁰

Within the context of this storyline, those who fulfill their assigned duty by voting to join the EMU are identified as 'good Europeans', while those who resist integration are identified as 'second rate'. These identity constructions are evident in the discourse of Ralf Pittelkow, former adviser to Rasmussen, who, as reported by the St. Petersburg Times, said

A Danish 'no' would have a short-term impact on the euro, but the broader repercussions would be longer lasting. 'In the longer term, this would be another step in the direction of a two-speed Europe. I think the euro zone will be the power engine in the future and those left outside will be, let's say, second-rate members,' he told Reuters Television.⁵¹

Within the context of this storyline, increased integration in Europe is characterized as 'progress' and those who are hesitant are identified as inhibitors of that progress. This is evident in a passage from an Irish Times article:

Memories have been revived of Denmark's Maastricht referendum in June 1992 when the Danes refused to ratify the treaty laying the foundations of the single currency. The decision brought political progress in the European Union to a standstill for a year, while the Danish government negotiated a special deal, including an opt-out from the euro.⁵²

The concept of 'progress' is inextricably bound with a normative evaluation of what the future should hold. Thus, in equating regional integration with 'progress', all actors are positioned with the duty to facilitate regional integration. Consequently, those who fulfill their assigned duty by voting to join the EMU are identified as 'good Europeans', while those who resist integration are identified as 'second

⁴⁹ CNN.com 2000.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Geoghegan 2000.

⁵² Peel 2000.

rate'.⁵³ Other discourse suggests that Denmark only agreed to some integration with the rest of Europe for dubious and egoistic – rather than idealistic – reasons, thus identifying Denmark as selfish:

It is referendum time in Denmark and (once again) the Danes have an opportunity to upset the EU apple cart - this time by rejecting the euro. ... In Denmark this is nothing new. Danes have always been among the most ambivalent of Europeans. The country entered the EEC in 1973 with Ireland and Britain but did so only to safeguard its lucrative bacon exports to the UK. ... In 1992 Danish voters rocked the European Union to its core by rejecting the Maastricht Treaty on stronger European integration by a slim margin. This decision threatened the whole future of European co-operation as the treaty was legally inoperative without the Danish government's signature. Denmark's snub to Europe triggered a dramatic sequence of events.⁵⁴

Even before the euro referendum had taken place, this author identified the Danes as a repeated nuisance to EU project. Portrayed as only looking out for its own interests, Denmark is painted as a spoiled nuisance that repeatedly inhibits 'progress', thereby ruining the integration project for the rest of 'Europe'. Denmark is thus accused of violating its attributed duty to properly integrate into Europe.

4.5 Challenging the positioning

In the context of the 'European integration promotes peace' storyline, Danes are identified as 'bad Europeans,' who would be even worse if they reject the euro. This identification was contradicted by some Danes who identified themselves as 'good Europeans' despite their reluctance to join the EMU. Holger Nielsen, leader of the anti-euro Danish Socialist People's Party, attempted to distance himself and his party from the DPP and rejected the identification of 'no' voters as xenophobic, right-wing, bad Europeans, as reported by Osborne:

The euro is not a question of being conservative but of democracy. It's important for us to stress that it's not a right-wing or xenophobic position. It's not fair to say that resistance is built on right-wing values,' he said in an interview with The Observer. Denmark could be in the EU and outside the euro, he adds, and still be 'a good European'.⁵⁵

Similarly, Trine Pertou Mach, a board member of the June Movement, expressed opposition to joining the EMU. She said, 'We're very European-minded, but people see this vote as an opportunity to say we don't want any more integration. We stop here'.⁵⁶ In this discourse, the positioning of Danes as having the duty to promote integration by voting 'yes' to join the EMU is rejected, which challenges the claim that further regional integration is 'progress'. Danes are identified as being 'good Europeans' while still having the right to vote 'no' in the referendum, which legitimises Denmark as a non-member of the EMU.

⁵³ Geoghegan 2000.

⁵⁴ McCarthy 2000.

⁵⁵ Osborne 2000.

⁵⁶ Vinocur 2000.

5 Discussion

The above analysis of discourse surrounding the Danish euro referendum in 2000 employed the positioning diamond to illustrate how identities are constructed for, and rights and duties assigned to, actors in discourse. In illuminating the construction process, this work supports the claim that it is a myth to believe that people's ethnic or regional identities need not compete with their attachment to a state.⁵⁷ However, rather than saying that individuals can and do 'have' multiple identities,⁵⁸ it more accurately could be said that individuals can draw upon multiple identity concepts and conceive them within a storyline that portrays them as compatible. They can also be conceived and portrayed as incompatible. Regions, such as Europe, do not 'produce' identities. But new geo-political constructions can be drawn upon as tools in the creation of new discursive spaces, which people use to construct identities for (and allocate rights and duties to) themselves and others. Thus, when people in a given context choose to identify themselves as 'European', they are actually creating 'Europe'.

An understanding of this process is essential to becoming a co-artist of social reality, rather than being a victim of it. Awareness of how social realities are achieved through discourse enables one to design more purposefully. This raises a normative question: according to which criteria should discourse be evaluated and, consequently, designed?

One person claims that 'there is a strong European identity' and another that, 'there is no European identity'. It is impossible to prove either statement true or false. Since there is no 'real' identity or storyline to which a given discourse can be compared, truth value is not an appropriate criterion. However, each statement does accomplish something: In being uttered, the former statement contributes to the construction of a European identity, while the latter contributes to establishing the absence of one. Whether or not it is better to construct a European identity can be debated. The answer of a prudent judge will depend upon what kind of European identity is constructed and to what ends; in other words, it will take into account the kinds of social tasks accomplished by the discursive practices through which the identity is constructed.

One might object that not all storylines can be equally valid, because this would insinuate that the accounts of Holocaust-deniers stand on equal footing with those of Holocaust survivors. Here, we must be careful not to compare the incomparable. We must distinguish clearly between the physical realm of actions and the symbolic realm of meaning-imbued acts. If an account denies that mass deaths occurred in the 1940's, it is easy to prove false by pointing to physical evidence to the contrary. In the physical realm, the criterion of truth value can be appropriately applied. However, controversies over the meaning of these mass deaths pertain to the symbolic realm. One account may claim that they are the result of a Nazi attempt at genocide, while another account portrays them as a consequence of an act of self-defence. (If this sounds preposterous, it should be noted that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were premised on such an account of self-defense by the second Bush administration.) In the symbolic realm, 'correctness' can only be judged by referring to conventions of use. Akin to rules of grammar, the relationship is normative, so the criteria are 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate', not 'true' or 'false'. For example, if we agree that the

⁵⁷ UNDP 2004.

⁵⁸ See also Sen 2006.

concept ‘self-defence’ is appropriately used when there is evidence of an immediate threat then we can debate appropriate use of the terms ‘immediate’ and ‘threat’.⁵⁹ The nature of the ensuing discussion will be an exchange of perspectives on the (normative) rules of a language game. It can be likened to discussing appropriate attire to fit the dress code of a particular dinner invitation.

Another criterion according to which discourse can be evaluated is its social consequences. Such an assessment of discourse is ethical (also not factual) in nature and can be based upon diverse philosophical or practical stances. One such criterion is whether discourse promotes destructive social conflict or peace and justice.⁶⁰ Some research has examined this and has produced an analytical framework for conceptualizing the role of identity constructions in conflict.⁶¹ Understanding of most social conflicts would benefit from such an analysis, including debates over border policy and migration,⁶² nationalisms and minority group representation, affirmative action programs, regional integration and dis-integration processes,⁶³ terrorist recruitment, and the morality of war.⁶⁴ A fundamental understanding of how identities are constructed and their role in conflict is paramount to preventing conflict.

An ethical responsibility for social scientists follows from the above insights. An ultimate aim of social scientists should be to illuminate the process and concomitant consequences of meaning construction. Beck has criticised much of contemporary social science for its un-reflected acceptance of social categories and concepts, whereby it entrenches social realities, rather than offering society a mechanism for its own ‘liberation’.⁶⁵ The present paper has attempted to provide such a mechanism in the form of a conceptual framework for illuminating the processes and consequences of social reality construction in the EU and beyond.

5.1 Policy Discussion and Recommendations

The kind of policy recommendations that one would suggest depends upon the aims one wishes to achieve, and these are many and varied. I will presently discuss some ideas regarding two goals. One side of the euro debate suggested that these two goals were incompatible with their objectives, whilst the other side claimed they were in concord.

Increased Integration

With regard to promoting increased integration among current and potential EU members, the main insight that can be gained from the present study concerns the contribution of various “identity” constructions. In the context of this study, identity constructions were studied qualities that were attributed to Denmark and the EMU/EU for various purposes and in the contexts of various storylines. It was found that those against further integration (e.g. promoting a “no” vote) constructed “identities” that were mutually incompatible. In positioning terms, we said that Denmark and the EMU/EU were positioned in opposition to each other. In contrast, the “identity” constructions employed by people

⁵⁹ See Harré 2006 on the use of the concept ‘threat’.

⁶⁰ Slocum-Bradley 2008a & 2008c.

⁶¹ Slocum-Bradley 2008d.

⁶² Slocum-Bradley 2008b.

⁶³ Slocum and Van Langenhove 2004.

⁶⁴ Rothbart and Korostelina, 2006 and forthcoming.

⁶⁵ Beck 1998.

promoting integration (e.g. “yes” voters) were not portrayed as incompatible; that is, they were not positioned in opposition to each other. Therefore, it seems advisable to anyone whose goal it is to promote European—as well as other types of—integration, to construct the relevant identities in such a way that they are not perceived as oppositional but rather as complementary.

In the discourse surrounding the referendum, some identity constructions were available that did not position Denmark and the EMU/EU in opposition to each other. Therefore, the question can be posed as to why these were not taken up by more Danes – that is, why the majority of voters opted out of EMU membership. First, it is important to emphasize that identity constructions do not *cause* people to vote in a certain way. Rather, people are autonomous beings who actively create identity and other constructions for various purposes. People cannot be forced to accept or reject any construction. That having been said, it is also possible that some people see the goal of integration as admirable or even idealistic, but perceive their identities to be incompatible with that goal. In such cases, people might presume fixed identities and conclude that that these identities preclude integration. In this kind of situation, we can ask what we could do to define ourselves and others in such a way that unity, rather than division, is facilitated.

In the discourse surrounding the Danish referendum, it was particularly noticeable that while some people portrayed European identity as *not* in opposition to Danish identity, there was little or no evidence of discourse that constructed Danish identity as pointedly European. That is, the studies underlying this paper found no evidence of discourse that characterized European identity as being at the essence of Danish identity. It can then be speculated that such discourse might be found in a different context – for example, in discourse with an American, rather than a Danish audience. Preliminary analyses evidenced this to be the case. When addressing an American audience, various European nationals often identified themselves as European, rather than only “Danish,” “German,” or “Italian”. This kind of positioning does not need to be limited to such non-European contexts. In order to promote integration within Europe, national identities can be constructed as essentially European. In positioning terms: “Danish” and “European” might be positioned as overlapping, in the form of concentric circles – in which a storyline could be created for positioning either as the inner (or outer) concentric.

According to the analysis of the referendum discourse, the most prevalent pro-euro storyline depicted a “yes” vote as a “rational economic” decision and portrayed the EMU as offering help to protect Denmark from economic ruin. This storyline and its concomitant identity constructions may have offered the Danes a more positive identity if they had been in an economic slump, but this was not at all the case. While proponents argued that Denmark would not remain prosperous if it attempted to “stay the same” when the rest of Europe evolved, many people probably did not have the foresight to see how Denmark would be affected, in any case, by the change around it. The currently dominant models and perceptions of the social world are static. Thus, many people find it difficult to see how Denmark necessarily changes when the rest of the world changes - even if they vote “no” in order to “stay the same.”As a consequence, the pro-euro financial arguments may have seemed irrelevant to citizens of a Denmark already prospering without the EMU. In this case, positioning the EMU as a potential economic aide can be likened to offering a lifeguard’s services to someone who is not only *not* drowning, but is sunbathing on the shore.

The “peace” storyline, which presents a Danish-compatible “European” identity, seemed to be sparsely represented in the discourse, since the pro-campaign focused on the “economic savior” storyline. This focus even appeared to do considerable harm to the pro-euro campaign, since many people expressed disbelief in it. In this context, euro advocates portrayed the economic arguments as “pure facts,” and steered away from storylines that focused on “political” meanings. It is possible that the pro-euro campaign’s reluctance to address the “political” issues of the EMU referendum left a kind of vacuum of meaning on the “yes” side. In other words, there were few discursive resources promulgated that provided compatible Danish and European identity constructions. This vacuum was then easily filled by the anti-euro campaign with its incompatible, oppositional identity constructions. For many, the meaning of European identity was defined by the anti-euro storylines and their associated identities, rights and duties.

The idea of a resulting *vacuum of meaning* is supported by the fact that members of Dansk Industri requested “more information on the political importance of the single currency, and not just its economic advantages,” according to Mr. Norskov, who added, “It is about Denmark and Europe.”⁶⁶ Another clue that suggests a vacuum of meaning is the comment of Danish hotel administrator, voter Claus Erikson, 42, that, “I think most people will just vote on instinct, or do what their friends and families do. The issues are too big for normal people to understand.”⁶⁷ If technical issues are too complicated, “voting on instinct” suggests that one will vote in accordance with the storyline that is most accessible in social discourse and that makes most sense⁶⁸ to oneself. A *Policy Review* paper on Denmark’s referendum corroborates these speculations. The author writes:

But there was a grave problem with the euro referendum -- namely, that one would have to look hard for a more unsuitable question to put to a popular vote. It turned on the arcana of monetary policy and the murky world of central bankers. Currency questions are among the more rarefied aspects of economics, and these are not easily accessible to the man on the street.... So it was that rather than vote on something they did not understand, Danes turned the referendum into something everybody could have an opinion on. The euro question became a proxy debate about foreigners and the future of the Danish welfare state.⁶⁹

The comments of Hugo Paemen, former EU ambassador to the U.S. and former spokesperson for Romano Prodi, also seem to convey a focus on technical issues. In a private interview with me in Washington, D.C., Mr. Paemen recalled that, as Prodi’s spokesperson, it had been very difficult to explain the EU’s day-to-day technical matters to the press. According to him, there was no coordinated effort to convey the larger picture and ultimate goals of European union.⁷⁰ Since it was exactly this kind of storyline that

⁶⁶ Peel 2000.

⁶⁷ CNN 2000.

⁶⁸ Future research could inquire into the determining factors and processes through which people select one storyline or positioning over others.

⁶⁹ Bering 2000.

⁷⁰ This was also partly due to the fact that different member states had different opinions about what the EU should ultimately look like. To circumvent answering this question, it was simply agreed that there would be an ever-closer union.

provided the context for European identity constructions that were compatible with national ones, it seems that the forest got lost in the trees.⁷¹

For the goal of promoting European integration, one could engender discursive resources that narrate European identity as essential to and an enhancement of national identities. In the words of British foreign secretary Robin Cook in a speech to the centre for European reform, “We need to develop a positive storyline about Europe.”⁷² In accordance with discursive psychology, such a storyline and its entailed positions would not be just a change in words. Rather, it would provide discursive resources that would enable people to *experience* their identities in a new way.

Increased Democracy

In the context of the “promoting peace and tolerance” storyline, EU members are attributed the duty to promote an “ever-closer” union, and thus to vote “yes” to join the EMU. In this storyline, an ever-closer union is seen as the means to facilitating peace, liberty, and tolerance between European states and peoples. Ironically, the prescription of the duty to vote yes was found to be one of the main sources of conflict and division between “yes” and “no” advocates in Denmark’s euro referendum. A positioning more in concordance with democratic values would assign members the duty to vote according to their best judgment of what measure would most facilitate peace, liberty, and tolerance. This duty is more democratically oriented, because it validates diverse opinions and encourages people to voice their ideas about what means are most likely to facilitate the common end. Rather than necessarily positioning “yes” and “no” voters in opposition to each other, this positioning enables a storyline that all voters are working together in constructive democratic debate to decide upon the wisest policy. Therefore, in addition to promoting democracy, such a positioning may also contribute to the resolution of conflict.

⁷¹ A further challenge to the image of Europe lies in the current structure of democratic representation, which is mostly national. Many politicians of national governments, accountable to their national constituents, take credit for European accomplishments but place the onus for problems on the EU bureaucracy.

⁷² Cook 2000.

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