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**Non-decision on the
“Seat Issue” of the
European Parliament**

***The Politics of Agenda
Setting in the European
Union***

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Preface

Studying Public Administration at University of Twente was a major personal achievement. I am grateful to the Dutch Government for providing me a scholarship so I could be able to embark on this Master project. This thesis represents its fulfillment.

Without the help of certain people this study would not have attained the quality it has, so I hereby grasp the opportunity to thank some of them.

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Victor Papp
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(Source: www.oneaseat.com)

Abstract

This study deals with a politicized problem observed in the decision-making process of the European Union: the "seat issue" of the European Parliament. The objective is to find a comprehensive and coherent explanation for the non-decision on the "seat issue", or why is it not on the decisional agenda of the EU.

The theoretical framework built up to guide the research integrates theories of agenda setting, agenda denial strategies and policy change that were considered relevant and appropriate to explain the situation. John Kingdon's "Multiple Streams Framework" represents the core of this framework. The perspective is actor-centered in the context of a "messy" political system. The focus is on actors as "stakeholders" in the governance of the EU, and their strategies to set the agenda, or to deny access for some issues.

The empirical findings established that the non-decision on the "seat issue" is determined by the missing of the coupling of the problem, policy and political streams. These findings confirm that "who pays attention to what and when" is crucial. The position and the power of the political "entrepreneurs" constitute the first important condition that has been met in order for the issue to get to the decisional agenda. The nature of the issue itself or how it is defined is the second element which has significant impact on the trajectory of it. The time dimension has the same importance as the first two factors. In addition, the "venue" of action can facilitate or actually block the access of the issue or problem to the decisional agenda.

Answering the question "why the seat issue is neglected from the decisional agenda" might be critical for more insights about the politics of the EU. It aids our understanding of decision-making in the EU throwing more light on the structural biases inherent in this process. It gives a structured view about the state of the "seat issue" and it clarifies some controversial aspects. The main academic contribution of this study would be the extension of some theoretical approaches to the EU level where they were little used before, trying to find a coherent answer for the specific problem under analysis.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

EFA: European Free Alliance

CJEC: Court of Justice of the European Communities

CPR: Campaign for Parliamentary Reform

ECSC: European Coal and Steel Community

EEC: European Economic Community

EP: European Parliament

EPP-ED: European People Party – European Democrats

ESP: European Socialist Party

EU: European Union

EURATOM: European Atomic Energy Community

FDP: German Liberal Party

FRG: Federal Republic of Germany

IGC: Intergovernmental Conference

OJEC: Official Journal of the European Community

MEP: Member of the European Parliament

MS: Member State(s)

UK: United Kingdom

US: United States

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1. Introduction

1.1. What to study - the practical situation

A parliament which has its working places in three different cities, in three different countries; holding its committee and political groups meetings in one place for two or three weeks per month, then thousands of people, including members of the assembly and staff moving for three and a half days in a different city and country for the main plenary session. Meanwhile, the administration of the institution is based in a third city, in a third country. In brief, this is the story of how a parliamentary assembly of a *sui generis* political construction is running its business; a complex situation for complex institution: the Parliament of the European Union (EU). The institution has a few characteristics that make it a non-typical parliamentary assembly. One of them is having, not only one, but, according to the EU Treaty, actually three seats. It is now spread over twenty buildings in Strasbourg (France), Brussels (Belgium) and Luxembourg.

The story of the seat(s) of the European Parliament (EP) is not only about the complexity embedded in the EU Treaty regarding the places where it should meet and work. It is also about political actors and a continuous political conflict between them. On one side, some actors, most of them Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are trying to challenge the existing situation, obviously unsatisfied with the way how the institutions is organized; on the other side, there are other influential actors who are opposing any change of the existing *status quo*. The open conflict between these two groups of political actors is obvious. What is not clear is the lack of decision on the issue, or why there is no decision on the “seat(s)” of the European Parliament?

The so-called “seat issue” represents a very sensitive and politicized institutional “affair” of the EP. It is now present for a long period of time on the general political agenda of the EU, and in different forms it is constantly coming back in the political debate. Since the very beginning of the European construction, from 1952 onwards, the Member States (MS) of the EU were not able to comply with the obligation incumbent upon them under the EU Treaties to establish a single seat for all EU institutions, including the Parliament. Until the early 1990s all decisions were just provisional. Only at the Edinburgh European Council (1992) a compromise was reached which imposed the actual *status quo* also for the EP: one official seat in Strasbourg and two more places of work in Luxembourg and Brussels. Later on, this arrangement was included in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), thus it has now a legal foundation.

Since then, this *status quo* was challenged by series of initiatives from inside and outside the EP. Several actors wanted and still want to push the "seat issue" back on the decisional agenda of the EU, in order to reduce the number of the seats. They are constantly facing the strong opposition of counter-forces, those who are favoring the maintaining of the existing three seats system. The situation appears similar to what **Roger W. Cobb** and **Marc Howard Ross** (1997) call "agenda conflicts". These are about what issues government, or in this specific case the EU, will act on, but they are also about alternative interpretations of political problems and the acceptance and rejection of competing worldviews. In this kind of situations, two main groups of actors can be identified: the initiators of a specific proposal or what in this paper are called the "supporters" and their "opponents". The political process involves a continuing conflict between these two groups of actors.

"The former represent the possibilities for change in the political system. They express grievances by naming problems, blaming the forces that cause them, and claiming a need for public action to galvanize political support...However, there is another group that represents opposition to political change and has commitment to the status quo. They are the opponents, who have a vested interest in keeping the political agenda limited to those issues that are currently being discussed and not including any new items. As long as the agenda is not altered in any significant way, their material and symbolic positions will not be affected"(Cobb & Ross, 1997, p. 41).

In the political arena, the same situation might be interpreted in many different ways by these actors, mostly conflicting, according to the perspective they want to use. This is what **Deborah Stone** (2002) calls a "policy paradox". The "seat issue" of the EP looks appealing from this perspective as well, and it might be considered a "paradox". The ongoing debate evolves and flourishes around those actors who support a change and militate for just one seat for the EP, while their opponents are supporting the maintaining of the existent *status quo* of three seats. Both sides use different strategies in order to set the agenda of the EU and to assure that their point of view will be the one taken into account when the time for a decision has to come. Contradictory interpretations and strategic problem definitions are both present in the "arsenal" of these politicians.

The objective of this paper is to find a comprehensive and coherent explanation for this problematic situation observed in the European Union decision-making process.

1.2. State of the Art in Research

Sebastian Princen (2006, 2007), describing the state of art on agenda setting in the EU, highlighted the scarcity of works in this field of research. **Falk Daviter** (2007) provides an up to date review of the EU literature on the topic of political issue definitions used in the policy-making process of the EU. The article of **Frank Baumgartner** and **Christine Mahoney** (2008) should also be mentioned in the same context; it discusses the two face of framing – the individual and the collective issue definitions – as they relate to recent literature on policy-making in the EU suggesting some avenues for future research.

The subject of the allocation of the seats of the EU institutions is almost totally neglected by the academic literature on agenda-setting in the EU. Little attention is paid also to the more specific topic of the seats of the European Parliament. To some extent, but only tangential, **Sasha Baillie** (1996) is referring to it in the analysis on the influence of Luxembourg in the decision making process of the EU. Baillie’s purpose was to explain how Luxembourg, at that time, the smallest EU country has been able to steer decisions regarding the seats of the EU institutions, including those of the EP; his purpose was to find those factors that provided this country with the opportunity to guarantee the location of these institutions in the Grand Duchy¹.

Other contributions on the “seat issue” are purely descriptive, making historical reviews of the situation, but without trying to answer more explanatory questions. These contributions are the introductions and guides about the EU, such as **Timothy Bainbridge** and **Anthony Teasdale** (1996), or monographs of the European Parliament like those authored by **David Judge** and **David Earnshaw** (2003), and **Richard Corbett**, **Francis Jacobs** and **Michael Shackleton** (2007).

1.3. How to study – Theoretical framework

Facing this scarcity of the existing EU literature on the specific topic, the author of this study was determined to develop his own theoretical framework. To build up this framework, theories of agenda setting, agenda denial strategies and policy change were considered relevant and appropriate to explain why the “seat issue” of the European Parliament is not on the decisional agenda of the EU.

¹ Baillie combined two different approaches: institutionalism and actor-specific rational theory. In their purest forms these approaches were often presented as being mutually exclusive in many of their claims, but used in a combination, Baillie argues that “they can offer a complete picture of the complex phenomena to be explained”, otherwise, taken individually they would only explain a slice of reality (Baillie, 1996, p. 8).

The perspective used in this paper is an actor-centered one in the context of a "messy" political system (Richardson 2006). The focus is on actors as "stakeholders" in the governance of the EU, and their strategies to set the agenda, or to deny access for some issues.

Three major theoretical lenses are used in an integrated manner; a combination of these theoretical perspectives is most likely to provide an adequate guidance for the study of the "seat issue".

The "Multiple Streams" approach of **John Kingdon** (1984) represents the core of this framework; it is completed by the "agenda conflicts" and the "cultural agenda denial strategies framework" of **Roger W. Cobb** and **Marc Howard Ross** (1997), and the "behavioral model of policy choice" of **Bryan Jones** and **Frank Baumgartner** (2005); other relevant and related concepts such as "policy image" and "venue shopping" are also integrated in it.

Initially developed in the context of the U.S. politics, Kingdon's framework was little used by now analyzing decision making and policy change in European countries (Compston and Madsen, 2001) or at the EU level (Pollack, 2003; Corbett, 2005; Richardson 2006; Zahariadis, 2008)². As regarding the other two perspectives included in the theoretical framework, the author did not find any research which would use or adapt them to an EU related topic.

1.3.1. Research questions

At the end, the aim is to explain **why the issue of the EP' seats is not on the decisional agenda of the EU?** To answer this general question, more specific sub-questions were developed focusing on the strategies used by the political actors. What strategies were employed by the "supporters" to push the issue on to the decisional agenda? Which agenda denial strategies were preferred by the "opponents" to block the access of the problem to the decisional agenda? How successful were all these strategies? How political rhetoric was used by the actors involved in the agenda conflict? What other factors contributed to the non-decisional situation on the "seat issue"?

² An interesting contribution was found among the Master Theses of the European Studies Program from University of Twente. I.L. Elias Carrillo (2007) applied the theory to the antiterrorist agenda of twelve Council Presidencies of the EU from the second half of 2001 until the first half of 2007 (see <http://essay.utwente.nl/58034/>).

1.4. Methods

The research method used in this paper is determined by the subject under analysis. The paper is focused on one practical problem, concerning a very specific, “bounded” issue, thus this peculiarity impact on the research strategy. The aim is to provide a valid explanation for the current non-decision situation on the “seat issue” based on a theoretical framework which was developed combining several individual theories assembled into a new integrated framework. From this perspective, this research looks alike a “*single-outcome study*” (Gerring, 2006) in which *working hypotheses* or *assumptions* are *explored*.

Taking into account the objective, the research is not very concerned about generalization. It is beyond the scope of this study to improve the level of generalization of the theories included in the framework. It will do it only implicitly. The study rather seeks to use the theoretical framework to better understand the context of the unique empirical material.

This study is using mainly primary data. For collecting this data or for “accessing local knowledge” (Yanow, 2000) the researcher used three methods. The first sources of information were the official documents of the EP and other EU institutions. The second source was constituted by the press articles from the main EU journals: European Voice, EU Observer, The Parliament.com and Euractiv.com. The third source of information which completed the previous two was the interviews conducted with the political actors from the European Parliament identified for the purpose of the research. Data collection was facilitated by an internship at the Parliament in Brussels, starting from April till July 2008.

1.5. Why to study the “seat issue”

Focusing on the seats of the EP may not seem as spectacular as other “high” political issues regarding the assembly or the EU, in general. But still, the contribution of the paper is more than a thorough description of a situation about which little was known before; not only the *in-depth analysis of the “seat issue”* is valuable. It also helps to gain some insights about how decisions are made or, actually avoided at the EU level. Asking the question of how the issue of the EP’s seats emerges on the EU agenda, or actually it is blocked to gain access there, might be critical for *understanding the EU politics*, since decisions on which issues are up for discussion are as much political as the process of deciding on those issues once they have come on to the agenda.

Issues do not have an equal chance to make it on to the decisional agenda. The consideration of some are favored, while other issues are discouraged to get to it. In this regard, studying political agendas and processes, this contribution wants to throw more light on the ***structural biases inherent in the EU decision making*** (Princen, 2007).

1.6. Outline of the paper

After the **Introduction** chapter, the **Theoretical framework** that is used to guide the analysis of empirical data is developed. A brief overview opens this chapter in order to introduce the theories and concepts used to generate background information for the analysis. Then the three core approaches are developed together with other relevant concepts from the academic literature.

The third chapter contains the **Methodology** part of the research. It refers to the plan for collecting, organizing and integrating collected data so that, at end, result can be reached. This section discusses the research methods, and data "accessing" techniques.

Chapter 4 is dealing with the **analysis of the empirical results** of the research. It includes the data analysis according to the initial assumptions. The chapter starts with a historical background of the European Parliament's seat, following the evolution of the debate about this issue at the EU level. Then the focus of the chapter is on explaining the existing non-decision situation on the seats of the EP using the working assumptions derived from the theoretical framework.

A special section is dedicated to explore the dominant problem delimitations, including the main "pros" and "cons", and the rhetoric how they are presented by different parties. The types of language used to frame the problem are analyzed using **Deborah Stone's** conceptualization (2002).

In the **Conclusions** part, the results of the research are summarized and interpreted, while under the title "**Discussion**" these results are put in perspective referring to issues such as the relevance and the objectives of the research. The validity and the limitations of the approach, but also some recommendations for future research are considered in this last part of the study.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Plurality of perspectives

Since the aim of this paper is to understand and explain complex processes and behaviors, it makes sense to resort to a more complex theoretical framework which can provide a more complete and coherent guidance for analyzing the practical problem.

Constructing this theoretical framework, the author was totally supporting **Jeremy Richardson's** idea (2006) that taking into account the complexity of the EU, more sophisticated approaches which combine a number of models are likely to be more useful. Incorporating a plurality of theoretical perspectives a better understanding of key aspects of the decision making process regarding the "seat issue" can be achieved and the researcher can bridge the limitations inherent for any single theory taken by its own.

2.1.1. An integrated approach - Overview

The core of the theoretical framework is represented by **John Kingdon's** theory on agenda-setting (1984), further developed by **Nikolaos Zahariadis** (1999, 2007) and called the "**Multiple Streams Framework**". This approach is based on the "Garbage Can" model of "organized anarchies", elaborated by Michael D. Cohen, James G. March and Johan P. Olsen (1972). **John Kingdon** explains agenda setting and alternative specification identifying three main streams from the coupling of which, in critical moments of time, called "policy windows" the issue gains access to the decisional agenda. The three streams are: the problem, the policy and the political stream. Each of them is conceptualized as largely separate from the others, with its own dynamics and rules. At critical points in time, the streams are coupled by "policy entrepreneurs". Thus, the combination of all three streams into a single package enhances dramatically the chances that an issue will receive serious attention by decision makers (Zahariadis, 1999, p. 76).

In order to avoid a one sided approach, the theoretical framework includes also the perspective of **Roger W. Cobb** and **Marc Howard Ross** (1997). This offers a completion of Kingdon's theory, emphasizing the political actions and strategies that can explain the non-consideration of certain issues and thus non-decisions on those issues from the perspective of the opponents of an issue. Any opponent seeks to achieve its desired result at the lowest possible cost but will progressively turn to higher-cost strategies. Based on this assumption, **Cobb & Ross** realize an inventory of tactics that opponents can use to keep new issues off the decisional agenda. They identify four

categories of "agenda denial strategies" that opponents are likely to use: low cost, medium-cost: attack, medium-cost: symbolic placation and high cost strategies.

The previous two approaches are integrated then by the "behavioral model of policy choice" developed by **Bryan Jones** and **Frank Baumgartner** (2005). Their model describes how individuals and organizations prioritize and evaluate multi-dimensional issues. According to the theory, decisions are determined mostly by the "winnowing down of which problems to focus on, which attributes of those problems to weight most heavily as being relevant, and which alternatives to choose from in addressing those attributes (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005, p. 36)". Two other concepts are also integrated in the framework: "policy image" and "venue shopping" (Baumgartner & Jones 1991).

These main theoretical approaches on which the theoretical framework is grounded are developed in the following sub-chapters, being further completed with other relevant and closely related concepts such as: "policy paradox" (Deborah Stone); "problem delimitation" (Arnost Vesely) and problem "structuredness" (Robert Hoppe & Matthijs Hisschemoller); "audience cost" (James Fearon); and "heresthetics" (William Riker).

2.2. Politics and agenda conflict

One of the major battles in politics is who will control the political agenda. **John Kingdon** (1984) conceptualize "agenda" as "the list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials, and people outside government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time" (p. 3). Out of all conceivable subjects or problems to which officials could be paying attention, they do in fact seriously attend to some rather to other, so the purpose of **agenda setting** may be summarized as the process which "narrows this set of conceivable subjects to the set that actually becomes the focus of attention" (p. 4).

Kingdon also makes relevant distinctions. First, he distinguishes between *governmental* agenda, as the more general list of subjects to which governmental officials and those around them are paying serious attention, and the *decision* agenda, viewed as the list of subjects within the governmental agenda that are up for an active decision. In a similar way, there is a distinction made between agenda and *alternatives*.

For **Roger W. Cobb** and **Marc Howard Ross** (1997) agenda setting is the "politics of selecting issues for active consideration" (p. 3). They identify three main models of agenda setting or agenda building. The first one is called the "*outside initiative*" model, which draws attention to nongovernmental sources of policy innovation, focusing on the

efforts of a single person or group to transform its concerns into those of a larger movement. An additional route for issue initiation is called "*mobilization*" which means that "public officials launch a campaign to gain public attention and support for an issue as a way to gain entry to the formal agenda and then to mobilize support once the issue is actively being considered". The third model, "*inside access*", describes how an issue originates with a narrow group of actors and is placed on a formal agenda with little attention from the public" (p. 8-9).

Cobb & Ross ask a basic question: what activates those who have grievances? Their concept of "**agenda conflicts**" tries to answer this question at two levels.

"One is about whether government takes a particular grievance issue seriously. Analysis at this level often emphasizes how both proponents and opponents of policy innovation are motivated by rational self-interest, meaning that actors pursue objectives interests to obtain concrete gains to maintain or to improve their position in society"(p. 12). Without disputing the role that self-interest plays, Cobb and Ross propose to move to another level and to view "agenda conflicts as about competing interpretations of political problems connected to competing worldview. These interpretations address how people ought to lead their lives, how society ought to act, what should or should not be done by government, how we should treat the environment, and who threatens our security" (p. 13).

Attention should be paid also to how supporters and opponents associate specific issues with these more general worldviews. At this level, "cultural and symbolic factors come into play, drawing attention away from simple questions about whether the distribution of resources to different individuals and groups are equitable. The focus becomes how various groups perceive the fairness of resource distribution (n.n. equity goal in Stones' terms) and how they interpret it in terms of group identity. When issues are tied to culturally salient ideas about identity, the structure of a conflict and the ways in which it develops go beyond simple self-interest, as individual and collective action become linked" (p. 13). For them "cultural and symbolic processes are seen in the competing definitions associated with alternative cultural images of an issue... Often, culturally linked issue definitions powerfully represent one side of an issue, and the strength of these images determines, in great part, whether an issue attains agenda status or not" (p.13).

2.3. Problem delimitation and strategic use of political language

In this context, issue creation or definition is a complex political process. "Problems need to be identified, organizations must be built or mobilized around particular issues and policies, and an issue has to be propelled through multiple layers of policy process. Problems are not just associated with objective conditions; rather, issue definition is associated with cultural dynamics related to proponent's ability to connect a problem to cultural assumptions about threats, risks, and humans' ability to control their physical and social environments" (Cobb & Ross, 1997, p. 5).

Describing the state of art of the literature on problem definition, **Arnost Vesely** (2007) notices the diversity, and the different terminology and approaches used to the subject. He considers these different approaches not contradictory but complementary, thus he is integrating them under a new name: "**problem delimitation**"³. The concept encompasses several activities and perspectives such as problem definition, problem structuring or problem modeling.

Deborah Stone (2002) captures in a very concise way the main feature of problem delimitation using symbolic language:

"Problem definition in the polis is always strategic, designed to call in reinforcements for one's own side in a conflict. Since it is always the loser or weaker side who needs to call in help, strategic problem definition usually means portraying a problem so that one's favored course of action appears to be in the broad public interest" (p. 155).

Another characteristic of strategic definition is the attempt to manipulate the scope of a conflict by making some people seem to be affected by it and others not. From this perspective the problems "are not given, out there in the world waiting for smart analysts to come along and define them correctly. They are created in the minds of citizens by other citizens, leaders, organizations, and government agencies, as an essential part of political maneuvering"(p. 156).

³ Vesely identified two major approaches in the literature of problem delimitation that he calls the 'political stream' and the 'policy stream'. (Vesely, 2007, p. 88) The first approach – the political stream – tries to explain different definitions or frames of public issues. Its aim is to understand "how concrete public issues are identified, conceptualized and defined by different actors, why certain societal conditions become defined as public problems (and others do not) and what are the reasons and consequences of different definitions or frames of public issues." (Vesely 2007: 88) The second one – the policy stream – is considered by Vesely more practical and it aims to provide precise formulation of public problems so that the problem can be effectively and efficiently solved. Vesely included in the first approach scholars such as Dery (1984), Rochefort and Cobbs (1997), Stone (2002), while the authors from policy stream who are mostly concerned with the methodological part of problem formulation are Dunn (2008) and Hoppe (2001, 2002).

2.3.1. Symbolic languages

Deborah Stone (2002) identifies five types of languages used for defining and portraying problems considered critical in determining which aspect of a problem will be examined. These are: the symbols, the numbers, the causes, the interests, and the decisions; each of them is briefly described below.

2.3.1.1. Symbols

Symbolic representation is the essence of problem definition in politics. Four aspects are especially important: narrative stories, synecdoche, metaphors, and ambiguity (Stone, 2002, p. 137).

The definitions of policy problems usually involve a narrative structure. "They are **stories** with a beginning, a middle, and an end, involving some change or transformation. They have heroes and villains and innocent victims, and they pit the forces of evil against the forces of good. The story in policy writing is often hidden, but one should not be thwarted by the surface details from searching for the underlying story. Often what appears as conflict over details is really disagreement about the fundamental story"(p. 138). Stone identifies two broad story lines with their variations as prevalent in politics: the story of *decline* and the story of *helplessness and control*.

Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part is used to present the whole. "The strategy of focusing on a part of a problem, particularly one that can be dramatized as a horror story, thus is likely to lead to skewed policy. Yet it is often a politically useful strategy. It is a good organizing tool, because it can make a problem concrete, allow people to identify with someone else, and mobilize anger. Also it reduces the scope of the problem and thereby makes it manageable" (p. 147-8).

Metaphoric reasoning means seeing a likeness between two things and is essential to classification and counting. Stone considers that to make a metaphor is also to make a political claim. "There is a likeness that is important" (p. 138).

Ambiguity, the capacity to have multiple meanings, is the most important feature of all symbols. "Ambiguity enables the transformation of individual intentions and actions into collective results and purposes. Without it, cooperation and compromise would be far more difficult, if not impossible. As Charles Elder and Roger Cobb say symbols provide the vehicle through which diverse motivations, expectations, and values are synchronized to make collective action possible (p. 157)". Symbolic representation is a

fundamental part of all political discourse, and by conveying images of good and bad, right and wrong, suffering and relief, these devices are instruments in the struggle over public policy (p.156).

Stone's conclusion regarding stories as tools of political strategy is that "policy makers as well as interest groups often create problems (in their artistic sense) as a context for the actions they want to take. This is not to say that they actually cause harm and destructions so they will have something to do, but that they represent the world in such a way as to make themselves, their skills, and their favorite course of action necessary" (p. 162).

2.3.1.2. Numbers

Another way to strategically define a problem is to measure it. **Numbers** are "another form of poetry".

"Numbers are always descriptions of the world, and as descriptions, they are no more real than the visions of poems and paintings. Their vision of experience may correspond more or less with popular visions, just as realist, impressionist, and abstract expressionist paintings correspond more or less with common visions. Numbers are real artifacts, just as poems and paintings are artifacts that people collect, recite, display, and respond to" (p. 187).

There are many possible measures of any phenomenon and the choice among them depends on the purpose for measuring. "The fundamental issues of any policy conflict are always contained in the question of how to count the problem...Counting always involves deliberate decisions about *counting as*" (p.164). Stone mentions that it is impossible to describe counting without talking about "inclusion and exclusion (terms that in themselves suggest community, boundaries, allies, and enemies); selection (a term that implies privilege and discrimination); and important characteristics (a term that suggests value judgments and hierarchy)" (p.164).

2.3.1.3. Causes

"Once we think we know the cause of a problem, we use the knowledge to prevent people from causing the problem, to make them compensate other people for bearing the problem, and to punish them for having caused suffering. To identify a cause in the polis is to place burdens on one set of people instead of another. It is also to tell a story in which one set of people are oppressors and another are victims" (p. 187).

"Causal stories" are strategically crafted with symbols and numbers and then asserted by political actors who try to make their versions the basis of policy choices. Stone distinguishes between four uses of causal arguments: first, to challenge or protect an existing set of rules, institutions, and interests; second, to assign blame and responsibility for fixing a problem and compensating victims; third, to legitimize certain actors as "fixers" of the problem, giving them new authority, power, and resources; and fourth, to create new political alliances among people who perceive themselves to be harmed by the problem (p. 189).

"In summary, causal theories, like other modes of problem definition, are efforts to control interpretations and images of difficulties. Political actors create causal stories to describe harms and difficulties, to attribute them to actions of other individuals and organizations, and thereby to invoke government power to stop them. Like other forms of symbolic representation, causal stories can be emotionally compelling; they are stories of innocence and guilt, victims and oppressors, suffering and evil. Good political analysis must attend to all strategic functions of causal interpretation" (p. 209).

2.3.1.4. Interests

One of the languages most strongly associated with politics in popular discourse, is the language of **"interests"**. In this case, problems are not defined by their causes, but by their effect: who is affected, and in what way. As Stone is noticing it, the central problem in democratic theory is that interests that are regarded as morally equal might be politically unequal. The good, legitimate, virtuous interests are not emerging naturally, so they need protection of the government; its role is precisely to protect weak but legitimate interests against strong but less legitimate and virtuous ones (p. 227). So basically, in this language, problems are portrayed as a contest between competing interests.

Stone makes also list of rhetorical characterizations of political contests between "good weak interests" and "strong bad interests". "The underlying story all these portrayals is that small, selfish concern is able to dominate a larger, more virtuous concern" (p. 228). Making a particular interest appear to be in the interest of the general public is a classic political strategy. There are four ways by which groups define issues so as to make a sectional interest appear general. The first one is to show that a single political actor accused of being self-interested is really composed of a large number of ordinary and average citizens. The second is to transform what appear to be narrow interests by aggregating potential winners or losers in a much broader class of 'everyman'. Similarly,

Stone mentions that economic interests can be transformed into social ones. Not at least, immediate short-term interests can be portrayed as long-run interests (p. 229-31).

2.3.1.5. Decisions

Portraying a problem as a **decision** is a way of controlling its boundaries: what counts as problematic and what does not, how the phenomenon will be seen by others, and how others will respond to it (p. 243).

In politics, controlling the number and kinds of alternative actions considered is the essence of the political game. "Keeping things off the agenda is a form of power as important as getting them on" (p. 245).

Another part of the strategy is to make one's preferred outcome appear as the only possible alternative, the so-called Hobson's choice⁴. Talking about decisions, Stone also mentions issue framing, as the process of focusing attention on a particular slice of an extended causal chain. "A frame is a boundary that cuts off parts of something from our vision, and a list of alternatives is one of the most important ways of framing a policy problem and constructing a Hobson's choice" (p. 248). Another important technique in issue framing is the labeling of alternatives; because in politics language does matter, the way we think about problems is extremely sensitive to the language used to describe them.

"Political actors are dedicated to showing that a favored course of action benefits society as a whole and imposes costs on no one in particular. From this point of view, the maximum total welfare criterion of the rational model (n.n. to what Stone opposes her polis model) can be seen as highly desirable costume with which people try to dress their own proposals. The construction of alternatives and selection of consequences contribute to the making of the final costume, the decision criterion. In the guise of numbers and the seeming logic of 'maximizing welfare' (who could be against that?), the criterion appears as an irrefutable, unassailable, and even innocent way of deciding. In fact, the decision was made long before the criterion was invoked" (p. 255).

Referring to all these **languages of problem definition**, Stone concludes that there is no universal, scientific, or objective method of problem definition. "Problems are defined in politics, and political actors make use of several different methods, or languages, of

⁴ The politician offers the audience an apparent voice, wearing all the verbal clothing of a real choice, when in fact the very list of options determines how people will choose by making one option seem like the only reasonable possibility.

problem definition. Each of these languages has room for moral conflict and is a vehicle for expressing moral values, but there is no universal technical language of problem definition that yields morally correct answers. To become fluent in these languages is to learn to see problems from multiple perspectives and to identify the assumptions about both facts and values that political definitions don’t usually make explicit” (p.134-5).

2.4. Garbage can politics in the EU

Jeremy Richardson (2006) tries to explain the policy making in the EU⁵ using theories that are focused on policy actors, such as those participating in the EU policy process. He concludes that “we can make progress if we focus on policy actor behaviour – as well as on institutions and institutional relationships – in order to begin our search for a better understanding of the EU as a policy system or series of policy sub-systems” (p. 24-5). He considers that by focusing on actors as “stakeholders” in the governance of the EU, “we are able to survey a range of actor types and a range of relationships. Different types of actors and different types of relationships may emerge at different times. The policy process is both episodic and taking place in several venues at any one time. Actors do not always understand what they are doing and what the outcomes might be. Even when the outcome is agreed, there will be many unintended consequences in the implementation process, leading to further rounds of policy-making and so on.” The same scholar identifies the multiplicity of games in which Member States are involved and the complex nature of the EU policy process itself as other factors that can affect the autonomy of actors and the relationships between them⁶ (p. 25).

Richardson describes this decision-making process at the EU level in a very suggestive way as undoubtedly “messy”, but not necessarily bad. “Its multinational and neo-federal nature, the extreme openness of decision-making to lobbyists, and the considerable weight of national politico-administrative elites within the process, create an unpredictable and multi-level policy-making environment. Even the relationships between key institutions – such as the Commission, the European Parliament (EP), the Council of Ministers (CM) and the European Court of Justice (ECJ) – has been in a considerable state of flux for many decades... Although clearly a very productive policy process, the EU political system has not been institutionally stable... At best the EU

⁵ For a detailed overview of the diversity of EU policy-making, including theories, policy domains, predominant patterns and characteristic styles, see Wallace & Wallace & Pollack (2005)

⁶ Richardson points out the limitations of “*intergovernmentalism*” as model of analysis. But we could not reject totally this perspective, and we have to highlight that national governments still try to act in either national interest or their own political interests.

policy process has exhibited some stable patterns of cross-national coalition-building; at worst some of the extreme aspects of a garbage can model of decision-making" (p.5-6).

The alternative view for the EU is of actors that "operate under a huge degree of uncertainty in what are often very long-running games, with uncertain pay-offs. The total 'system' is large and amorphous with numbers of part-time participants and a range of ideas floating around in some ethereal fashion"(p.15). In these situations the whole process may resemble better with the "garbage can" model of decision-making developed by Cohen *et al.* (1972) and further elaborated by Kingdon (1984).

2.5. The Garbage Can Model and the "Multiple Streams" Framework

John Kingdon (1984) developed his theory as a response to the rational decision making and incremental policy change approaches, two very influential theories of his time, but considered insufficient to fully explain the agenda setting and alternative specification processes. The starting point of his theory was a model developed by **Cohen et al** (1972) called the "*garbage can model of organizational choice*". He summarizes the logical structure of the original model as it follows: "(1) the flow of fairly separate streams through the system, and (2) outcomes heavily dependent on the coupling of the streams – couplings of solutions to problems; interactions among participants; fortuitous or purposeful absence of solutions, problems, or participants – in the choices (the garbage cans) that must be made" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 91).

2.5.1. Kingdon's Three Streams

The main intention of Kingdon was to determine why some agenda item are prominent and others are neglected. His framework contains five structural elements: problems, policies, politics, policy windows, and policy entrepreneurs.

Departing from the original "Garbage Can Model", he identified not four, but three streams flowing through the system. These are the problems, the policies, and the politics. They are separate from each other, and they have their own dynamic. At critical points in time, labeled "policy windows", these streams are coupled by policy entrepreneurs; this enhances the chances that an issue will receive serious attention by policy decedents.

2.5.1.1. Problems

The first stream consists of **problems**, or various conditions that policy makers want to address. The basic question here is why do policymakers pay attention to some problems and not others? The answer relies on the way officials learn about conditions, and the way these conditions come to be defined as problems. Kingdon proposes three ways to identify conditions. Indicators may be used to assess the existence and magnitude of a condition. The language through which these indicators are expressed is what Deborah Stone calls "numbers". These indicators can be used "politically" to measure the magnitude of change in the hope of catching official attention.

Problems are not always self-evident by the indicators, so they need "a little push to get the attention of people in and around government" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 99) That push may come from different sources, like a focusing event, a crises, a powerful symbol that catches on, or the personal experience of a political actor. All these can call attention to a problem. Third, formal or informal feedback from existing programs, or originated in citizens complaints and bureaucrats day-to-day activity can also bring conditions to the decisional fore.

But, problems are not simply the conditions or external events themselves. Kingdon makes the point that there is also "a perceptual, interpretive element" (p. 109). To the translation of conditions to problems, a major contribution is attributed to values, comparisons, and categories.

Zahariadis summarizes this argument in a very concise way. "A range of values is normally associated with a particular issue. Changes in specific conditions may violate those values and therefore activate interest and attention. People define conditions as problems by letting their values and beliefs guide their decisions, by placing subjects under one category rather than another, by comparing current to past performance, and by comparing conditions in different countries" (Zahariadis, 2007, p. 71).

Kingdon also tries to answer the question why some problems, even though not solved or addressed, fade from view? "It takes time, effort, mobilization of many actors, and the expenditure of political resources to keep an item prominent on the agenda. If it appears, even after a short time, that the subject will not result in legislation or another form of authoritative decision, participants quickly cease to invest in it" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 109). Problems often fade also because after short period of awareness and optimism, they give way to a realization of the financial and social costs of action.

Analyzing different actors' strategies in problem definition and the level of "structuredness" these actors try to impose on the problem (and the reason why they want to do that), **Robert Hoppe** and **Matthijs Hisschemoller** (2001) propose a typology of four problem definitions mapped out in two dimensions. The first one refers to the lack of certainty concerning the kinds of knowledge about the problematic situation and the ways of converting it into a more desirable situation. The other dimension refers to the lack of consensus on relevant values.

"A problem is termed *structured* when there is a high degree of consensus and certainty. A problem is referred to as *moderately structured (ends)* when there is consensus on relevant values and uncertainty or dissent on what kind of knowledge is relevant. A problem is called *moderately structured (means)* when there is consensus on what kind of knowledge is relevant, but ongoing dissent with regard to the values at stake. A problem is called *unstructured* when there is neither consensus nor certainty, yet there is still a widespread sense of discomfort with the status quo" (p. 50-1).

2.5.1.2. Policies

The policy stream includes a "soup" of ideas about solving problems that compete to win acceptance in policy networks. These ideas are generated by specialists in policy communities that include bureaucrats, staff members, academics, and researchers and are considered in various venues. Some of the ideas survive the initial period unchanged, others are combined into new proposals, and other just disappear. Only a few out of a large initial number receive serious consideration in the end.

In addition to starting discussions of their proposals, advocates push their ideas trying to, what Kingdon calls, "soften up" both policy communities, and larger publics, getting them used to new ideas and building acceptance for their proposal. "Then when a short-run opportunity to push their proposal comes, the way has been paved, the important people softened up. Without this preliminary work, a proposal sprung even at a propitious time is likely to fall on deaf ears" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 134).

The selection criteria for all these ideas include technical feasibility and value acceptability. Proposals that appear to be difficult or too costly to implement have lower chance of surviving. Those that do not conform to the values of policy makers or did not pass the public acquiescence test are less likely also to be considered.

"The policy stream thus produces a short list of proposals. This short list is not necessarily a consensus in the policy community on the one proposal that meets their

criteria; rather, it is an agreement that a few proposals are prominent. Having a viable alternative available for adoption facilitates the high placement of a subject on a governmental agenda, and dramatically increases the chances for placement on a decision agenda" (p. 134).

2.5.1.3. Politics

The third stream labeled "politics" consists of three elements: the national mood, pressure-group campaigns, and administrative or legislative turnover. National mood refers to the notion that a fairly large number of individual in a given country tend to think along common lines and that the mood swings from time to time. Political actors sense the changes through, say, opinion polls, and they act to promote certain items on the agenda or to dim the hopes of others.

The support or the opposition of interest groups is also used as indicators of consensus or dissent in the broader political arena. Their perception that the balance is tilting one way or another directly affects the likelihood of the issue's prominence or obscurity (Zahariadis, 2007, p. 73).

Political and administrative turnover affects agenda in a dramatic way. "A change of administration, a substantial turnover of congressional seats, or a change of top personnel in an administrative agency all change agenda substantially. Agendas are also affected by jurisdictional boundaries. Competition for turf does not necessarily produce stalemate. Indeed, if a popular issue is involved, competition promotes rather than retards action" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 171).

Of these three elements, the combination of the national mood with the turnover in government exerts the most powerful effect on agendas.

2.5.1.4. Policy windows

An important feature of Kingdon's argument is what he calls the "**coupling**" of the three streams. Issues rise on the agenda when the streams are joined together at critical moments in time. Kingdon labels such a moment "**policy window**" and defines it as "an opportunity for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions, or to push attention to their special problems" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 173).

A window opens mainly because of the appearance of compelling problems, or by happenings in the political stream. Hence, Kingdon distinguishes between "problems

windows" and "political windows", which is coherent with his distinction between agenda and the alternatives. "The governmental agenda is set in the problems or political streams, and the alternatives are generated in the policy stream" (p. 204).

The probability of an item to rise on a decisional agenda is dramatically increased if all three elements – problem, proposal, and political receptivity – are coupled in a single package.

One key coupling is that of policy alternative to something else. "Policy entrepreneurs" are responsible for this coupling. "They keep their proposal ready, waiting for one or two things: a problem that might float by to which they can attach their solution, or a development in the political stream, such as a change of administration, that provides a receptive climate for their proposal" (p. 204).

The main characteristics of a policy window is that they open infrequently, are quite unpredictable, and do not stay open long (p. 175). The window closes for a variety of reasons. "First, participants may feel they have addressed the problem through decision or enactment. Even if they have not, the fact that some action has been taken brings down the curtain on the subject for the time being. Second, and closely related, participants may fail to get action. If they fail, they are unwilling to invest further time, energy, political capital, or other resources in the endeavor... Third, the events that prompted the window to open may pass from the scene... Forth, if a change in personnel opens a window, the personnel may change again. People in key positions come and go, and so do the opportunities that their presence furnishes... Finally, the window sometimes closes because there is no available alternative" (p. 177-8).

Kingdon also argues that success in one area increases the possibility of success in adjacent areas. He talks about "spill over" effect. "Events spill over into adjacent areas because politicians find there is a reward for riding the same horse that brought benefit before, because the winning coalition can be transferred to new issues, and because one can argue from precedent" (p. 204).

2.5.1.5. Policy Entrepreneurs

Policy entrepreneurs are those individuals or corporate actors who attempt to couple the three streams. They are described as the "advocates who are willing to invest their resources – time, energy, reputation, money – to promote a position in return for anticipated future gain in the form of material, purposive, or solidary benefits" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 188).

When a window opens, policy entrepreneurs must immediately seize the opportunity to initiate action. Otherwise, the opportunity might be lost, and they have to wait for the next one to come along (Zahariadis, 2007, p. 74).

Kingdon identifies the qualities of the successful entrepreneurs. First of all, they should have “some claim to a hearing” that has one of three sources: expertise, an ability to speak for others, or an authoritative decision-making position (Kingdon, 1984, p. 189). Second, they should have greater access to policy makers. Having political connections and being appreciated for their negotiating skills, are also important feature of any policy entrepreneur. Successful entrepreneurs are also persistent and they have greater access to resources. Not at least, they must know to employ manipulating strategies to accomplish their goal of coupling the three streams (Zahariadis, 2007, p. 74).

In conclusion, as Nikolaos Zahariadis⁷ highlights it, the added-value of the “Multiple Streams Framework” which is apposite to this study is that it “offers a fruitful way to explain how political systems and organizations make sense of an ambiguous world. The lens supplies the analytical tools to explore how and under what conditions entrepreneurs manipulate the policy process, not only to pursue their own self-interest, but also to provide meaning to policy makers with problematic preferences” (p. 87).

2.6. Agenda denial strategies

The next “piece” of the theoretical framework “puzzle” is about the concept of “cultural agenda denial strategies” (Cobb & Ross, 1997). While the “Multiple Stream Framework” is focused on the active consideration of new issues, this new concept highlights the other side of the same coin: what kinds of strategies are used by the opponents of some issues in order to block their access to the decisional agenda.

Starting from the assumption that any opponent seeks to achieve its desired result at the lowest possible cost but will progressively turn to higher-cost strategies, Cobb & Ross list an inventory of tactics that opponents can use to keep new issues off the formal agenda. They identify four categories of strategies: low cost, medium-cost: attack, medium-cost: symbolic placation and high cost strategies (see **Table 2.6** on page 30). They describe the opponents’ strategies on a “continuum” that considers not only short term resource expenditure to pursue a particular strategy, but also possible future costs.

⁷ In his works, Nikolaos Zahariadis (1999, 2007) maps out the fundamentals and basic assumptions of the Multiple Stream Framework. He reviews the framework and partially extends it, including a review of the critics and limitations of Kingdon's initial theory.

"Normally, the least costly strategies are tried first, then a gradual escalation occurs that involves greater opponent commitment and investment in time and other resources. If all these strategies fail and public officials and private opponents cannot keep an issue of the formal agenda, they will continue to oppose it in other arenas. However, most opposition strategies – even if they do not work in the long run – will keep initiating groups' issues off the formal agenda for a while and raise the cost to initiators" (p. 41).

Table 2.6: Agenda denial strategies

<p>1. Low-cost Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nonrecognition of a problem - Denial that a problem exists - Refusal to recognize the group that is pushing an issue <p>2. Medium-cost Strategies: Attack</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reversal of roles: claim victim status <p>If <i>group legitimacy is low</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - discredit the group advocating the issue - link it with unpopular groups - question ethics, behavior of leaders - blame group for problem - use deception: release false information <p>If <i>group legitimacy is high</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - discredit the issue itself - state that issue is not a legitimate public concern - dispute facts of the case - state that concerns are isolated incidents - raise fears of the general public - focus on problem definition by stressing issue characteristics that buttress the opponent: ambiguity, socially significant negative impact, negative spillover, clear precedent, high complexity <p>3. Medium-cost Strategies: Symbolic Placation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invoke community norms - Showcase by narrowly defining the problem - Co-opt leaders or group's symbols and language – "<i>symbolic cooptation</i>" - Create a commission to study the problem - Postponement <p>4. High-cost Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Electoral threats or withholding of support; - Economic threats or actual sanctions; - Legal threats or actions; - Physical threats or actions. <p>(Source: adapted after Cobb & Ross, 1997, p. 42)</p>
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Although both sides stand to lose from high-cost tactics, as in a negative-sum game, Cobb & Ross suggests that opponents clearly believe that they will lose relatively less than the initiators in the long run. "For this reason, such strategies are not used lightly and are generally brought into play only after less costly efforts have clearly failed and when the issue is sufficiently important to the opponents to continue opposing its consideration" (p. 38).

Facing a challenge, opponents seek to respond strategically using their resources - money, time, people, etc - as efficiently as possible. But, as Cobb & Ross highlighted, "resources alone are often insufficient to blunt a demand". What is required is to meet a set of words and themes with a counter set of ideas. The contest is first one of non-recognition, and when that is no longer possible, it becomes one of problem definition in which each side elaborates a set of themes that resonate with mass public. The contestant that does the better job of linking its issue position to culturally rooted worldviews is usually victorious. This involves the use of cultural strategies, associating a proposal with powerful values and symbols. The opponent has a wide variety of strategies that can be used to reduce the impact of the initiator's argument. If effective, this will limit the intensity of the issue innovator to its small core of adherents and preclude the initiator from attracting others to the cause. This set of tactics, when combined with the resource potential of the opponents, makes it clear why so few issues ever make it onto the formal and public agendas (p. 42-3).

2.6.1. Audience costs

Regarding the motivation of different political actors to use the agenda denial strategies, not only the costs of the tactics or the importance of the issue might be relevant. An additional explanation may come referring to the concept of "audience costs", originally elaborated in international relations and conflict resolution studies but that can be used with success also in the context of the EU decision making.

For **James Fearon** (1997), the dilemma for any political actor (especially in foreign policy issues) concerns the problem of how a genuinely resolved state can threaten in such a way as to persuade the target that it is not bluffing. He identifies the main way that the states attempt to resolve this dilemma: making their threats *costly signals*. "To be credible, a threat (n.n. a legal threat involving veto) must have some cost or risk attached to it that might discourage an unresolved state from making it (p. 69)".

The principal way (not the only one) that a leader generates costly signals is by creating *audience costs* that would be suffered if the leader backed down or backed away from a

public threat or warning issued in a crisis. "Audience costs arise chiefly from the reaction of domestic political audiences interested in whether foreign policy is being successfully or unsuccessfully handled by the leadership" (p. 69). This might be relevant also in explaining why some Member States of the EU are using their veto power in the "seat issue". The audience costs are referring chiefly to costs imposed by a leader's domestic audience, although one can extend the concept to cover foreign audiences (international reputational costs) as well (p. 70).

2.7. Prioritizing and evaluating multi-dimensional issues

Bryan Jones and **Frank Baumgartner** (2005) in their "behavioral model of policy choice" try to describe how individuals and organizations prioritize and evaluate multi-dimensional issues. Their model, at the system level wants to answer three questions: Which issues to attend to? (agenda-setting level), which attributes to incorporate (problem definition) and which solutions to examine (proposal and debate), while at the end to make a choice the decision makers should know which alternative to select (p. 37).

Decisions are determined mostly by the "winnowing down of which problems to focus on, which attributes of those problems to weight most heavily as being relevant, and which alternatives to choose from in addressing those attributes" (p. 36). Two other concepts are used here from the work of Baumgartner & Jones: "policy image" and "venue shopping" (1991).

How public policies are discussed in public and in the media in a positive or negative light is considered the "*policy image*". "We simply differentiate between images that are favorable to proponents of a given policy and those that are detrimental" (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991, 1046). Images are important because they have implications for which actors in society will be attracted to a given debate, thus decision makers have the incentives to attempt to manipulate them (p. 1047).

Closely related to the policy image is the "*venue*" of an action. "Depending on the issue and on how it is understood by those potentially involved, it may be assigned to an agency of the federal government, to private market mechanisms, to state or local authorities, to the family, or to any of a number of institutions. We term this the venue problem. Each venue carries with it a decisional bias, because both participants and decision-making routines differ" (p. 1047).

Conflict expansion forms the basis of the notion of institutional venue and points to the importance of image as well. There are a variety of venues to which a particular conflict may be directed. According to Baumgartner & Jones, conflict expansion to new venues can occur in three ways. "The first is the classic loser appeal strategy that Schattschneider noted (n.n. involving the mass public). The second is action by concerned outsiders, who may or may not be allied with losers in a policy subsystem. Oftentimes such outsiders lack both credibility and information to attack the existing subsystem, so that making alliances with losers from within the smaller group can be very important to outsider strategies. Third, decision makers from another venue can attack an existing policy arrangement trying to expand their own policy jurisdictions. Congressmen, for example, may wish to raise their visibility through such a strategy (p. 1047)". These three conflict expansion processes are not mutually exclusive, and in fact, alliances between all three types of conflict expanders are expected.

2.7.1. Venue shopping

Cobb and **Elder** (1983) describe a link between agenda entrance, by which they mean inclusion in the list of issues that compels attention by a governmental entity, and issue expansion, which refers to the number of people mobilized around an issue. They see the issue expansion process as a key element in the destruction of systems of limited participation and argue that as a larger and larger circle of participants is mobilized, the strength of the subsystem is likely to be weakened. Yet there is a second manner in which issues may gain agenda entrance: **venue shopping** by strategically minded political actors (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991). This strategy relies less on mass mobilization and more on the dual strategy of the presentation of image and the search for a more receptive political venue. Even when mass publics are involved in the issue expansion process, they often come into the process following elite debate and then generally respond to symbols generated during the elite conflict.

The image of a policy and its venue are closely related because as venues change, images may change as well; as the image of policy changes, venue changes become more likely. Image and venue can combine to produce rapid change, or they may interact to reinforce the current assignment of authority. Both stability and rapid change in policy outcomes can come from the same process (Baumgartner & Jones, 2005, p. 1049). Manipulation of images and venues is an inherent part of the policy process understood by those on all sides of most policy debates.

2.8. Political manipulation

Political manipulation is also the central concept of **William Riker** (1984), who named the art of manipulation "heresthetic". Political manipulation is concerned with the strategy-value of sentences and it involves the use of language to accomplish its purpose. "It is about structuring the world so you can win" (p. IX). Riker also identified three ways how manipulation occurs: by agenda control, strategic voting and the manipulations of dimensions (147-150).

Political manipulation is required also to control the ambiguity inherent to decision making. Nikolaos Zahariadis (2007) points out that ambiguity is a state of having many ways of thinking about the same circumstances or phenomena, and these ways may not be reconcilable, creating vagueness, confusion, and stress.

The problem under conditions of ambiguity is that "we don't know what the problem is; its definition is vague and shifting. Distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant information is problematic, which can lead to false and misleading interpretation of facts. Choice becomes less an exercise in solving problems and more an attempt to make sense of a partially comprehensible world (Zahariadis, 2007, p. 67)". To control this ambiguity which is pervasive to politics, manipulation is employed. Zahariadis sees it as "a political struggle to create winners and losers, to provide meaning and identity, and to pursue self-interest" (p. 69). A central concept is information, which is viewed as not value-neutral.

Although from the point of view of the political entrepreneur, manipulation might involve pursuing self-interest, for the system it serves a different purpose: to provide meaning, clarification, and identity (p. 69).

"Policy makers and entrepreneurs use labels and symbols that have specific cognitive referents and emotional impact. Employing these elements strategically alters the dynamics of choice by highlighting one dimension of the problem over others. It's the strategic use of information in combination with institutions and policy windows that changes the context, meaning, and policies over time" (p. 70).

3. Methods

3.1. Single-outcome study

The paper is focused on one practical problem, concerning a very specific issue, the non-decision on the EP’ seats, thus this peculiarity impacts on the research strategy. The researcher’s aim is to provide a valid explanation for the existing non-decision situation based on a theoretical framework which was developed combining several individual theories and assembling them into one new integrated framework. Thus, from this perspective, this research looks similar with a **single-outcome study**.

The aim of the study is to investigate a bounded unit – the seat of the EP - in an attempt to elucidate a single outcome occurring within that unit – to identify those factors that influence the access of the issue to the decisional agenda of the EU, thus to explain the missing of a decision on the seat issue. This is referred by **John Gerring** (2006) as a *single-outcome study* to distinguish it from the usual genre of case study⁸.

Case studies often tackle subjects about which little is known previously. The opportunity to study a single unit in great depth is thus the virtue of the case study method. This remark is valid also in the case of the EP’ seats. There is little academic research conducted on this topic, and actually the only literature found on it, just partially is concerned with it.

In the same time, as Gerring (2004) noticed, “it is difficult to write a study of a single unit that does not also function as a case study, and vice versa...Indeed, it may be difficult to neatly separate the study and case study components of a work. The reason for this structural ambiguity is that the utility of the single-unit study rests partly on its double functions. One wishes to know both what is particular to that unit and what is general about it” (p. 345)⁹. In the case of this research, this ambiguity is amplified by one additional factor concerning the content of the study: the complexity of the EU institutions, in general.

⁸ “Case study” is defined as an “in-depth study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon) where the scholar’s aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena” (Gerring, 2004, p. 341).

⁹ Gerring suggests that the appropriate response to such ambiguity is for the writer to “report all facts and hypotheses that might be relevant – in short to over report. Much of the detail provided by the typical case study may be regarded as ‘field notes’ of possible utility for future researchers – perhaps with a rather different set of inferences in mind” (p. 346).

3.2. Exploring working hypotheses

This study was designed to be **exploratory**. The purpose was to explore the “seat issue” and the causes of the non-decision situation on it more thoroughly in order to find the necessary and sufficient conditions under which non-decision is happening. The general statement that was derived from the theoretical framework might be considered “**working hypothesis**” to be confirmed or refuted by the empirical data.

In terms of general research variables, the non-decision situation might be considered the “dependent variable”. There is no decision on the “seat issue” because of the influence of the “independent variable”: the missing of the coupling of the three streams. This more general working assumption suggested auxiliary “hypotheses”, based on concepts and theories from other parts of the theoretical framework. In this way a hypothesis-generating and hypothesis specification process was set into motion, which, in the end, led to an analysis that might be interpreted as a causal mechanism which explains this case. It also shows the relative explanatory power of some of the different frameworks included. This analysis is the core part of the next chapter.

The logical steps followed to develop the research were:

1. Identifying an interesting practical problem from the domains of my research interest: the “seat issue” of European Parliament in the more general context of agenda setting and agenda conflicts in the EU;
2. Reviewing the existing relevant literature on agenda setting, agenda conflicts and policy change, as a general framework on which to ground the theoretical framework;
3. Developing the theoretical framework using a pluralist and integrated approach, and formulating working assumptions to guide the analysis of the empirical data;
4. “Accessing local knowledge” using document and press analysis, and semi-structured interviews;
5. Based on the “accessed” data, to verify the working assumptions drawn from the conceptual framework;
6. Drawing some conclusions regarding the research objective.

3.3. The time dimension

The explanation resulting from this study tries to cover the period of time since the “seat issue” reached last time the decisional agenda of the EU. This occurred in the early 1990s at the Edinburgh Council (1992) and then it was “put in stone” in the Amsterdam Treaty (1997).

Since then, this *status quo* was challenged by series of initiatives mainly from inside the EP. Several political actors wanted and still want to push the issue back on the decisional agenda of the EU, in order to reduce the number of the seats. They have to face the opposition of counter-forces, those political actors who are favouring the maintaining of the existing three seats system. This research tries to find a valid explanation for all these failures (and successes on the other hand) in time, thus, it might be considered a "longitudinal" study. This means that the analysis of the phenomenon is made along a longer period in time (1997-2008) with more focus on the latest developments closer to the time of the research.

3.4. Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis of the research is the "agenda conflict" situation on the "seat issue" of the European Parliament since the decision made in Edinburgh (1992) and Amsterdam (1997). The purpose of this study is to discover what kind of factors "blocked" since then the access of the "seat issue" to the decisional agenda of the EU.

3.5. Collecting Evidence: "accessing local knowledge"

This study uses mainly primary data. For collecting this data or for "accessing local knowledge" (Yanow, 2000, p. 27) the research applied several methods. The main method for "accessing" data was the semi-structured interviews conducted with stakeholders from the European Parliament. Talking personally to the political actors directly involved has the advantage of a valuable first hand insight into the EU decision making process. Interviews were complemented by other primary sources such as articles and opinions selected from the personal websites or blogs of the MEP and other political actors. Analysis of different official documents of the EP and other institutions of the EU, or Member States combined with press analysis of the main European journals were also used in this research.

"Accessing local knowledge" was facilitated by an internship at the European Parliament in Brussels, starting from April 2008. "Accessing" all these different sources of data, I am confident that the validity of the conclusions is increased.

3.5.1. From who was the data collected?

The first sources of information were the interviews conducted with the actors identified for the purpose of the research and their personal opinions expressed in digital formats (weblog, homepage). Official documents of the EP and other EU institutions regarding

the "seat issue", but also press articles from four EU journals and online media – European Voice, EU Observer, The Parliament.com and Euractiv.com, represent the other sources of information for this research.

3.5.2. How were they selected?

The starting point in the selection process of the interview population was the preliminary press monitoring done in the months that preceded the start of the empirical research. From this analysis, the researcher extracted the first names of the actors who had in the past political positions on the subject. This initial list was then confronted with the names extracted from official documents of the EU. Using these two tactics, an initial list of MEP and other political actors was configured. During the internship period, this list was completed with other names after the researcher gained more insights about the topic. To extend this list of subjects, a method suggested by **Dvora Yanow** (2000) was used: the respondents were asked to recommend other political actors who had an interest on this issue. The following question was asked from them in order to guide the research to other new, until then "hidden" actors who were involved: "With whom else should I talk about this topic?"

3.5.3. How big the sample is?

The final number of the sample was determined by two factors that influenced the sampling strategy. The first one was to select politically important and to some extent representative actors that could illustrate different sub-groups involved (supporters and opponents of the "seat issue"). The main objective was to have sufficiently representative sample in order to make a relevant comparison between their strategies to push or to block the access of the issue to the decisional agenda.

The second element was a more practical one. In the literature it is often called the "convenience strategy". The researcher wanted to keep the size of the sample in "doable" limits for a master project and to select only those cases that are important, but in the same time feasible. This is linked with the limitations of the research like time constraints and access to influential political actors.

I have conducted all interviews in Brussels in April and July 2008, eight in person. The objective was to cover all important political groups represented in the EP. The selection was made by requests from the author. The interviewees talked on behalf of themselves and it is not possible to state whether what they have said represents the whole organization. That was not the purpose either. The questions were open, even though I

used an interview guide. All except three interviews were taped and transcribed. All interviews were anonymous; the reason for this is that the topic under discussion was a very sensitive and politicized one. By relying on a variety of interviews in combination with other primary sources, the validity and reliability are sufficient to claim an analytical contribution to the theory.

On the other hand, using personal interviews has another important implication that has been mentioned for the reliability of the study. If another researcher will ask the same questions to the same people the result might be different, thus this affects to some extent the reliability of the study.

Chapter 4 - Empirical findings

The objective of this paper is to explain the non-decision situation on the “seat issue” of the EP by exploring the working assumptions mentioned before. In this part, after presenting the historical background, the findings of the empirical research are revealed and explicated emphasizing the relevant parts of the theoretical framework.

4.1. Historical background¹⁰

The European Parliament’s premises can be found nowadays in Strasbourg, Brussels and Luxembourg. Its staff is split between Brussels and Luxembourg: around half of the EP’s 5.000 staff members work in Brussels, the other half in Luxembourg, with a handful of staff permanently based in Strasbourg. While plenary sittings are held in Strasbourg, the additional so-called “mini plenary sessions” are held in Brussels, where committees and political groups usually, but not always meet.

This *status quo* was determined by the decision taken by the heads of the EU states at the European Council from Edinburgh, held on 11-12 December 1992. Then this agreement gained legally binding force, being introduced as a protocol annexed to the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997).

But the history of the EP’ seat is one of conflict. Initially, in the early 1952, Strasbourg was proposed to house the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community, the ancestor of the future European Commission (ECSC) and the Court of Justice in order to bring them closer to the Council of Europe which already was established in the French city right after World War II. But after complicated and intense negotiations, in the summer of 1952, the Member States decided that Luxembourg will be the “provisional working place” for the High Authority (Baillie, 1996, p. 17) and Strasbourg will host the plenary sessions of the Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community the ancestor of the European Parliament¹¹.

The city was chosen for a strong political symbolism: it was situated in a geographical region on the French-German border that was contested space in all the wars between

¹⁰ Sources: *Seat of European Parliament*, dossier of the European Parliament’s Library created by Giina Kaskla, last updated on 27 of February 2008. (Accessed on 23.04.2008)

¹¹ What is known today as the European Parliament has changed its name several times in the history. In 1951, it was the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community. After the founding of the European Economic Community and the “EURATOM”, in 1958, all three communities merge into one single Assembly, which has the name: the “European Parliamentary Assembly”. In 1962, it changed again to “European Parliament”, however, this name was first acknowledged in a treaty by the Single European Act in 1986.

the two countries, thus placing pan-European institutions there was considered the symbol of the French-German reconciliation. On the other hand, another argument, this time a practical one was in favor of Strasbourg: the Assembly could make use of the hemicycle of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe which was already based there.

The European Parliament secretariat came to be established in Luxembourg in 1952 following a decision of the Assembly, which deemed it most practical that its secretariat be sited in the same place as the High Authority and its secretariat. Ever since, the secretariat operates in Luxembourg and the plenary sessions of the Assembly were held in Strasbourg.

With the entry into force of the European Economic Community and the “EURATOM” treaties in 1958, the then Common Assembly of the two communities continued its meetings in Strasbourg, and the Secretariat remained in Luxembourg. What changed though was that the committee meetings came to be held more and more frequently in Brussels, where most of the new Community institutions were based in the meantime.

In January 1958, the foreign ministers of the Member States decided in Paris that “all the European institutions of the six countries should be located in the same place as soon as such centralization operation was actually feasible and in accordance with the provisions of the Treaties” (Extract from the Conference of Foreign Ministers, held in Paris on 6 and 7 January 1958, on the provisional location of the institutional seat, accessed on www.ena.lu). The creation of the “European district”, where to place all institutions was the vision of Jean Monnet¹², the French politician considered one of the “founding fathers” of the European Community.

The decision of the Member States was welcomed by the European Parliamentary Assembly, which in a resolution from June 1958 expressed its opinion that “for important political reasons, the Parliamentary Assembly must have its seat in the same place, which will be the location both of its permanent departments and of technical installations for its committee and plenary meetings” (European Parliamentary Assembly Resolution of 21 June 1958, in Official Journal of the European Community (OJEC) 26.07.1958, accessed on www.ena.lu).

¹² « Je n'avais pas de préférence pour tel ou tel lieu en Europe, l'important était que ce lieu fût le siège unique de toutes les institutions à créer et qu'il fut érigé en territoire européen, préfiguration du district fédéral de l'avenir. Cette proposition n'avait rien d'utopique et la Communauté eût probablement grandi dans un autre climat si les gouvernements avaient eu la sagesse de lui édifier de toute pièce une capitale et de la soustraire aux rivalités et aux influences nationales ». (Monnet 1976: 432-4)

Although, the Assembly was open for some derogation from the "single-seat principle" for the plenary meetings, if such derogation "does not jeopardize the smooth functioning of the Assembly's work" (European Parliamentary Assembly Resolution of 21 June 1958, in Official Journal of the European Community (OJEC) 26.07.1958, accessed on www.ena.lu). The Assembly nominated even three candidate cities - Brussels, Strasbourg and Milan and asked the governments to take a decision as quickly as possible. Despite this request, the Foreign Ministers Conference held on 1 July 1958 did not come to a decision on the seat.

Since that moment, for a long period of time, the governments of the Member States adopted no more than temporary solutions to the problem. Not even the Merger Treaty (1965) which gave to the three separate Communities (ECSC, EEC and EURATOM) a common Council and Commission, did not come up with a solution for the seat of these institutions. Instead the decision accompanying the Treaty confirmed Luxembourg, Brussels and Strasbourg as temporary seats of the institutions.

The founding treaties did not determine the seat of the institutions, but they have stipulated that it is up to the Council to decide on any seat issue. The EU Treaties lay down that the seats of the institutions should be determined by common accord of the Member States, thus unanimity. The right to determine where the EP meets was conferred by Article 289 EC (ex 216) and was reaffirmed and detailed by the Annex of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997.

"The seat of the institutions of the Community shall be determined by common accord of the Governments of the Member States" (Art. 77 ESCS, ex-Art. 216 EEC, now Art. 289 EC, Art. 189 EURATOM)

From the late 1960s onwards until 1979, for reasons of convenience, the Assembly held more and more part-sessions in Luxembourg. This situation radically changed with the first elected Parliament in 1979. Because the institution had more than doubled in size (410 seats compared to 198 before), the Luxembourg hemicycle was not big enough, thus all sessions were again held in Strasbourg.

"For the first few months after the elections only Strasbourg had a hemicycle big enough to seat the enlarged Parliament, in the new building of the Council of Europe. By the time Luxembourg had completed its own new hemicycle the members had got used to going to Strasbourg where they were given their own offices (facilities unavailable in Luxembourg). The majority of members had come around to the belief that it was preferable to have to travel regularly to only two cities, Brussels and Strasbourg, than to three. This evolution was of great concern of Luxembourg-based staff who went on strike over the issue" (Corbett et al, 2007, p. 33).

Despite Parliament's repeated calls on the Member States to "solve" the seat question, the European Council from Maastricht (23-24 March 1981) only decided to maintain the *status quo*. There followed various attempts to revise this situation. The period between 1981 and 1997 is marked by a series of cases before the Court of Justice of the European Communities (CJEC).

In November 1980, the Parliament gave an ultimatum to the governments with a view to forcing them to take the decisions required to ensure its smooth running before 15 June 1981. Facing the failure by the Governments of the Member States to meet the deadline, in July 1981, the Parliament adopted a resolution on the Zagari Report. In asserting its "right to meet and work where it chooses", the Assembly decided "(a) to hold its part-sessions in Strasbourg, (b) to organize the meetings of its committees and political groups as a general rule in Brussels, (c) that the operation of the Secretariat and technical services must be reviewed with a view to avoiding the need for a substantial number of staff to travel constantly" (European Parliament, Resolution on the seat of the institutions of the European Community and in particular of the European Parliament (7 July 1981), in Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC). 14.09.1981, No C 234, p. 22).

The Luxembourg government challenged this resolution of the EP on the grounds that Parliament exceeded its powers when deciding on issues that fell under the competence of the Member States. In February 1983, the Court of Justice of the European Communities rejected the appeal. It stated however that "any decision to transfer the General Secretariat of the Parliament ..., wholly or partially, de jure or de facto, would constitute a breach of Art. 4 of the Decision (from 1981)" (Court of Justice of the European Communities, Judgment of 10 February 1983, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg v European Parliament, Case 230/81, in Reports of Cases before the Court. 1983, p. 255).

In May 1983, the EP decided in another Resolution on the Von Hassel Report to relocate some of its staff to Brussels in order to divide up staff of the Secretariat "in the most rational manner between the places of work". Again, Luxembourg challenged the resolution before the CJEC, which declared Parliament's resolution null and void (Court of Justice of the European Communities, Judgment of 10 April 1984, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg v European Parliament, Case 108/83, in Reports of Cases before the Court. 1984, p. 1945).

The following resolution of the EP on the "seat issue" dates back in October 1985, when it was calling for a new building with meeting room with at least 600 seats in Brussels,

besides others for additional plenary sessions. This time, the French government challenged Parliament's decision (Cases 358/85 and 51/86). The Court ruled in favour of the EP, giving it the right to hold additional sessions outside Strasbourg. With the EP adopting the Prag Report (A2-0316/88) in January 1989, calling for a reduction in the dispersal of its work and staff, the controversy continued. Again the government of Luxembourg took the EP to the court (Cases C-213/88 and C-39/89).

"While the case was pending, French members, in particular, called for a guarantee that the holding of plenary sessions in Strasbourg would continue after the new Brussels building came on-stream, and that a new hemicycle be built in Strasbourg. In March 1990 a compromise on these lines was adopted by Parliament's Bureau, but was challenged by back-bench supporters of Brussels. At the April 1990 plenary a bitter debate culminated in a final vote in which the Parliament supported the Bureau's text" (Corbett et al, 2007, p. 35).

In November 1991, the Court of Justice dismissed the Luxembourg government's challenge. The Court stated that the Parliament's objectives as regards its internal organization justified its building projects in Brussels, and that the transfer of a number of the staff to Brussels was not on such a scale as to be in breach of previous decisions.

The Member States managed to reach a formal decision on the "seat issue" only at the Edinburgh Council in December 1992. Reacting on this decision, in a resolution, the Parliament expressed its astonishment that the European Council has acted without even consulting Parliament itself. The Assembly argued that "any decision which permanently splits the European Parliament's activities between three different Member States conflicts with the Treaties, notably Articles 5, 142 and 216 of the EEC Treaty, and is contrary to the inherent right of a Parliament elected by direct universal suffrage to determine its own working methods so as to carry out its tasks in the most effective manner". More than that, it stated that it does not consider itself bound by measures which would be contrary to the Treaties (European Parliament, "Resolution on the conclusions of the European Council meeting in Edinburgh on 11 and 12 December 1992 (16 December 1992)", in Official Journal of the European Communities (OJEC). 25.01.1993, No C 21, pp. 107). The conflict between the European Parliament and the Member States has continued thus even after this formal decision.

Despite the 12 sessions foreseen for Strasbourg, in some years in the 1990s the Parliament held only 11, arguing that August was a session-free month. The French

government again took the EP to court (Case 345/95) and it ruled in favor of the complainant. This implied for the EP that it could only hold additional part-sessions in Brussels once it had held 12 sessions in Strasbourg. Following this controversy, the Edinburgh decision was enshrined by a Protocol annexed to the Amsterdam Treaty (1997).

"The European Parliament shall have its seat in Strasbourg where the 12 periods of monthly plenary sessions, including the budget session, shall be held. The periods of additional plenary sessions shall be held in Brussels. The committees of the European Parliament shall meet in Brussels. The General Secretariat of the European Parliament and its departments shall remain in Luxembourg."

(Protocol on the location of the seats of the institutions and of certain bodies and departments of the European Communities and of Europol annexed to the Amsterdam Treaty – OJ C-341 23/12/1992)

After Amsterdam, France stopped subsidising some flights connecting Strasbourg directly with other European cities such as Munich, Rotterdam, Hamburg, London, Rome and Madrid. "This decision meant that the elected MEPs had to juggle with connecting flights and were subject to numerous delays. In protest, they decided to shorten the length of their part-sessions in Strasbourg: beginning in the year 2001, the Strasbourg part-sessions would only last for four days instead of five. France could do nothing about it, since the duration of part-sessions is not laid down by the Treaty" (Le Monde 02.10. 2002).

In 2001, nine MEPs from four political groups represented in the EP formed the Campaign for Parliamentary Reform (CPR), an informal association which proposed to improve the way how the EP works. The latest developments on the "seat issue" of the EP are connected to the actions of this group of MEPs.

Their most important initiative came in May 2006, when a Swedish Liberal, Cecilia Malmstrom (who has since become Minister for European Affairs) launched one of the first citizens' initiatives at the EU level, the so-called "One seat petition". She used an instrument that would have been foreseen in the European Constitution, but also maintained in the latest Lisbon Treaty. This initiative started in a very favorable context: the European Commissioner in charge for Communication, Margot Wallstrom (who, by the way, has the same nationality as Malmstrom) just launched an invitation for European citizens' initiatives in order to increase dialogue and debate about the future of the EU.

In a couple of months, over one million EU citizens signed the online petition for a single seat in Brussels. This was presented by the members of the CPR in front of the EP'

Petition Committee. The answer received from the then President-in-Office of the Council stated that only the Member States can revise the Protocol on the location of the seats of the institutions, thus no action was taken.

Since then, media campaigns, initiatives for changing the internal working procedures and the calendar of meetings of the EP and parliamentary questions addressed to the Council and the Commission were the most used tools of the group to keep "warm" the subject on the political agenda.

Taking advantage of the foreseen Lisbon treaty' provisions on "Citizens initiative", the petition was re-considered again by the Petition Committee of the EP for an own-initiative report. In February 2008, the Committee decided to refer the petition to Coordinators, an internal working body of the EP, in order to decide the follow up. In May 2008 the subject ended up on the table of the Conference of Presidents – which groups the party leaders from the EP. Following a vote, the Conference decided to invite the President of the EP, Hans Gert Pottering to write to the heads of government of all Member States to ask them whether they wish to reconsider the question of the seat of the Parliament, "with the precise timing of such letters being left at the President's discretion". More than that, any further steps, including a possible debate in the plenary of the EP, would be decided upon in the light of the responses to such letters (Summary of decisions of the Conference of Presidents, meeting of Thursday, 22 May 2008 – Strasbourg).

An incident occurred in August 2008 (at the very end of my research) attracted the general attention again to the "seat issue". The ceiling of the Hemicycle in Strasbourg partially collapsed. Fortunately there were no human injuries, but still due to this exceptional event, the first plenary session from September that, normally, was planned to be held there was canceled by the Presidency of the EP and moved to Brussels.

The news has been greeted with glee among the "supporters" of the "one seat" campaign and the incident prompted renewed calls to scrap the Strasbourg seat – a point to which we will return. It will be interesting to observe the follow-up of the events: what will be the position of the Member States on the letter of Pottering, and how this latest incident with the Hemicycle will influence, if at all the "fate" of the "seat issue".

4.2. Why has the "single seat" still not been agreed?

Reviewing the history of the "seat issue", it is clear that the topic was considered a "serious" problem and it was on, what John Kingdon calls, the "governmental agenda" from the early beginnings of the European project. What was peculiar for this case is the inability of the political actors (the Member States) to reach an agreement for almost 40 years; when they have managed to adopt a solution, this was all the time only a "provisional" or "temporary" one.

The continuous postponement of the well-debated "seat issue" from the early 1950s till the early 1990s shows that, although it was an important problem for the decision makers, still it was not considered "urgent" enough to be solved.

The key moment was the Edinburgh Council in 1992. At this time, after 40 years of dispute, surprisingly, the Member States succeeded to agree. A couple of years later, the "seat issue" re-appeared on the decisional agenda in the negotiations for the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) when the agreement was attached as a Protocol to the Treaty, this giving it legal force. This was the single moment when the "seat issue" managed to get to the decisional agenda of the EU.

After being "put in stone" in the Amsterdam Treaty, the "seat issue" of the EP faded from attention for a couple of years. It was re-discovered after 1999, when a new Parliament started its mandate after pan-European elections. A new attitude was visible starting with the constituency of the CRP group in 2001 formed of newly elected MEPs dedicated to be actively involved in internal reforms of the EP. The "seat issue" returned to the agenda again as an internal affair of the EP, as it was all the time considered. An opportunity for change occurred in 2006, with the debate on the future of the EU, initiated after the failure of the Constitutional Treaty. This was the "policy window" for the reformist group to expand the conflict and to involve the general public. Using the on-line petition campaign, the "supporters" hoped that this will lead later on to the change of the venue.

Their motivation to take over the "seat issue" is not difficult to be established: it is a serious political theme which, for long time, was neglected, but which in the new context started to look appealing. It conferred them important visibility, and, in the same time, solving the problem - having just one seat in their view - would also have a positive impact on the work of the EP.

The re-emergence of the “seat issue” should be linked also to the changing position of the EP in the EU decision making framework. The Parliament became a prestigious organization with growing powers. For a long period of time, it was never treated on equal footing with the other EU institutions, like the Council or the Commission. The Assembly merely had advisory and supervisory powers as opposed to today’s full co-legislative competence. Starting from the early 2000s, with increased visibility and with the progressive extension of the “co-decision procedure”, the EP started to be considered more and more like equal stakeholder in the decision making process of the EU, not only a “decorative” assembly with just consultative role. The individual MEPs started to sense the strengthening of their positions and the political weight of the EP for all EU citizens, thus they did not hesitate to use it and play on it by pushing the “seat issue” as high as possible on the EU agenda. Perhaps this issue was considered more than just a “pet” problem for most of the actors involved in conflict, not only for the “supporters”, but especially among the “opponents”.

In this specific case, to push their “pet” problem on the decisional agenda, the “supporters” were using several strategies. But in their attempt, they had to face the counter-strategies employed by the other side of the agenda conflict, the “opponents”. All this strategies and actions are further developed and analyzed.

4.2.1. Findings regarding the Problem Stream

First of all, the problem delimitations of the “supporters” were challenged by the delimitations of the “opponents”; from here a moderately structured problem (means) resulted, which implies a strong conflict on the values involved. Second, the “image” of the problem had a major influence: the “seat issue” was considered serious enough, but less urgent to be put on the decisional agenda.

4.2.1.1. The image of the “seat issue”

The working assumptions were confirmed by the “accessed” data which strongly emphasize the connection between these variables. As it was summarized by one interview respondent, there are two major factors that determine the ranking of the issues on the decisional agenda of the EU: the importance or how serious is the problem and its urgency.

“We always have to take into consideration two aspects: how important is it, the relevance of the issue. The other thing is how urgent is it in terms of time. It is very important to deal with the very relevant and very urgent issues, but some things are not

so important but they are very urgent at the moment, because something has to be done. So you always have to combine and of course, you also have deadlines from the other, external actors."

The empirical findings also show that, although it received and still receives considerable attention from political actors, in terms of relevance, the "seat issue" was never the most "hot" issue at the EU level. There were all the time more important other issues on which the EU decision makers were focused. When the research was conducted (April – July 2008), the attention of decision makers was focused on general topics such as the future of the European construction in the light of the Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, or more specific, but urgent issues like food prices, climate change or energy security. Even when institutional reforms of the EU were discussed and negotiated for the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) in 2007, for example, the "seat issue" of the EP was neglected in order not to threaten the outcome of the negotiations on other institutional topics. The latest developments, confirm again this assumption. In May 2008, as it was presented in the historical sub-chapter, the subject was discussed by the Conference of Presidents from the EP. This political body decided to leave total "discretion" to the president of the EP to send the letters to the Member States, thus it is up to this political actor until when he will postpone the problem.

With the "urgency" of the problem one step further was made towards considering the other major element that plays a crucial role for the "serious" consideration of an issue on the decisional agenda. It is not only about the nature, or the "image" of the problem, but also the broader political context; this has also a strong influence on the access of the issue to the decisional agenda. It counts not only, "what" is the issue that requires attention, but also "when" is it requiring that attention, or the timing of the issue. John Kingdon highlighted the importance of time in his original model, which proved to be relevant and decisive also in the case of the "seat issue" of the EP.

In Kingdon's terms this would relate also to the third stream, the political one, but also to what he calls the "policy window" that "critical" time, when an issue can gain access to the decisional agenda. We will consider these factors separately, so here it is enough just to say that for the "seat issue" the time did come yet.

4.2.1.2. Strategic use of problem delimitations

William Riker described the manipulation of dimensions as one of the most frequent political manipulation strategies. What attributes of the problem are more relevant is purely a strategic decision made by the interested political actors.

In any agenda conflict, thus also in the case of the “seat issue” strategic problem delimitation is considered as one of the most effective “weapons”. Both sides try to manipulate the dimensions of the complex problem: the “supporters” of the “seat issue” have one perspective and define the problem based on one set of values and interpretations, while their “opponents” are insisting on totally different characteristics of the problem. Stressing issue characteristics that buttress the opponent is included by Cobb & Ross in the arsenal of medium cost blocking strategies used by “opponents” in agenda conflicts.

In the following we will map the different strategic problem delimitations, analyzing the political rhetoric by referring to Deborah Stone’s “policy paradox” concept (2002).

4.2.1.2.1 Competing problem delimitations

The study identified five main problem framings - some of them having also some variants - used by both the “supporters” and by the “opponents”. Each of them is emphasizing different attributes of the problem. The economic, the environmental and the practical problem delimitations are the favorites of the “supporters”, while the political-symbolic and the legal problem delimitations are mostly used by their “opponents”.

The very first is the **economical framing**. It is used by those who argue that maintaining three seats of the EP is very costly for the budget of the EU, and thus it is a burden for the European citizens.

“Firstly, it is a waste of money and damaging to the institution’s credibility. According to the European Parliament’s Secretary-General’s report on the cost of maintaining three places of work, the additional cost to the taxpayer will be over € 200 million per annum following enlargement. Citizens rightly ask themselves why taxpayers’ money is spent on unnecessary travel costs and a building in Strasbourg that stands empty for over 300 days a year. Many citizens see the three locations as yet another example of the expensive bureaucracy of the EU.” (www.ep-reform.eu/about.php)

There is another economic framing, but this one is almost not mentioned at all in the public discourse of the politicians. But this *hidden* problem framing was confirmed by all interviews. The monthly travel from Brussels to Strasbourg and back gives important **financial advantages for the city of Strasbourg**.

“Imagine thousands of people travelling to your city one week per month and the money they are spending there during their staying for hotels, restaurants, shops, travel, etc. For the city of Strasbourg, but also for private companies the monthly plenary sessions of the Parliament represent an important source of income.”

Another hidden economic framing envisages what some respondents called “**money-pocketing**” of some MEPs. Like the previous framing, affirming it in public it might touch on credibility of those involved, but is also might bear upon the whole assembly, thus it is included in the category of “what can be done but not said” (Brunsson 1993).

“Some MEPs use Strasbourg sessions to increase their income. The money that they receive from the Parliament to cover their costs is all the time more that they actually can spend there, so at the end of the sessions, the budget of the MEP might increase with a couple of hundred of Euros.”¹³

The second problem delimitation used by the “supporters” envisages **practical** things like organization of the work of the EP or travelling arrangements.

“In a way, we can define it as an administrative problem; that is how it is mostly perceived. The main disadvantage is that people do not have so much time, but on the other side the days are very long start at 8 and finish at 10 in the evening, so you can always find a moment to see somebody, to meet people. In a way, this intensity is nice, there is a little bit of special atmosphere, but on the other hand I don’t think that counterbalances the whole negative side of the travel, costs; the city becomes completely overcrowded. If you are an assistant or stagiare, or just new in the house, you can hardly find a place where to stay, there are many practical problems. For us, it is really a more practical-administrative question. I think it would really facilitate our lives if we would not have to do that travel every month.”

Having more than one seat is also considered a cause for the **inefficiency** of the EP.

“The constant travelling makes it difficult for MEPs to do their job properly. Strasbourg is difficult to reach, and most staff and facilities stay behind in Brussels. The European Parliament is now a full-time Parliament like every other Parliament, and an arrangement which may have worked in the early years of the Union’s existence, when the Parliament was a part-time assembly, is no longer workable.”

¹³ This framing looks relevant taking into consideration that during the internship done at the European Parliament, one of the main internal debates was around the non-transparent use of money allocated for the MEP that leads to numerous abuses and illegal money-pocketing.

The latest and one of the most used problem delimitation is the “**green argument**”, very fashionable these days at the EU level, when all political actors are concerned about climate change.

“The truth is that the constant travelling to Strasbourg is environmentally unsustainable.”

“The Strasbourg operation imposes a very large climate change burden. There are reasons why Parliament has evolved this way but the urgent need to take action on climate change requires a change of plan. Not to change the historical operational practice sends a very clear message to millions of citizens and thousands of businesses that they need not to try very hard to change behavior if this change is inconvenient. This would be a serious mistake at a critical juncture in the climate change policy debate. The conclusion that follows from this is that on climate change grounds the European Parliament should concentrate all its activities in Brussels and bring the Strasbourg operation to an end.”

The main argument for the “opponents” to maintain the existing *status quo* is the **political** delimitation and it relates to the **symbolic** heritage of Strasbourg city.

“With Brussels, with Luxembourg, the European Parliament spreads its activities between three places of work. We accept this unusual arrangement as a legacy of history. As regards Strasbourg, I would merely say this place has a specific purpose, one imbued with the spirit and memory of Europe, which the Amsterdam Treaty has now set in stone. It was Lord Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Minister of the United Kingdom, who, in 1949, almost exactly 50 years ago, was the first to suggest Strasbourg as a powerful symbol of a new Europe in which peace had been restored...He argued, and I quote, that ‘this great city, which has borne witness to the stupidity of the human race...should become a symbol of the unity of Europe...an ideal place in which to pursue this great project in an atmosphere of good faith, rather than domination’.” (Speech by Mrs. Nicole Fontaine, President of the European Parliament, at the inauguration of the Louise Weiss Building, Strasbourg, 14 December 1999 – Source: www.ena.lu)

The city of Strasbourg is presented not only the symbol of the French-German reconciliation and the unity of Europe, but also as the symbol of the European **democracy**: the Parliament should stay closer to the European citizens and it neither “politically nor literally” should not stay in the shadow of the European Council and the European Commission from Brussels.

Besides the political framing, the opponent’s most powerful argument relies on the provisions of the EU Treaties. This represents the **legal** problem delimitation.

“Strasbourg is not a gift, it is in the treaty.”

“From legalistic perspective, Strasbourg would be the right decision for a one seat parliament. The treaty is pretty clear”.

What the empirical findings show regarding the problem stream, is, first, the major influence of the “image” of the “seat issue”: it is considered a serious problem, but it is viewed as less urgent to be addressed, thus is neglected from the decisional agenda. For some, it is an “internal” matter for the EP to arrange its own working procedures; at the same time, the venue is Treaty change, which gives veto power to MS as interested MEPs.

Second, the empirical findings clearly demonstrate that the “supporters” had problems in the coupling of the streams because the “opponents” used as well strategic problem delimitation to counter-attack the supporters’ actions. Both sides actually were using political rhetoric to manipulate these problem delimitations. Some suggestive examples are given below.

4.2.1.3 Analysis of the political rhetoric

In politics, each word and sentence are not matters of simple coincidence, but of a strategic thinking. Symbols, stories, metaphors, and labels are all weapons in the armamentarium of the politicians (Stone, 2002, p. 156).

The main “**causal story**” used by the “supporters” is that the European Parliament, and the EU, in general will lose their credibility on environmental issues if they continue the “travelling circus” to Strasbourg.

“Not to change the historical operational practice sends a very clear message to millions of citizens and thousands of businesses that they need not to try very hard to change behaviour if this change is inconvenient. This would be a serious mistake at a critical juncture in the climate change policy debate. The conclusion that follows from this is that on climate change grounds the European Parliament should concentrate all its activities in Brussels and bring the Strasbourg operation to an end.”

Their story challenges the existing set of rules and institutions; in the same time it is the **story of decline**.

“Sending the EP to Strasbourg is more than a money issue: it’s about keeping the EP weak and unimportant.”

The “opponents” have their own story of decline if the *status quo* is changing and the EU decides to remove the Parliament from Strasbourg. It is mainly an anti-Brussels argument:

“Throughout Europe, Brussels has become the symbol of all the EU failings: centralization, aloofness from citizen, lack of legitimacy, lack of credibility. One of the reasons why the ‘Brussels consensus’ has been rejected by European citizens (in recent referendums and elections) is the inbreeding of the EU elite, whereby politicians, civil servants, stagiaries, lobbyists, all live together, disconnected from the everyday life of ordinary citizens. This assessment is not a prejudice or a caricature. It is based on personal experience.” (www.taurillon.org/For-one-seat-of-the-European)

“As every country in Europe decentralizes, there is no good reason why the European Union should destroy its existing decentralized structure, and go against the general movement of history. History teaches that concentrations of powers increase the risk of abuse of powers.” (www.democratieeuropeenne.eu)

A variety of **metaphors** is also used. The monthly commuting to Strasbourg is considered a “travelling circus”. A Maltese liberal MEP said that the arrangement as travelling to and from Strasbourg is a waste of time and money, while a British socialist mentions the current three seats system as “schizophrenic”, damaging to the reputation of the EU. In his view, the constant travelling is seen as a “logistical nightmare”. Other metaphors used describing the situation are: “wastefulness of the EU”, “expensive mistake” and “hypocrisy over the EU’s bold environmental targets when travel between the two cities leaves a huge carbon footprint”. The city of Strasbourg is labeled “Stresbourg” to describe what the staff and the MEPs have to “endure every month when they move to the second seat” of the EP.

On the other hand, concentrating all EU institutions in Brussels is described as “ghettoisation”, while Strasbourg is called “the Capital of Democracy” or “the heart of Europe”.

Numbers are used mostly in the stories of the "supporters" who rely on official documents of the European Parliament and on scientific studies to show how "wasteful" is the monthly migration from Brussels to Strasbourg and back, and how "damaging" is it for the environment.

The Green group from the EP commissioned an "independent" scientific report full of numbers that supports the one seat arrangement. It says that the European Parliament's monthly commute to Strasbourg generates 20,000 tones of CO₂ per year. It also estimates the "financial penalties" of the duplication of the facilities to be over 200 million Euros each year. (European Parliament: a study of the environmental costs of the European Parliament two-seat operation, Eco-Logica Ltd. April 2007)

"This is a large figure, an avoidable figure, and it risk undermining parliament's leadership on climate change", declared one leader of the Green from the EP. The report is part of the green MEPs' push to put the controversial issue of parliament's two seats back on the agenda. It was described as "the first robust evidence-based analysis of the environmental cost of the European parliament's operations." (TheParliament.com, 24.05.2007)

Metaphoric reasoning or seeing a likeness between two things is also successfully employed.

"Last week's European Parliament voted to ban patio heaters has caught the attention of the press...While a ban of patio heaters would be a small step in tackling climate change, it would be nevertheless be a significant one...of course calls for the EU to get its own house in order are completely justified. The European Parliament is forced against its will to travel to Strasbourg 12 times a year. The trip may not contribute much in the great scheme of things but the point is that everyone must make changes to battle climate change. Banning patio heaters requires personal sacrifices, while ending this monthly migration would not even be a sacrifice as far as most MEPs are concerned." (www.richardcorbett.org.uk)

The "opponents" consider that *"physically separating EU institutions is one of the answers to this new eurosclerosis we are in. As South Africa rightly understood with its three capital cities (Pretoria/Government, Cape Town/Legislative, Bloemfontein/Judiciary), it would clarify in the public debate who one is talking about and prevent journalistic shortcuts such as 'Brussels decided...'"* (Emanuel Vallens on www.taurillon.org/For-one-seat-of-the-European)

At discourse level, both sides involved in the agenda conflict present themselves as the true guardians of the "**interests**" of the European citizens. Both are dedicated to showing that a favored course of action benefits society as a whole and imposes costs on no one in particular, or that cost is so little that is worthy to pay it.

"The Campaign for European democracy is a new and independent information and lobbying campaign to keep the European Parliament in Strasbourg, not for the selfish interests of Strasbourg, but rather in the name of a better European democracy..." One of the main goals of the campaign is *"to bring Europe and its citizens closer together"*.

Analyzing the political rhetoric in the terms of what Deborah Stone calls "**decisions**", each party presents his preferred solution as the only possible alternative; this is mentioned in the literature as the "Hobson's choice". For the "supporters" a change of the existing set-up is just recommended (for all the reasons presented above), while the "opponents" have a totally different alternative: no change at all, keeping the *status quo* is the natural solution.

What results from here is a "moderately structured problem (means)" (Hoppe & Hisschemoller, 2001). There is consensus on what kind of knowledge is relevant to solve the problem, but there is an ongoing dissent with regard to the values at stake. For the "supporters", efficiency, environment, credibility seems the most important values, while the "opponents" are using a totally different set of values such as democracy or decentralization. The "hidden" problem dimensions should be mentioned here as well: "money pocketing", the economic interests of Strasbourg, and keeping the EP weak not giving it the right to decide upon its own organization.

4.2.2. Findings regarding the Policy Stream

The policy stream includes a "soup" ideas and alternatives that compete to win acceptance. In the case of the "seat issue", the findings show that no such viable and accepted alternative is available.

The "supporters" have initiated several proposals, trying to what John Kingdon calls "soften up" the political community and the larger public, getting them used to their new ideas and building acceptance. The proposals of the "supporters" included possible alternative uses for the buildings currently occupied by parliament in Strasbourg. The CPR group wants to include a future EU diplomatic service or a European technology institute there, both of which would be based in the city permanently, bringing more economic benefits than the assembly (TheParliament.com, 12.11.2007). Another

"supporter" proposed an exchange between Brussels and Strasbourg: the Parliament would move to Brussels, while the European Council summits that are held in Brussels to be organized in Strasbourg. On the short list of proposal of the "supporters" there are also included: the head quarter for the future EU army, or a pan-European University.

None of all these proposals did include any technical feasibility and value acceptability. They were just produced in an attempt to compensate France and the city of Strasbourg for their eventual "loss". Any of them was not subject of a serious political debate and analysis.

The "opponents" did not even take them into serious consideration, but proposed totally different solutions: to keep the *status quo*, or to have just Strasbourg and not Brussels as the single seat for the EP, a very pervasive blocking strategy. The French President, Nicolas Sarkozy called the twin-seat arrangement as non-negotiable and part of Europe's founding balance. He has said that axing Strasbourg is "out of the question". The French leader said he would not debate the controversial issue under any circumstances. (TheParliament.com, 24.05.2007)

A French socialist member, former mayor of Strasbourg nowadays MEP defends the Strasbourg seat, saying that *"axing it is not a solution. It is important that everything is not concentrated in one city, that is, Brussels. Rather than moving parliament to Brussels, I think we should be considering moving parliament to Strasbourg. That would be a good idea."* (TheParliament.com, 12.11.2007)

From the findings it is clear that there is no developed and accepted solution which makes even more difficult the attempt of the "supporters" to couple the streams and to push the "seat issue" on to the decisional agenda.

4.2.3. Findings for the Political Stream

What is happening in the political stream it is decisive for the success or failure of any initiative. In the original model, John Kingdon made reference to the importance of the "national mood", a very broad concept that wanted to include the general attitudes of the large public. Applying the "Multiple Streams Framework" to the EU context, the researcher faced a structural difficulty: there is no "European mood" in the sense that Kingdon described it for the politics of the United States. At the EU level there is not yet configured any single "European mood". The fundamental difference comes from the fact that actually there is no European "demos" that could originate such a "mood". Instead there is, nowadays a puzzle of 27 "national moods", sometimes consensual,

sometimes conflicting ones, so it is very difficult to "sense" what would be the "European mood" for any specific subject, including the "seat issue" case.

The more than 1 million on-line signatures gathered in favor of moving the EP to Brussels is an important number, but at the EU level which has more than 450 million of inhabitants, this number is still very low and it needs be handled with great attention. There is no information available about how these signatures were spread over the Member States, thus caution is recommended regarding their capacity to represent the entire EU.

One of the main pan-European weeklies, "European Voice" commissioned in May 2006 an EU-wide opinion poll which suggests that the majority of the citizens favor a one seat set-up for the EP and that would be in Brussels. 68% of the respondents of the survey believe the European Parliament should have just one seat, and 76% of those believe that the seat should be in Brussels (European Voice Press Release: EU Citizens want one European Parliament seat in Brussels, 30.05.2006 - www.europeanvoice.com).

Both examples would suggest that the citizens' "mood" is one favorable to the "supporters", but this assumption has to be taken into consideration with high reserves, for reasons of representativeness.

There is hardly any balance in the perception of the European public that would be tilting one way or another and thus directly would affect the likelihood of the issue's prominence or obscurity. The conclusion is then twofold: it is hard to obtain a favorable "mood" at the pan-European level, and even if the supporters would manage to get it, this would be not a very strong support. The first difficulty for the "supporters" in the political stream has its roots in this situation.

The political turnover is neither favorable to those who would like to change the *status quo*. The main leader of the "supporters" – Cecilia Malmstrom has quit the group going back for national politics. Although this movement weakened their position, there is still a chance that they could turn it into an opportunity in a later stage¹⁴.

On the other hand, the "opponents" are well represented in high political positions from where they can influence the outcome. They are in considerable number inside the EP; they constitute the majority in the two most important political groups - the European

¹⁴ We are coming back to this discussion when analyzing the "Policy Windows".

People Party – European Democrats (EPP-ED) and the European Socialist Party (ESP), but they also have influential positions in the remaining political groups.

According to the theory, the combination of the national mood with the turnover in government exerts the most powerful effect on agendas. In the "seat issue", as it is obvious by now, both elements had a negative effect on actions of the "supporters", favoring the *status quo* bias.

The unfavorable political context is determined not only by the lack of "European mood", or by the negative effect of the political turn-over. The fact that the "seat issue" is perceived by the political actors as not that urgent to be tackled or the "image" of the problem has an important contribution as well on the missing of the coupling. "*As long as it does not hurt too badly, people can live with it*", frankly concluded one interview respondent.

4.2.3.1. The Venue of action

Until now, the research showed how the "image" of the problem, the definition of the problem, the lack of accepted solutions to the problem, and the general political context in which the problem is discussed and decided may have an influence on the success of the "seat issue" to be put on the decisional agenda. For a better understanding of all these factors, the analysis should also focus on the "venue" of the action, or the "locus" where the "seat issue" has to be decided.

According to the EU Treaty, this has to be done by the Member States using the rule of unanimity. There are two main "venues" where such a decision could be adopted: the Council or an Intergovernmental Conference for Treaty revision. Both favor the *status quo* bias.

The Edinburgh Agreement (1992) and then the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) clearly show that the choice of the decision makers was to keep the *status quo*. This was challenged by the "supporters" who use several strategies in order to *push back the seat issue on the decisional agenda*.

One of the first strategies was "conflict expansion". The changing of the "venue" where the decision has to be made was the goal of the "supporters". As Jones & Baumgartner (2005) have mentioned, conflict expansion to new venues can occur in three non-exclusive ways: the first one is the classic loser appeal strategy. The mass public was involved in order to change the attitudes of those responsible for a decision. The

"supporters" launched intense pan-European press campaigns in order to increase the awareness of the European public. This was also useful for keeping the issue "warm" on the political agenda. In all their public appearances, the supporters highlighted the idea that the "seat issue" is an important topic for all European citizens. "...*the Strasbourg issue is something that people care about all over Europe.*"

In May 2006, the launching of the first European Citizens Initiative, the www.oneseat.eu campaign has to be noted as the most important conflict expansion action of the "supporters"; it started in a very favorable context that was already explained. The more than 1 million on-line signatures gathered in a very short period of time were presented as a proof showing the involvement of the public in favor of the "supporters" of the "one seat issue".

An increased number of MEPs were also involved: since 2001, the initial number of nine (9) MEPs who founded the Campaign for Parliament Reform (CPR) was gradually extended to more than 100 in 2008. The members of the group wished to raise their visibility attacking the arrangement and trying to expand their own jurisdictions. The objective of the "one seat" campaign is not only to "stop the monthly travelling circus of the European Parliament", but to give to the European Parliament the "sovereign right to decide its own working arrangements"(www.ep-reform.eu). This basically means that the MEPs want to re-direct the problem to a different "venue": from the table of the heads of governments to the plenary of EP.

Another alternative venue is also suggested: the introduction of the "qualified majority" voting system instead of unanimity in the Council in deciding on the seats of the EU institutions. "*This would be in line with the general move towards qualified majority voting in most areas*", argue the members of CPR.

Changing the venue of the action, or "venue shopping", closely relates to changing the "policy image" (Baumgartner & Jones 1991).

Putting the actual arrangements in a negative light, to affect the "policy image" is the main strategy used by the "one seat" supporters.

"Something that was once a very positive symbol of the European Union (n.n. Strasbourg) reuniting France and Germany has now become a negative symbol – of wasting money, bureaucracy and the insanity of the Brussels institutions" ("From words to action – interview with Margot Wallstrom, European Commission Vice-President" in E-Sharp Magazine, September-October 2006).

“It is a very political question, but I would describe the problem that all rational factors speak in favour of having one seat and also speak in favour of having that in Brussels, but the decision making of the EU requires unanimity and France is not ready to give away its seat, and Luxembourg not as strongly, but they are also not very happy to give away the seat. So that is the main problem, I mean logic is one thing but decision making is different.”

“Ridiculous” is the more often used metaphor used by respondents in the interviews, but also by other political actors as the press monitoring shows it.

“Everybody hates to go to Strasbourg, because in my opinion it is a waste of money, waist of time, and energy. Sometimes it becomes really ridiculous that you have a meeting there and you travel five hours there, and five hours back.”

4.2.4. Findings regarding the “Policy Window”

The theory says that “policy windows”, those critical moments in time that are an opportunity for advocates of proposals to push attention to their problems, opens mainly because of the appearance of compelling problems, or by happenings in the political stream.

As it was already highlighted, the “seat issue” was considered a serious problem, but not as forceful as other problems, thus this characteristic of the problem did not help too much the “supporters” in their attempt. The happenings in the political were neither too favorable.

For the “opponents” the main “policy window” appeared at the Edinburgh Council when after political bargaining they have managed to have a formal, favorable outcome, which then was “put in stone” in the Amsterdam Treaty (1997).

For the “supporters” the first opportunity to gain more attention after Amsterdam occurred with the launching of the “Citizens Initiative” by the European Commission. Though, to challenge the *status quo*, and to bring the “seat issue” back on the decisional agenda, this was not enough. Another “policy window” occurred in 2007 with the Intergovernmental Conference organized at the end of the two years “reflection period” after the failure of the Constitutional Treaty. The “supporters” were aware of the high importance of the moment, thus they concentrated all their efforts to push the problem on to the agenda.

The German Liberal Party initiated a campaign calling the European citizens to support the re-opening of the discussions about the “seat issue”. “IGC must discuss the issue of the two seats. The FDP (n.n. the German Liberal Party) demands that the IGC puts the question of the seat of the European Parliament on the agenda. This ridiculous travelling circus must come to an end”, is stated in a campaign leaflet.

In the European Parliament, the CPR group even proposed an amendment for the report of the EP which formed the basis of the Parliament’s opinion on the subjects discussed at the IGC. This Report of the European Parliament is required before the IGC can start work. It is the only way for the MEPs to influence the agenda of the IGC, thus it was important for the “supporters” to have the seat issue included in this report. The amendment called for the “mandate of the IGC to be extended to include a change in the seat of the European Parliament from Strasbourg to Brussels and of the European Council (summit) from Brussels to Strasbourg” (European Parliament – News – Treaty Reform: Parliament gives green light to Intergovernmental Conference, 11.07.2007, source: www.europarl.europa.eu). It was defeated with 280 votes in favour, 370 against with 33 abstentions.

One political actor directly involved explained the vote: *“We basically rejected it because we felt that it will be no chance of getting it through. The whole IGC was very intense, very difficult and to reach a compromise was extremely difficult, so part of the work of the German Presidency at that time was to take controversial issues off the agenda and to deal with controversial issues as early as possible and take everything away that doesn’t need to be discussed. The debate was so much heated that, at that moment, it was decided that we take hot issues off the agenda in order to have a solution and that was also the case with the one seat, because that would be hot and France would just block the whole Treaty so therefore there was no chance to put it into that package”*, explains the vote one directly involved actor.

The IGC – the venue where the Treaty provisions could be changed – organized under the German Presidency of the Council in June 2007 was a lost opportunity for them. The main reason why the window was closed is the participants’ failure to get action. This was influenced by the “image” of the problem, the “time” factor, the general political context, the position of the “supporters” who were in a weaker position than their opponents, the missing of the available alternative and the change in personnel, as it was already shown.

Actually, this change in personnel, more specifically the case of the Swedish Liberal MEP who left the Parliament taking over a ministerial office back home, is viewed by all interview respondents as a new opportunity in the future for the “supporters”. In the

second half of 2009, Sweden will hold the Presidency of the EU and this is the time when the former leader of the one seat campaign, Cecilia Malmström would be a leading actor again, so she could push the issue on the top priorities. They also could use issue linkage considering the Swedish Government priorities. The overarching themes for the period 1 July - 31 December 2009 are climate, energy and environment (www.sweden.gov.se), thus the "green argument" of the "supporters" could gain power then.

4.2.4.1. Access to agenda

The "seat issue" was approached most of the time in its history more as an internal problem of the Assembly, than a subject to be decided by the Member States, yet the EU treaty sets the Council as venue of decision. Using Cobb & Ross (1997) terminology on agenda setting, the "seat issue" originated with a narrow group of MEPs and was placed on the formal agenda with little attention from the public. Initially, the "push" that got the attention of decision makers to be focused on the "seat issue" came from their personal experience. MEPs were unsatisfied with the existing arrangements, thus they have decided to challenge the *status quo* and to re-open the discussion about the opportunity of the three-seat system.

"Mobilization" was used only later on, more closely to our days, after the "supporters" faced several failures to gain access to the decisional agenda using "inside access". In 2006, they have launched a campaign to gain public attention for the "seat issue"; by this they tried to gain entry to the formal agenda and then to mobilize support once the issue is actively being considered.

The latest developments in the case indicate a different type of factor that could be used for the same purpose. The partial collapse of the Strasbourg Hemicycle occurred in August 2008 might be exploited as a "**focusing event**" by the "supporters". Reacting on the event, one member of the CRP group immediately took advantage of the situation. "*We should turn catastrophe into opportunity and meet continuously in Brussels*" (EU Observer, 22.08.2008).

In a cynical e-mail addressed to all MEPs and staff of the assembly, another "supporter" evoked the Divinity to support their claim.

"Perhaps the 'gods' are sending us a signal that they are displeased about all the waste of time, money, energy in maintaining a two seat EP and its high time now to close the Parliament down in Strasbourg (or rather find a new use for the building) and have one

seat in Brussels – as over a million EU citizens have petitioned for and which so far sadly has fallen on deaf ears.”

Combined with the opportunity of the Swedish presidency and the high role to be played then by the former leader of CPR, Cecilia Malmstrom, this focusing event might help to some extent the cause of the “supporters”; the future will tell us how much exactly...

4.2.5. Findings regarding the “Entrepreneurs”

The missing of the coupling of the streams is caused not only by the situation in the streams, or by time or contextual factors, but also by the quality of the “entrepreneurs”. The paper made references to the “supporters” and “opponents” involved in the agenda conflict. They are what Kingdon called “policy entrepreneurs”. But who are actually these political entrepreneurs?

4.2.5.1. The “Supporters”

The “supporters” group is mainly concentrated inside the EP. They are represented in almost all political groups, but more concentrated in two of them: the Liberals (ALDE) and the Greens (EFA). Here they form not only a majority, but also hold high positions which allow them to influence the politics of the whole group. In the European Popular Party – European Democrats group, the largest group in the EP, the number of the “supporters” is quite limited, as well as in the Socialist group, the second largest group.

Regarding their nationality, as a general rule, a North-South split might be observed: going down on the map from North, the fewer supporters could be found. The “supporters” from inside the EP are mostly Swedish, Danish, Finish, British, Irish, Dutch, Belgium, while the Germans are already more divided. The French and Luxembourg MEPs are clearly against any change. The situation is not so clear with the Spanish and Italian ones, but they would tend to favor the *status quo*. The Central and Eastern European MEPs appear undecided and mixed up, thus it is difficult to draw a clear “demarcation” line.

The “supporters” group is backed by the majority of the staff members of the EP for whom the monthly travelling is the most problematic from logistical and from financial point of view.

This group is completed by “external” allies as well. The European Commission, as an organization adopted a neutral position in the “seat issue” trying to stay outside any debate. President Jose Manuel Barroso has refused to comment on the “one seat”

petition, since he cannot act upon it. Only a few “rebel” commissioners expressed publicly their discontent regarding the actual arrangements. The Swedish Commissioner, Margot Wallstrom was already quoted; the other one is Trade Commissioner, Peter Mandelson (UK) who declared that: “I like the parliament in Strasbourg. But it is very hard to justify the cost” (www.euractiv.com/en/future-eu/wallstrom-strasbourg-negative-symbol/article-157474).

The “supporters” from the EP are not backed, officially, by any Member State of the EU. The position of these remained unclear. A clearer picture and an official position is possible to have only after the Heads of Government will respond to the letter of the President of the EP, Hans Gert Pottering. Until then, the findings have shown that, excepting France and Luxembourg, all the other Governments preferred not to be involved. Even the Belgium Government that is direct stakeholder had a passive attitude compared to how the French and Luxembourg officials acted.

4.2.5.2. The “Opponents”

The main “opponent” of any change in the *status quo* is obviously, the Government of France. Along the history, the French politicians attached such a great significance to Strasbourg, viewed as the true Capital of Europe that the whole “seat issue” became an international prestige problem for them.

France was very active and supporting the city of Strasbourg, not only politically, but also financially. Luxembourg adopted a low profile; it is playing on path dependency and good bilateral relations, on what the governmental officials are playing when it comes about a decision on the seat of the EU institutions (Baillie 1996). Belgium was more passive for several reasons: the inhabitants of Brussels accepted only after a long struggle the housing of the EU institutions, viewed as affecting their urban life; Brussels already concentrated many other important EU institutions, including the Council and the Commission, but also the Committee of Regions, or the European Social and Economic Committee, thus its interest to have just for itself the seat of the European Parliament is not a high chip; not at least, the Belgium Government faced serious internal political problems which for sure affected its commitment and coordination regarding such a low issue¹⁵.

The French MEPs are backing their government and block any initiative from inside the EP. They are represented in all the political groups and they act like disciplined soldiers

¹⁵ The Walloon population of Belgium (the French speaking community) cherishes the implicit support of France; hence this also might explain to some extent the much more “passive” attitude of the Belgium officials.

of their country. Inside the EP, they held high positions in the two most important groups, the Christian Democrats (the chairman of the group is a Frenchman born in Strasbourg) and the Socialists, so they can easily control any decision of the House.

The "Opponents" are not only influential, but they constitute the majority in these groups, especially in the EPP-ED group where for the French and German MEPs the symbolical significance of Strasbourg is still important.

Luxembourg and its MEPs are also in the group of the "opponents" because a new discussion and negotiation on the Strasbourg seat would automatically raise the question of the Luxembourg seat, thus they oppose any change in order not to risk anything.

The City of Strasbourg should be also mentioned between the most important "opponents". The local administration made important efforts to constantly improve the work facilities and is very active lobbying decision makers. The administration is backed by the local business organizations and NGOs for who it is vital to have an important EU institution in their city.

While the "supporters" seems that value more economic efficiency and greener environment, for the "opponents", especially for those coming from the "founding" states of the EU, political symbolism appears more important. For the newer Member States, like those from South and East, this symbolism does not have the same strong meaning. This could be an acceptable and plausible conclusion which still requires future research¹⁶.

4.2.5.3. Political delineation

Inside the European Parliament, the "seat issue" is a good example when political delineation is not going along pan-European groups' lines and it is not based on party ideology, but it is influenced by national and individual interests and preferences.

The political behavior of the MEPs is determined in a significant way by their subordination. Hix et al (2007) suggest that each of them is in effect "the agent of two principals: his or her national party, and his or her European political group" (Hix et al, 2007, p. 134) Based on the results of their research, Hix and his colleagues conclude that MEPs are more beholden to their national parties than to their European parties.

¹⁶ We are coming back to this point in the "Discussion" chapter

“MEPs are more likely to vote against their European political groups than their national parties. Moreover, the main reason for MEPs to vote against their European political groups is a policy conflict between their national party and their European political group. When this happens, an MEP is likely to vote with his or her national party and against his or her European political group (p. 143)”. This finding is apposite to what happens in the case of the “one seat” issue with one specification. On the “one seat” issue there is no clear party delineation. The European political groups have no official position on this issue; it is up to the individual MEPs personal preferences to act on this regard, thus their national political background has a very strong influence.

Referring to voting behavior on different issues, the same scholars notice that the political groups represented in the EP are generally less cohesive on external relations issues and internal parliamentary issues. Their example is the organization of the parliament’s timetable, but this conclusion is also valid for the “seat issue”. For some MEPs, especially those coming from France or those who have close links with French politics, the seat issue might be considered a foreign policy problem, so MEPs split more on the national lines than taking into consideration their pan-European affiliation. On the other hand, the same issue is viewed as an internal organization problem, and thus as Hix et al state the political groups “are not likely to issue voting instructions on many internal organization issues”, which allow the MEPs a “free vote” which then again might be influenced in a decisive manner by their national background (p. 127).

The main conclusion of the research regarding the “entrepreneurs” is that the “supporters” are, generally weaker than their opponents. They are less in number, but also situated in less influential political positions. Their weakness is essentially influenced by the “venue” of the decision.

4.2.6. Agenda denial strategies

While the coupling of the three streams or actually the missing of the coupling envisages more the supporters of the “seat issue”, the second element which has a major contribution to the final outcome - the non-decision situation – regards the “opponents” of the issue and their ability to maintain the *status quo*. The use of “agenda denial strategies” (Cobb & Ross 1997) influences significantly the coupling of the streams, by this blocking the access of the issue to the decisional agenda.

The findings highlight that especially medium cost strategies were employed, but the “opponents” had no problems to use also their favorite “high cost strategy”, given them by the legal framework of the EU.

The “supporters” of the “seat issue” had all the time “some claim to a hearing”, given their political positions: they were MEPs, thus they had the ability to speak for the others and they were involved in the EU decision-making process. Taking into consideration the high legitimacy of the “supporters”, their “opponents” could not use all arsenals. In the following, a brief overview of the most common agenda denial strategies is given, skipping this time the strategic problem definitions that were presented before.

4.2.6.1. Medium-cost Strategies: Attack

4.2.6.1.1. Dispute facts of the case

The Green group from the European Parliament commissioned an “independent” study to show the high administrative and environmental costs of the monthly commuting. These numbers were disputed by the “opponents” who argued that costs of running the parliament are relatively low and it is worthy to pay the price. The only MEP from the Greens who did not back the party’s campaign was a Frenchman, vice-president of the EP. He argued:

“Everything is relative. It’s true that coming to Strasbourg costs money. But do you know how much this parliament costs every European citizen per year? Less than three euros a year. I’d say that’s not much for a continental democracy. It’s a cheap investment in return for peace.” (www.martinfrost.ws/htmlfiles/june2006/strasbourg_parliament.html)

4.2.6.1.2. Reversal of roles: claim victim status

One of the latest strategies adopted by some “opponents” was to reverse the role and claim the victim status. On the website of the Campaign for European Democracy that is militating for the Strasbourg seat, those interested can read that the French city is considered the “natural” home of the Parliament and it should stay like this, and those who are challenging this are supporting a “centralized” Brussels which, “unfortunately, suffers from a bad reputation”. Interpreted, the message would sound like this: you, citizen of Europe, should support us, the Good guys who are fighting for democracy, and not the Bad guys who are pro-Brussels and who want to move this symbol of democracy to a city which has no legitimacy and bad reputation.

4.2.6.1.3. Raise fears of the general public

Raising fear of the public was the ultimate goal of the campaign initiated by the “opponents”. Removing the EP from Strasbourg would have negative consequences for

the European democracy was their main claim. The European citizens should not allow this situation to happen.

The president of the largest group in the Parliament, the EPP-ED, Joseph Daul, a Frenchman born in Strasbourg used a problem framing that had the scope to the raise fear not of the general public, but of the representatives of the Member States. They could register important loses, if they decide to re-open the negotiations on the “seat issue”, is the message between the lines.

“It is written in the Treaties. Those who do not agree have to tell their heads of state and governments that the treaties have to be renegotiated...If the treaties have to be renegotiated, then we renegotiate the whole of the institutional arrangements, not just the Parliament’s seat. Why to have all these agencies in London, Frankfurt or Parma? They too cost a lot of money. Why not relocate them too in Brussels?”
(www.euractiv.com)

4.2.6.2. Medium-cost Strategies: Symbolic Placation

4.2.6.2.1. Co-opt group’s symbols and language

The online “one seat campaign” was the main instrument used by the “supporters” to expand the conflict and to push the issue back on the political agenda. The “opponents” reacted, creating another on-line campaign called this time the “one city campaign” (www.one-city.eu). The names of the two campaigns sound really similar and might create confusion. The content of the “one city” campaign is also confusing: it is militating for just one seat for the EP, but this should be Strasbourg, and not Brussels.

4.2.6.2.2. Make a committee

The creation of a committee to study the problem is viewed as the classical way to postpone a problem, pretending that the decision maker is actually doing something on it.

The President of the EP initiated a working group inside the House called the “Working Party on Parliamentary Reform”. The title of the committee sounds impressive, but analyzing its mandate, the initial optimism is rather limited. The working group’s objective is to make parliament’s committee and plenary sessions more “lively and entertaining” in a bid to raise awareness of the institution with the general public. No deep reforms, as one could expect from its title, are actually considered by this working

group. The "seat issue" is not even mentioned, because, the House has no competency on it. But still, creating this committee, the EP gives the impression at least, that it is tackling important parliamentary reforms.

4.2.6.2.3. Postponement - Leave for tomorrow what you can do today, maybe it won't be necessary anymore

In the case of the "seat issue", postponement was used from the early 1950s till the early 1990s, and after the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 till nowadays. Because it is a much politicized problem and it involves great efforts, energies and resources, not to mention the difficult "horse-trading" between Member States, the main political actors who actually could decide on it do not have many incentives to act. The permanent postponement of the problem is also facilitated by its symbolic definition. Being a problem which relates mostly to symbolic issues or solutions it may indeed be postponed more easily. Probably other factors also intervened: for the "supporters" the situation resemble to what Brunsson (1993) calls "what can be said but not done" situation, while for the "opponents" it is more a "what can be done but not said" – a point that is developed in the concluding chapter.

4.2.6.3. High-cost strategies

"Legal threats or actions" were included by Cobb and Ross in their original model, without explicitly making reference to the "veto power" of the "opponents". In the context of the EU, the veto power of the Member States could be interpreted, actually, as a "legal threat". Taking into consideration the legal rights of the Member States, veto power is a legitimate right of each member of the Union to oppose and to block any decision considered against the "interest" of the Member State. This basically gives an unlimited legal blocking power.

In the original theoretical model, the use of "legal threats" is considered as a consequence of the failure of the low and medium-costs strategies. In this study, it is difficult to evaluate exactly the effectiveness of the agenda denial strategies used by the "opponents". Specific analytical instruments should be developed in order to start studying the success or the failure of these strategies.

Still, what the results indicate is that the "opponents" could not avoid the raising of the issue on the general agenda of the EU. To some extent, the "supporters" were successful and managed to extend the conflict. The one million signatures could not be

ignored by the political decision makers, but this still does not guarantee them the full success.

In this specific case, the “opponents” had no difficulties in applying also their high cost strategy – the veto power, because it was facilitated by the “venue” of the action. After Amsterdam, for a long period of time, the “seat issue” was almost like a *taboo*. The French Government refused systematically to talk about it. Not even today, when the public awareness increased, and there is an active and dedicated group of MEPs who try to push it back on the agenda, there are not so many political leaders who are keen to re-open what appears to them as “Pandora’s box”. The Member States show little interest on the subject, although their role is crucial taking into consideration the venue of the action: a decision has to be made by consensus of all Member States.

The empirical findings point that the “opponents” used the medium and high cost strategies simultaneously, which is different from the initial expectations extracted from the theory. In this specific case, their concomitant use was facilitated by the “venue” of the action, and to some extent by the associated audience costs.

Relying on a legal right, conferred by the EU Treaties, is a legitimate action and no political actor from the EU would question it. Thus, for the “opponents”, especially for France it was the handiest and the most effective way to block the re-emergence of the “seat issue”.

4.2.6.3.1. High Audience Costs

The very high “audience costs” attached in time to the issue also influenced the usage of the high-cost strategy. From the very beginning of the agenda conflict, the French Government attached a very high importance for keeping the seat of the EP in Strasbourg. It went to Court, it made authoritarian statements, and soon the issue became a matter of national prestige for most Frenchmen. The French political leaders would support very high political costs if they would back down.

The price that has to be made for any change will be thus very high, considering the position of France. While Luxembourg and Brussels are housing other important and visible institutions, basically, the seat of the EP is the only important EU institution based in France. Giving it up would lead to the highest costs.

4.2.6.3.2. National interests

The explanation on the non-decision situation in this specific case would be incomplete without mentioning “intergovernmentalism” (Moravcsik, 1999). National institutions dominate and structure the political debate at the EU level and decisions are driven by the national interests and preferences, while the EU institutions and actors (MEPs) play only a secondary role and put the “entrepreneurs” in weaker positions.

The Member States directly involved – France and Luxembourg especially played on two strong factors: path dependency and the legal rights conferred them by the EU Treaties. Practical and legal matters weighted the most in blocking the access of the issue and it was consolidated by the venue of action. Obviously, for the Council and for (some of) the MS, the seat of the EP remains a highly symbolic issue: having just one seat for the EP would signal even more strength of the EP, something to be avoided, if possible, as it was already hinted.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions

5.1. Summary of the findings

The empirical findings confirmed that the non-decision on the "seat issue" is determined mainly by the missing of the coupling of the three streams. Several factors contributed to the failure of the "supporters" to couple the streams.

First, the problem delimitations of the "supporters" were challenged by the delimitations of their "opponents". Actually, both sides of the agenda conflict were using political rhetoric to manipulate the dimensions of the problem. From here, a moderately structured problem (means) arise, which implies a strong conflict on the values involved.

Second, the "image" of the "seat issue" has a major influence: it is considered serious enough, but less urgent to be addressed; being considered mainly a "symbolic" problem (at least by those in charge to make decisions on it) it was much easier to be postponed. All these elements favor the *status quo* situation.

Third, there are only undeveloped and unaccepted solutions for the problem; this hinders also the coupling of the streams.

Forth, there is an unfavorable political context determined, on one hand by the "image" of the problem, and on the other hand, by the "venue" of the action. As it was presumed, the Treaty favors the *status quo* bias.

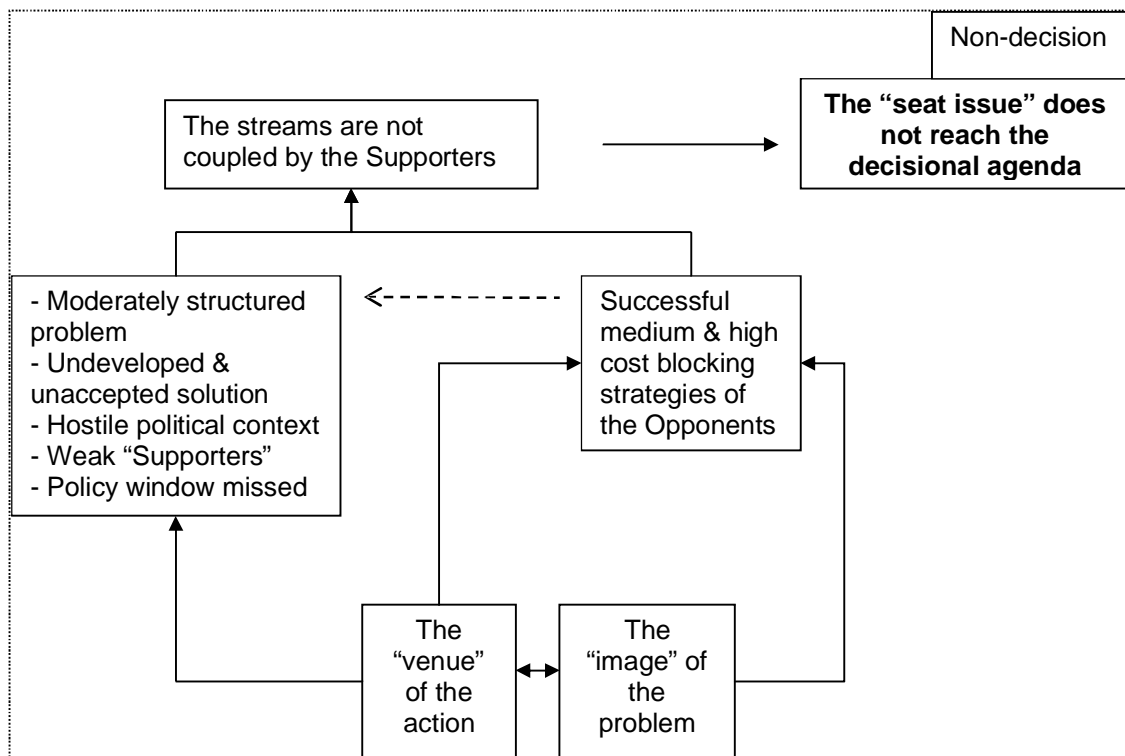
Fifth, the missing of the coupling is caused not only by the problem itself, but also by quality of the "policy entrepreneurs". The "supporters" of the "seat issue" are weaker than their "opponents" in terms of number and influential political positions. Their weakness is also caused by the "venue" of the problem.

Sixth, the "time" element plays also a crucial role. An opportunity was used with the launch of the "Citizens Initiative" of the European Commission in 2006, but a "policy window" was missed in 2007; the opportunity that occurred with the IGC was not exploited mainly because of three factors: the "image" of the problem (it was taken off from the agenda not to influence the negotiations on other more "urgent" issues), the unfavorable political context (the main entrepreneur just left the EP, and there was no "European mood" that could tilt balance in favor of the "supporters"), and finally the weak position of the entrepreneurs.

Not at least, the “Opponents” are using not only alternative problem delimitations, but also “symbolic placation” and other tactics meant to block the access of the “seat issue” to the decisional agenda. They had no difficulties in applying also their high-cost but very effective strategy – the veto power of the Member States of the EU. This was determined by the high “audience costs” attached in time to the “seat issue” and facilitated by the “venue”. Medium and high cost strategies were used simultaneously, which is different from the initial expectations of the theory. In this specific case, their concomitant use was facilitated by the venue of the action, and to some extent by the associated audience costs.

The main findings and the relations between the variables of the research are synthesized below in a suggestive *causal map*.

Figure 5.1: Causal Map of the “Seat issue” (1997-2008)



The findings of the research demonstrate that “who pays attention to what and when” is crucial. The position and the power of the “entrepreneurs” constitute the first important condition that has implications for the success of the issue to get to the decisional agenda. The nature of the issue itself or how it is defined is the second element which

has significant impact on the "trajectory" of it. The time dimension has the same importance as the first two factors. In addition, the "venue" of action can facilitate or, in this specific case actually block the access of the problem to the decisional agenda.

Overall, the theoretical framework has proved to be adequate and the findings have given a comprehensive answers for the research questions. This does not mean that there are no alternative theories that might have the same quality. For example, analyzing the "seat issue" through the theoretical lenses developed by Nils Brunsson (1993), an author who was already mentioned, interesting conclusions can be revealed.

5.2. Ideas in action

Brunsson (1993) highlights that, contrarily to common wisdom, ideas do not control all the time the actions. Because "the world of ideas is very different from the world of action", there are several problems connected with the relation between ideas and action in what he calls the "constituency-actor model"¹⁷: the problem of consistency, the problem of control and the problem of combining consistency and control (p. 490).

The differences between the conditions for ideas and action create difficulties in achieving consistency and control. There are three differences.

First, "what can be talked about cannot always be translated into action, and what can be done cannot always be talked about". Second, ideas may develop one way in a context to which ideas are of central importance and in another way in a different context where action is more crucial. Third, ideas may arise and change and disappear more rapidly than actions (p. 490).

The "seat issue" of the EP resemble to the "what can be said but not done" situation for the "supporters". They have the knowledge to change the existing set-up, but their ideas and opinions are not enough, because action demands more resources, time and power. "Wishes can be presented but not implemented because of a shortage of resources such as money or people. Or time may be lacking; ideas can be quickly stated, but action can sometimes take so long that problems fail to be solved in time, and opportunities are missed. And even if both resources and time are available, they may still be lack of the power necessary to influence those who can act" (p. 499).

¹⁷ "When the soul and body model is used for constructing organizations and societies, it leads to a division of labour between thinkers and doers. It is one task to provide ideas; it is another to act. Often certain people are authorized to carry out the first task and others the second. The first group forms a constituency which is supposed to articulate ideas to be realized by the second group, the actors. Sometimes a third party is involved, an executive which is supposed to link the ideas of the constituency into the actions of the actors." (Brunsson, 1993, p. 489)

For the “opponents” the situation is more a “what can be done but not said”. They rely on the existing legal provisions in order to keep the *status quo*, so actually maintaining the three seats system is easy to be done, but actually not that easy to defend in public. All the major actors involved are aware about the economical benefits for some stakeholders involved in the “seat issue” (e.g. the City of Strasbourg, some MEPs, businesses), but expressing them in public is counter-productive and it is connected to some extent to ethics and the truth. First, it is not fair that some stakeholders are having more economical advantages resulting from the *status quo* than others. Second, the “official”, institutional truth says that this *status quo* has a strong signification and meaning for the whole European Union and it should be kept like this, although the “private” truth acknowledges that, over the history of the EU, this meaning changed considerably and nowadays it is not anymore as strong as it was 50 years ago.

“*Justification*” is proposed to solve part of the consistency problem, and “*hypocrisy*” as solution for the control problem (p. 500).

Justification means that planned or accomplished actions are openly defended in order to convince people that they are right ones. The *status quo* on the “seat issue” is justified by the “opponents” using symbolic and legal problem delimitations. In this case, the problem of consistency and control is solved by achieving consistency at the expense of control. An element of control is still present, but actions are now controlling ideas instead of the other way round (p. 500). Justification in the “seat issue” case is combined with some degree of influence over actions. The “opponents” are in position to take and influence actions, but they prefer to avoid any risk and not to act, but to argue and to justify the existing arrangement.

When justification is not working, politicians are producing hypocrisy. Actions that are difficult to justify can be compensated for by talk in the opposite direction. Instead of justifying the high administrative and environmental costs of the three seats set-up, the “opponents” are talking about totally different aspects, such as legality or democracy. In this case what can be said is said and what can be done is done. Also a certain consistency is achieved, albeit not between ideas and action but between ideas and talk and decisions.

Whether or not they wish it, political actors involved in the “seat issue” often find themselves compelled to defend actions that they may not even approve of any more. But these actions cannot be changed easily. There are economic and “contractual” reasons (it is established in the EU Treaty) that intervene. Another factor would be that a

change would have high costs for some stakeholders, affecting their credibility, thus they are not keen for acting.

The second difference that creates problems is that ideas may develop one way in one context to which ideas are of central importance, like in the European Parliament where political debate is the central feature of the institution, and in another way in contexts where action is the more crucial, like under the Council circumstances where the focus is on action and less on talking.

Thirdly, ideas may arise and change and disappear more rapidly than actions. This is a general statement that is valid also in the "seat issue" case. It is easier to produce or to change ideas, than to produce or change action. Also "path dependency" plays an important role: once an action is started it is difficult to change its pattern.

The decision on the "seat issue" is essentially of a political nature. Brunsson refers to decisions describing them as a way of freezing ideas; by making a decision, the political leaders commit themselves to certain ideas. Deciding in 1992 and then in 1997 that the EP should have three seats, the EU actors committed themselves to the three seats *status quo*, freezing any other "alternative" idea. Not deciding on the "seat issue" might have the same effect. Refusing to decide about it also shows commitment to certain ideas and freezes any other attempt to change the situation.

Any change requires further treaty revision where a central role is played by national governments; this complicates even more the political bargaining. A changing political context, the political personnel turn-over or a focusing event, like the partial collapse of the ceiling of the Strasbourg Hemicycle, might have a strong influence in the future; but still is hard to make any prediction about these developments. Till a final decision the question is likely to remain controversial.

Chapter 6 - Discussion

Under this title the results are put in perspective referring to issues such as the objectives of the research and its academic and practical relevance. The validity and generalization of the findings are also discussed, and also recommendations for future research.

6.1. Internal validity

The objective of this paper was to find a comprehensive and coherent explanation for a problematic situation observed in the European Union decision-making process. This objective was reached: based on knowledge extracted from academic literature, the research explained why the "seat issue" of the EP is neglected from the decisional agenda of the EU.

Overall, regarding "conclusion validity", there is a clear relationship between the two variables: the non-decision situation on the "seat issue" (dependent) and the missing of the coupling of the three streams by the entrepreneurs (independent). The collected data confirm in a reasonable degree the conclusions we reach about this relationship.

The empirical findings also confirm that the missing of coupling of the three streams and the factors that determine this missing are the cause of the non-decision situation. The observed effect, the "seat issue" does not reach the decisional agenda because of causes initially identified; although, it is impossible to eliminate in totality alternative explanations to these findings.

6.2. Generalization of the findings

The study is not very concerned about generalizing. The specific case was analyzed using a framework made up of different theoretical lenses and little attention was paid whether the explanation would work with other "issues". The purpose of the study was to explain in details how the case under study occurred. It was beyond the scope of this study to improve the level of generalization of the theory. It rather seeks to use the theoretical framework to better understand the context of the unique empirical material. The strength of this approach is that it is possible to explain in detail how the event under study occurred, rather than assuring statistical probability. Still some generalization might be implied by the appropriateness of US-based theory to explain an EU related case.

6.3. The relevance of the research

At the end of the research, one legitimate question arises naturally: what is the added value of this research?

Although it was not its explicit intention, the main contribution of this study would be the extension of some theoretical approaches to the EU level where they were little used before, trying to find a coherent answer for the specific problem under analysis. All major theories integrated in the theoretical framework were developed for the US politics, thus applying them in the EU context involved some reserves considering the peculiarity and complexity of the political and institutional set-up. But the theoretical framework proved to be relevant and appropriate and it gave a comprehensive answer for the research question in this specific case. Of course, there are also limitations and specifications that are discussed below, but overall, the theoretical perspectives were useful even though they were elaborated for a different context.

Asking the question of how the issue of the EP's seats emerges on the EU agenda, or actually it is blocked to gain access there, might be critical also for understanding a "bit" from the EU politics.

First, it aids our understanding of decision-making in the EU throwing more light on the structural biases inherent in this process. From this point of view, the main conclusion is that decision making in the EU is decisively influenced by national, rather than supranational interests. The growing powers in time of the EP made its members to become more influential in the EU decision making process, but the "seat issue" showed that despite all their efforts, their influence might be limited if they are not backed by the "interests" of powerful Member States. When it comes about "high" interests of the states, even in the EP where pan-European political groups are strongly cohesive, the political delineation does not go with the party ideology or the more general, so called institutional EU ideology, but follows more a national pattern.

Second, the research might be interesting not only for the academic community, but also for political decedents. It gives a structured view about the state of the "seat issue" and it clarifies some controversial aspects of it. The results of the research could be used in two ways: for a better understanding of the situation, so as an interpretation, but also it could have some practical implications and can serve for a starting point for developing possible solutions.

6.4. Limitations

One of the main criticisms of the "Multiple Streams Framework" envisaged the appropriateness of conceptualizing independent streams. The critics' alternative view is more of "interdependent" streams, where "changes in one stream can trigger or reinforce changes in another, making coupling much less fortuitous and the process more purposive and strategic" (Zahariadis, 2007, p. 80). Even John Kingdon himself opened the possibility that coupling, or interaction may take place in the absence of an open window; he also suggests that the stream independence is a conceptual device which has the advantage of enabling researchers to uncover rather than assume rationality, for example the point that solutions are always developed in response to clearly defined problems (p. 81). The results of the research highlighted that in this specific case as well, the three streams are not necessarily entirely independent and there are important interactions between them.

One revision of the framework in order to adapt it the EU context is also necessary to be made. There is a structural problem regarding the "political stream": while in the original model, the existence of an American "national mood" is self-evident, in the case of the EU there is not configured (yet) any single "European mood". This fundamental difference originates in the absence of the pan-European "demos" from which such a "mood" could emerge. Instead there is, nowadays a puzzle of 27 "national moods", sometimes consensual, sometimes conflicting ones. Anyway it is very difficult to "sense" what would be the "European mood" for any specific subject, including the "seat issue" case. Basically, this is the main part which is not covered at all by the theoretical framework, thus it might be considered a serious limitation of the framework.

Some considerations regarding the fieldwork also should be mentioned. The main problem that was faced by the author conducting the research envisaged the access to the relevant political actors from the European Parliament. For a master student it was a difficult task to establish meetings for interviews with very busy political leaders. From the initial number of interviews with the stakeholders, at the end half of them were successfully conducted. The other half was refusals. Facing these refusals to sit the interviews, the list of the subjects was then constantly adjusted according to the development of the empirical research. Although possibility was taken into account from the very beginning of the research, it still represents the main limitation of the fieldwork. To avoid a bias by refusal, several alternative strategies were used: replacing the initial interview subjects with other respondents with similar background and position and using more in depth document analysis of press articles, personal web pages and blogs and official documents of the EU institutions.

6.5. Future research

For future research, I would make four recommendations. They are all directly related to the topic of the “seat issue” of the EP. First, more research is required regarding to decisive moments that determine the evolution of the “seat issue”: the Edinburgh (1992) and the Amsterdam (1997) negotiations that lead to the actual *status quo*. Unfortunately, the researcher possesses little relevant information about what happened in that context. There are scarce resources about this stage of the European integration and the limited time of the research did not allow more in-depth historical documentation on the subject. Why there was a decision in Edinburgh, sounds as an interesting future research question. More historical research on this specific decision should clarify probably many things. More research is required also for understanding what happened then in the negotiations for the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) and why did the Member States agree to annex the Edinburgh Agreement to the Treaty. These are “mysteries” of history that once revealed could help a better understanding of the evolution in time of the “seat issue”.

The next recommendation envisages the relevance and success of the different and conflicting problem delimitations. Which of the problem delimitations mentioned before is considered more relevant for the decision makers or for the general public¹⁸ is difficult to evaluate with the limited tools that the study had at its disposal, thus further in-depth study is required.

Regarding, the political delineation inside the EP (but also outside it) on the “seat issue”, no clear-cut lines could be identified neither in the political groups, or national delegations, excepting France and Luxembourg. A future research on how do the MEPs position themselves on the “seat issue”, including an extended role-call vote dimension would clarify for sure many aspects and would help for a sensitive mapping of the political and national lines.

The last recommendation is calling for the development of specific analytical instruments in order to start studying the success or the failure of the agenda denial strategies.

¹⁸ For a discussion about the relation between the individual and collective dynamics of problem framing see Baumgartner & Mahoney (2008)

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