

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to stand here today and to speak on behalf of the students of the master class 2011. Today, you have already heard a lot about this master class European priorities and national influence. I will tell you something from a students perspective. Then, I will briefly discuss with you the paper I wrote for this class.

It all started in January with the application and selection procedure. When you look at the website of the master class for information, the first question that is asked is: Are you an ambitious student who would like to know more about the political interaction between Brussels and national capitals? After that, the website also states: Every year the Montesquieu Institute organizes a Master class for excellent students. It takes a confident student to apply after these words...

Then, you have to send in a motivation letter, a resume and an overview of your grades. The wait starts. Finally, you receive a very flattering email with the following text:

Congratulations! You have been selected and will be one of the 22 students who will be in the Montesquieu Institute Master class 2011. We have received a large number of applications and the quality of the students was very high. Therefore, we see your selection as an achievement to be proud of.

This is an email I would like to receive any day!

The first meeting was on January the 28<sup>th</sup>. Students from all over the country, a lot of them foreign met for the first time in the Hague. Cees gave us a talk on the importance of being well prepared for all the lectures. He stressed that the master class is prestigious and that we should take it very seriously and give high priority to it. And that we did. During all the lectures two students had to prepare questions and lead a discussion. A large number of articles and other documents reaches us every week through teletop. Finally, a paper had to be written.

As a student I can say that the master class was very interesting and taught me a lot. The lecture series started with some general lectures on agenda setting. We then heard about the various European institutions and their role after the adoption of the Lisbon treaty. In Brussels we got to talk to people who work within or close to these institutions. Finally, different scholars discussed with us the agenda setting process in areas such as securization, the environment and immigration.

The master class ended with two sessions where we each had to present our idea for our final paper and where our fellow student could offer us comments and questions to improve the paper. After the wide range of topics that was offered to us during the lectures, it was great to see that the topics people chose for their papers also covered very divers subjects.

I chose to write my paper on the agenda setting by Dutch political parties during the 2004 and 2009 election campaigns for the European Parliament. The European parliament elections are usually considered to be second order elections. This means that voters do not really base their vote on the issue itself but on other issues, such as the performance of the national government. In second order elections, parties tend to pay less attention to the issues at stake and more to national issues. This translates into the media.

One theory on agenda setting by political parties states very briefly that parties will only put an issue on the campaign agenda if they feel they can win votes by emphasizing this issue. The only issues that can win a party votes are the issues where a party has a different opinion from other parties and where voters might share this opinion. If party A, B and C all feel the same about an issue, party C cannot win votes from voters for party A and B by raising this issue in the campaign. If party C has a different opinion, it is only useful to state this if the party feels that there are voters that share this opinion.

In the Netherlands, until 2004, all the major parties were in favour of the European integration process. Some authors say that voters were not presented with true options and that voting in the European Parliament elections was more a symbolic act then an expression of an opinion. However, in 2005 during the referendum on the European Constitution, a majority of the voters voted against it. This gave parties that were not in favour of the European Union the chance to voice objections during the 2009 European Parliament campaign.

The question I addressed in my paper is: Was there more attention in the Dutch media to European issues during the 2009 European Parliament election campaign then in 2004?

I did a small analysis of the content of two national newspapers in the last three days of each election. I found an increase of articles dealing with European issues and European politicians compared to articles on Dutch politics and politicians in 2009. This could mean that the rise of anti-Europe parties led to a campaign that was actually more about Europe. If this trend continues, the European Parliament elections might in become first order elections.

In closing, I would like to thank the Montesquieu institute for the very interesting and pleasant master course. I would also like to thank my fellow students for the heated discussions during class and the fun we had together.

Highlights for me were definitely the trip to Brussels and the Sunday evening or maybe I should say night before the paper was due when we exchanged encouraging words to each other via Facebook. I will you all the best, good luck with finishing your studies and hopefully we will see each other again. Thank you.

Leontine Loeber