

# Energy Discourses in Europe

## *Legitimation of EU Energy Efficiency Policy*

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Abstract: The production and use of energy is an important factor in European politics and science. However, we know little about the discussions that influence how scarce financial resources of governments and organizations are directed to different projects and action related to energy strategy of EU. Therefore, this paper studies the discourses that underlie the ‘energy talk’ of EU decision makers. This is important because discourses are resources that are employed to legitimate governmental and organizational aims and decision, such as new energy saving projects and policies. This paper is based on discourse theory that acknowledges that discourses change understanding of social situations, which also makes discursive activity a form of political activity (Hardy & Phillips 1999). However, there are multiple and contradictory meanings and realities existing in an organization, or in any discursive space (Hardy 2001) and discursive actors are commonly embedded in multiple discourses (Hardy & Phillips 2004). The study will be based on interviews with EU Members of the Parliament. The results are likely to reveal local and EU-level discourses that influence establishing of new energy policies and projects on EU-level and this way affect organizations and business in Europe.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Production and use of energy on the level of EU is a business area that has a significant effect on the economy and wellbeing of all European citizen in their daily life. Energy related decisions on EU level require negotiations in which MEPs play a central role in a way how they create and join certain energy related discourses and how energy related issues are framed and defined as important or less central in the negotiations. These discourses are resources for the legitimation for energy policies and also for EU as an institution. Legitimation is needed for sustaining the support of the constituents, such as business organizations and citizens. Despite the importance of this phenomenon we lack knowledge on the discourses that are central in the ‘energy talk’ of EU decision makers. Therefore this paper studies the discourses related to energy policy making in EU with the help of critical discourse analysis and interviews of MEPs as empirical material.

## 2 DISCOURSES ON ENERGY

Discourses have been studied in many different

fields and disciplines in social sciences. Consequently, there hardly exists an unambiguous definition of ‘discourse’. However, in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), that is the methodological approach we take in this paper, it has become customary to define discourses as interrelated collections of texts that construct social reality and produce a particular way and version of representing ‘the world’ (Fairclough, 1993, 2005). From the CDA perspective, discourses are also understood as social practices. That is, they are not merely ‘empty rhetoric’ disconnected from other social action, but instead inherent parts of different social and material practices that (re)construct our social structures and relationships (Fairclough, 2005). Texts are integral to the creation of meaning, but they do not function individually or independently; instead, meaning is created from collections of texts— or discourses—that evolve from the ongoing production, distribution, and consumption of individual texts. (Maguire and Hardy, 2009). Discourses provide a language for talking about a topic and also knowledge about a topic (du Gay, 1996: 43). They are socially constructed, not just descriptive. From discourse perspective there is no single “truth”. “Truth claims”

on the other hand are embedded with certain worldviews, judgments and preferences (e.g. Carvalho 2007) that are expressed through discourses. Discourses shape the way in which we can speak and act on a domain (Reed, 1998) and therefore they contribute to institutionalization. Power is a central in discourses. Power in discourses is related to 'subject positions' and 'bodies of knowledge'. Subject position can be based on bureaucratic or socially constructed contemporary position. High subject position gives possibility to legitimately, meaningfully and powerfully to speak for something. Where as the bodies of knowledge relate to the power of discourses to normalize certain ways of thinking and acting. Individuals that produce, distribute and consume texts can this way change institutions. (Maguire and Hardy, 2009)

Discourses related to energy policies and environmental issues have lately raised the interest of many scholars. After the 'linguistic turn' in the social sciences the constitutive role of language became focal which made researchers to pay attention to the discursive processes involved in the management of science and policy (e.g. Hajer, 1995). In studies conducted in Great Britain and South Africa the discourses of energy security and climate change were found central in energy policy discussions (Rogers-Hayden et al., 2011; Rafey and Sovacool, 2011). The construction of the discourses however varied by different groups, leading to for example to 'naturalization' of new clear new build or focus on lack of energy diversity (Rogers-Hayden et al., 2011). In this kind of situations competing movements engage in discursive debates—or framing battles—over the interpretation of the problem and the necessity and nature of solutions (Hoffman, 2011). This is related to the construction of 'interpretive packages' or frames (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989) that are interpretations of 'truth' in which the issues are not just defined but also put together with broader values. For example in the case of climate change as the phenomenon is so complex that there is no 'one professional logic' the credibility the person interpreting the discourse becomes central. (Lefsrud and Meyer, 2012). Usually negotiating such complex issues causes 'us' versus 'them' struggles, or in-group and out-group distinctions (Gamson, 1992) between different groups in the negotiations. Groups that have different reasons for supporting certain discourse can also implicitly form 'discourse coalition', that is, link up with people that have same goals although different understanding of the issue (Lefsrud and Meyer, 2012; Gray and Stites, 2011)

An important perspective is also how common definitions such as climate change are discursively framed in the policy negotiations. As a cultural issue, climate change engages embedded values around issue categories related to religion, economics, risk, freedom, national security, and others (Hulme, 2009). Boykoff (2008) noted that British newspaper articles on climate change were predominantly framed through weather events, charismatic megafauna and the movements of political actors and rhetoric, while only few stories focused on climate justice and risk. The news were usually also brought up with tones of fear, misery and doom. In policy making public discourses and media play a significant role in producing, maintaining and creating discourses. "Depictions of the world in the media result from a series of choices such as whether an issue will make the news, the highlight it will be given, and who is going to speak for it. Operations of codification of the issue into media discourse are directed by the perceived interest and social impact of a topic, as well as other "news values," economic considerations and editorial lines. " (Carvalho 2007) Interestingly for example in the case of climate change the scientific knowledge behind the phenomenon was presented as uncertain in US, certain in Germany where is in Britain the readings of uncertainty varied between newspapers. (ibid)

One of the few studies on this area is a study by Kratochvil, P. and Tichy, L (2013) about the discussions around EU-Russian energy relations and noticed that these discussions were dominated by the discourses of integration, liberalization and diversification.

### 3 LEGITIMATION

Legitimation is closely related to policy-making as policy-makers must turn to scientists and experts to justify their lines of action (Lefsrud and Meyer, 2012). For policy-makers in various organizations and different organizational actors, legitimation and gaining legitimacy is crucial (Deephouse and Suchman, 2008; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). More specifically, legitimation is a fundamental process in organizational 'birth' and 'existence' (Deephouse and Suchman, 2008). In addition, organizations and organizational actors engage in legitimation for responding to social, institutional practices and for constructing themselves as conformant 'citizens' in the generally accepted cultural worlds (Meyer and

Rowan, 1977). As a concept, legitimacy can then be defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995: 574).

Building on these premises, it can be said that legitimation is very much an interactive process. That is, by utilizing various substantive and symbolic practices, organizations and organizational actors constantly legitimize themselves in relation to other actors, organizations, and institutional, cultural environments (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). In addition, there are multiple factors that affect the ways in which the external constituents ‘judge’, and for their part, ‘construct’ the legitimacy of an organization (Kostova and Zaheer, 1999). Moreover, the legitimacy of a particular organization can be increased or decreased by the legitimating activities of other players in the field (*ibid.*).

However, for the purpose here, it is crucial to understand that as legitimacy is socially constructed, discourses are fundamental for legitimation (e.g. Kostova and Zaheer 1999; Berger and Luckmann 1966). This has then lead researchers to examine more closely the discursive practices and processes constituting legitimation. For example, in the context of international mergers and acquisitions, Vaara et al., (2006) have examined different kinds of discursive strategies used in legitimating such activities. As another example, Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) in their seminal study focused on the rhetorical strategies that contribute to legitimation. On the other hand discourses can also work for abandoning previous legitimized and institutionalized practiced through deinstitutionalization. Deinstitutionalization can be started by an internal or external actor in the organization. Changing a discourse at the macro level will cause reconfiguring of power/knowledge relations in the organization and its context. (Maguire and Hardy, 2009)

Yet, despite these advances in increasing our understanding of the discursive practices involved in legitimation, it is clear that we still lack understanding of the specific discursive struggles involved in the process of legitimation (cf. Mumby 2004; Zelditch, 2006). In this paper we study legitimation of EU energy strategy from discourse perspective.

## 4 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

In this study our methodological analysis is based on Critical discourse analysis. In spite of the existence of a variety of approaches to Critical discourse analysis (CDA) (see e.g. Fairclough and Wodak, 1997), focal in these approaches is that CDA appreciates the centrality of language (Alvesson and Willmott 1992, 2003) and focuses on the relationship between discourses, power, and domination, (Alvesson and Deetz 2000; Fairclough 2005). It is called ‘critical’ because it does not only concentrate on lingual perspective but it also questions taken-for-granted assumptions and perspectives of our social order, institutions etc. (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992). More specifically, the purpose of CDA is to examine and unravel the ways in which discourses shape and are shaped by (unequal) power relationships; how these are socially constructed, maintained and changed (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). In addition, CDA can be seen both as a theory and a methodology (Wood and Kroger, 2000).

Also, central to CDA is the aforementioned understanding of the relationship between discourses and their cultural, economic, historical and political surroundings. Consequently, in CDA discourses and discursive practices are tightly coupled with their social contexts (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Building on these premises, CDA can be said to focus on examining the (power) effects of discourse in their wider socio-cultural contexts (e.g. Fairclough, 1995, Grant et al., 2001). In this way, CDA builds on social constructivism (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Grant et al., 2001) as discourses are seen not only to ‘mirror’ some existing ‘reality out there’ (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000; Hardy, 2001), but instead construct a particular version of ‘reality’ in general, and particularly, a ‘reality’ in terms of power relationships between actors. Therefore, from this perspective, discourses are not simply language or a medium for transmitting knowledge between social actors (Wood and Kroger 2000). Instead, in conjunction with other social and material practices, they are fundamental in constructing the structures and relationships between organizations and organizational actors (Fairclough, 2005). Hence, in CDA the focus of research is in how discourses relate to the other social and material practices within a particular social context, and how these together uphold or change existing power relations within that context (*ibid.*)

Following from this, inherent is that in CDA the purpose is to make explicit that different ‘truths’ about a particular social structure can exist in different discourses. Often in social contexts, over time one ‘truth’ – i.e. one discourse – has become dominant over others (Fairclough, 2005). Consequently, this benefits certain groups and their interests over others (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). It is also common that this dominance has become taken for granted and ‘invisible’ for the central actors in the social context. From this perspective, CDA attempts to unravel these taken for granted discursive structures, and bring forth the other discourses and ‘truths’ alongside the dominant ones and this was reduce out pre-structured limitations of thinking (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Moreover, it can be said that the purpose in CDA is to highlight that societal and organizational actors have a high degree of latitude in selecting the ways in which ‘truth’ is represented, and also that different discourses can be utilized to challenge the dominant ones for changing existing discursive, social and material structures (Fairclough, 2005; Heracleous, 2004).

Following from this, for example, Mumby (2004) has pointed out that from the CDA perspective, organizations and organizational actors are often engaged in dialectical, discursive struggles of power and resistance. That is, as multiple, often contradictory, discourses exist in a particular social context, organizations can be seen as political sites where different groups utilize different discourses for promoting one’s own position over others (Hardy 2001; Mumby, 2004; Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Hence, organizations become discursive sites of power and resistance struggles, where groups discursively attempt to gain privilege for the version of ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ that benefits them selves (e.g. Hardy, 2001; Zoller and Fairhurst, 2007; Mumby, 2004; Hardy and Phillips, 2004).

Thus, in this study CDA offers a perspective that, firstly, enables us to look at the complementary but also contradictory discourses that struggle and produce the political reality that forms the basis of European energy strategy; and secondly, enables us to see the power relationships that are influential in this political and societal context.

## 5 EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

The empirical material for the critical discourse analysis is going to be collected by interviewing EU

Members of the Parliament. The Interviews will be both face to face interviews that will be transcribed verbatim but also e-mail interviews, all together 30 interviews. Publicly available written documents of ITRE (Committee on Industry, Research and Energy) of European Parliament will also be used as a background information.

## 6 POTENTIAL FINDINGS

The results are likely to reveal local and EU-level discourses that influence establishing of new energy policies and projects on EU-level and this way affect organizations and business in Europe.

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