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We Politicians

Translation, rhetoric and conceptual change

Kari Palonen

1. Introduction¹

Politician is a type of person that has always been viewed with suspicion, frequently even by members of parliament. Scholars since Max Weber have largely agreed that parliamentary and democratic politics can hardly dispense with the professional politician. Most West European parliamentarians today accept the public and academic practice of being treated as politicians and, since the late twentieth century, they have been increasingly willing to speak of themselves as politicians. In this chapter, I shall discuss this change as a neutralising translation practice.

¹ Parliamentary records:

AU: Austria, *Stenographische Protokolle, Nationalrat – Plenarsitzungen*,

<https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/STPROT/>

BE: Belgium, Belgian Chamber of Representatives, *Proceedings of the plenary sessions*.

<https://sites.google.com/site/bplenium/proceedings>

FR: France, III République, *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Chambre des députés*, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb328020951/date>.

FRd: *Débats parlementaires de IV République et constituantes*, Assemblée nationale, <http://4e.republique.jo-an.fr>

c Germany, *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Reichstags, Reichstagsprotokolle*, <https://www.reichstag-abgeordnetendatenbank.de/volltext.html>

GEdb: Deutscher Bundestag, *Drucksachen und Plenarprotokolle des Deutschen Bundestags*,

<https://dip.bundestag.de>

IR: Ireland, The Houses of Oireachtas, *Dail debates*, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/find/?debateType=dail>

NO: Norway, *Statsmaktene. Digitale søknader fra regering, stortinget og domstolerna*,

<https://www.nb.no/statsmaktene/search.statsmaktene?lang=no>

SWE: Sweden, Sveriges Riksdag, *Protokoll*, <https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/?doktyp=prot>

SWI: Switzerland, Bundesversammlung, *Amtliches Bulletin, Protokolle, Findmittel*,

<https://www.amtsdruckschriften.bar.admin.ch/setLanguage.do?lang=DE&currWebPage=searchHome>

UK: United Kingdom, UK Parliament, *Hansard*, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/search>

In *Reason and Rhetoric of the Philosophy of Hobbes*, Quentin Skinner (1996: 135–61; see also Skinner 1974) discusses the translation of concepts as being a rhetorical redescription by means of paradiastolic normative judgement, which involves depreciating virtues, extenuating vices or a neutralising of both. His point is that successful rhetorical moves tend to avoid direct confrontations between affirmation and denial, and instead make recourse to indirect strategies and tactics. Skinner (1996, chapter 4) distinguishes between renaming, the revising of a range of applications, the modifying of the weight of a concept, and the re-evaluating of virtues in comparison to neighbouring vices. These moves can be understood as styles of conceptual translation that have different political implications. I shall use these Skinnerian tools to analyse the judgements made about politicians in the parliamentary plenary debates of particular European countries and languages.

Who are regarded as politicians, what do they do and how are they judged? I refer to the existing literature as background, but my main point is to analyse the conceptual transformation involved as a translation (in the sense of Koselleck 1986; see also Palonen 2012a) of the use of ‘politicians’ in parliamentary debates.

To speak of politicians in this manner runs the risk of anachronistic projection and pejorative labelling. Many examples from past debates illustrate how even members of parliament have shared the popular contempt for politicians or, in line of Carl Schmitt’s footnote (1932/1963: 27), applied the term to others rather than to themselves. To carry out a paradiastolic rehabilitation against such tendencies requires a special effort (see discussion in Palonen 2012a).

The first stage consists of replacing the advisors to princes of the ancient and early-modern period with the parliamentary politicians of eighteenth-century Britain. This is followed by a discussion of different conceptions of the professionalisation of politics, and a discussion on the Francophone distinction between *hommes politiques* and *politiciens*. The final section deals with the arrival and the momentum of ‘we politicians’ as a speech act. Both the recent forms of professionalisation and ‘we politicians’ neutralise the ideal type of politician. In a previous study

(Palonen 2012b), I found that the denunciations of politicians tend to be repeated from time to time and from country to country. There, I also discussed the *laudatio* of politicians in different genres of writing. In parliamentary debates, when members are facing their peers, such panegyrics would be either unnecessary or naïve. Neutralisation of the popular contempt is a more appropriate response.

European languages inherited the vocabulary of politics from ancient Greece (see Meier 1980). Max Weber speaks of ancient Greek politicians in his account of the historical types of politicians²:

Dem Okzident eigentümlich ist aber, was uns näher angeht: das politische Führertum in der Gestalt zuerst des freien ‘Demagogen’, der auf dem Boden des nur dem Abendland, vor allem der mittelländischen Kultur, eigenen Stadtstaates, und dann des parlamentarischen ‘Parteiführers’, der auf dem Boden des ebenfalls nur im Abendland bodenständigen Verfassungsstaates gewachsen ist (Weber 1919 [1994]: 38).

As a classically educated scholar, Weber would have known that the ancient actors could not have used such language. Neither *polités* nor *politikós* participated in the disputes of the *ekklesia* and other *polis* institutions. Mogens Herman Hansen comments on the vocabulary: ‘Etymologically, of course, “politician” is via the Latin *politicus*, derived from the Greek adjective *politikos*. It is worth noting, however, that the meaning of *politikos* is “statesman” and “not politician”. It is used by philosophers in a complimentary sense about a true political leader’ (Hansen 1983: 36).

Nonetheless, *polités* and *politikós* lie behind our speaking on politicians. Hansen notes: ‘In the wider sense, ‘politician’ denotes all politically active citizens, i.e. in Athens all citizens who attended the *ekklesia* ... “Politician” in this sense would be a good translation of *ho politeuomenos* in its wider meaning, and it squares well with the Greek concept of active citizen’ (ibid., 35). The tension between the citizen as a political actor and the politician as one intensely dedicated to ‘politics’ is still

² ‘In the Western world, however, we find something quite specific which concerns us more directly, namely *political* leadership, firstly in the figure of the free ‘demagogue’, who grew from the soil of the city-state, a unique creation of the Mediterranean culture in particular, and then in the figure of parliamentary ‘party leader’ who also sprung from the soil of the constitutional state, another institution indigenous only to the West’ (Weber 1994: 313).

highly relevant. Weber's view on Greek demagogues as the first professional politicians corresponds to Hansen's comment in a footnote: '*Dēmagōgós* means 'leader of the people', sometimes in a positive sense ... sometimes in a neutral sense' (Hansen 1983, 46). The active *polites* refers to Weber's 'Gelegenheits politiker', the occasional politician, which 'we all' are when acting politically (Weber 1919: 41).

Emma Claussen's recent study, *Politics and 'Politiques' in the Sixteenth-century France* (2021), contains a thorough discussion of the discipline 'la politique', the adjective 'politique' and 'les politiques' as actors. Following the shifts from the early-century post-Aristotelian respect for 'les politiques' to the ambiguous uses in the sixteenth century in the French civil war with the Huguenots and the accession of Henri de Navarre to the throne in 1594, Claussen identifies both the rhetorical view of the defenders and the anti-rhetorical polemics of the detractors in speaking of 'les politiques'. She regards the party of 'les Politiques' in France as an ex post facto construct (as do Turchetti 2012 and Papenheim 2017). The sixteenth-century French debates applied paradiastolic moves of devaluation and revaluation of 'les politiques', whereas neutralisation was out of the question.

Claussen's conclusions are in line with the early-modern practices in various languages. The acceptance of 'politicians' reflects the period of mixed government when the monarch was advised by courtiers, lawyers, assembly members and others. The rhetorical defences of writers in that period include classical virtues, such as wisdom and prudence, and vices, such as being tricky or cunning. For example, James Harrington (1656 [1992]: 9) in *The Commonwealth of Oceana* defended Machiavelli as 'the only politician of the modern age', that is, as a writer on politics.

Republican authors such as Harrington appreciated the politician, but in the post-Westphalian German duchies, *Politikus* was widely depreciated or ridiculed (see Palonen 2006 and Zimmermann et al. 2007).

As William Selinger (2019) discusses in detail, most cabinet ministers in eighteenth-century Britain were chosen among the members of parliament, contrary to Montesquieu's doctrine of separation of powers. In addition, the British parliament beginning in 1741 claimed the power to dismiss the government on the grounds of political expediency (Turkka 2007), which enabled speaking of both ministers and front-bench parliamentarians as politicians. However, before the reforms of 1832 and 1867, the British parliament was based on selection rather than election (Kislansky 1986), which restricted the range of politicians to the 'ministrable' front benches. Nonetheless, membership in either House of Parliament had become a necessary condition for being called a politician.

How was this attested in the British parliamentary debates? In the Hansard documentation (UK), available from 1803 onwards, French Laurence applied the term 'politician' (in the singular) as something well-known:

What ... was the cry of unpopularity, even if it attached to a particular course of policy, to weigh with the mind of an enlightened statesman, to urge him to the abandonment of that course, against the conviction of his own judgment. The idea was too ridiculous to be entertained. No sound politician could support it. That popularity was highly desirable, was an indisputable proposition, because it was, independently of other considerations, a powerful instrument for a politician to work with (UK: 14 December 1803).

Laurence equates 'enlightened statesman' with 'sound politician', while acknowledging that 'popularity' is 'a powerful instrument for a politician', for whom parliamentary representation and support from the electorate already mattered. In a later speech on the Petition of Ireland (1805) Laurence argued: 'Surely there is no serious Christian of the present age who will approve the existence of such religious intolerance, nor any wise politician who will wish for the continuance of so pregnant a source of discontent in our navies and armies' (UK: 14 May 1805). 'Wise' and 'sound' are classical epithets for advisors. Terms such as 'wise', 'sound' and 'politic' were now applied to ministers and parliamentarians. 'Innovating ideologists' connect to already existing vocabularies (Skinner 1974), and here this is used to facilitate the acceptance of politicians.

William Windham also used ‘politicians’ as a well-known term when he referred to the opinion of ‘Mr. Pitt, Mr. Burke, and Mr. Fox, the most distinguished politicians that had adorned any country’ (UK: 26 June 1807). Dennis Browne hinted at ‘alarms, which have been both mentioned and propagated by some apparently great politicians’ and that ‘[t]he good sense and liberality of the people have prevailed against the misapplied zeal of the bigot, and the interested speculation of the miserable politician’ (UK: 26 June 1807). Here politicians were appreciated or denounced according to the quality of their deeds.

2. The forms of professionalisation

Democratisation, parliamentarisation and bureaucratisation were major changes in the politics of the nineteenth century. All had implications for the standing and the reputation of politicians (see Steinmetz 2019).

2.1 Party patronage

An attempt to combine democratisation with de-bureaucratisation was the spoils system, which has been practised in the United States since the presidency of Andrew Jackson (1829-1837). It initiated a new paradigm for politicians. The system was based on party patronage, replacing appointment based on merit by elected officials with appointment based on which party had won elections. The system was limited by the Civil Service Reform in the 1880s, but partisan nominations to offices have remained a perennial topic in the criticism of politicians (for a defence of the spoils system, see interview with George W. Plunkitt in Plunkitt of Tammany Hall, 1905/1948).

Fears of the spoils system spreading to Europe were common after the democratisation of suffrage (see Palonen 2012b, chapter 2). James Bryce in *The American Commonwealth* made a distinction between the British (and European) usage of ‘politicians’ from the US usage:

In England it usually denotes those who are actively occupied in administering or legislating, or discussing administration and legislation. That is to say, it includes ministers of the Crown, members of Parliament (though some in the House of Commons and the majority in the House of Lords care little about politics), a few leading journalists, and a small number of miscellaneous persons ... trying to influence the public. ... The former, whom we may call the inner-circle men, are professional politicians in this sense, and in this sense only, that politics is the main though seldom the sole business of their lives. But at present extremely few of them make anything by it in the way of money (Bryce 1888/1914: 731).

The 'inner circle' of politicians was larger in the United States. Bryce distinguished between politicians living for politics and living off politics (see also Weber 1919).

In America we discover a palpable inducement to undertake the dull and toilsome work of election politics. It is the inducement of places in the public service. To make them attractive they must be paid. They are paid, nearly all of them, memberships of Congress and other federal places, state places (including memberships of state legislatures), city and county places. Politics has now become a gainful profession, like advocacy, stockbroking, the dry goods trade, or the getting up of companies (Bryce 1888/1914, 733).

Bryce indicated three conceptual shifts in the US understanding of politicians: (1) Their range was multiplied to include candidates for a huge number of offices, both elected and appointed by the election winners; (2) the 'work' of politics means in America the winning of nominations and elections' (ibid., 734), as winning candidates, appointed officers and partisan functionaries have much less to do with the content and direction of politics than do European ministers and parliamentarians; (3) finally, the 'professionalism' of politicians came to mark no longer an honoured status, but simply a paid position similar to those of the representatives, elected officials and party functionaries.

US type of politician has shaped the public image of politicians in Europe, including the contemptuous view and devaluation of them as second-rate political hacks. Experienced parliamentarians were challenged when the success of their parties and not their own parliamentary performance became the criterion for candidature (for Britain see Ostrogorski 1903/1912). It is worth taking a closer look at what has been said about politicians in European parliamentary debates.

2.2 Payment of members

The professionalisation of politicians was debated before WWI especially in the German and British parliaments. Though parliamentarism was abhorred in Bismarckian Germany, male suffrage was adopted in the Reichstag, while a census or plutocratic suffrage prevailed in the federal states. In Britain, the parliamentary responsibility of the government had been accepted in the mid-1830s, but the reform of suffrage and redistribution of seats between constituencies proceeded cautiously. The arguments for and against the payment of members and the professionalisation of politics were quite different between the two countries (see also Palonen 2012b, chapter 3).

Chancellor Otto von Bismarck declared afterwards that the 1867 decision to elect the Reichstag through the manhood suffrage had a counterpart in the non-paid membership. He opposed the payment of members in order to keep the Reichstag powers limited. After paying lip-service to dedicated members, Bismarck expressed a vision combining representation on a broad popular basis with the role of the Reichstag representatives restricted to mediating information about the people in their different classes and professions as well as their mood (Stimmung) to the government (GE: 19 April 1871). He argued against prolonged sittings (lang gedehnte Parlamentssitzungen), life-long membership (Lebensberuf) and the favour accorded to eloquent members in debate (GE: 5 May 1881; on Bismarck's anti-rhetorical stance see Goldberg 1998).

Even if the Reichstag did not have power to elect and dismiss the government, the need for new legislation grew and Reichstag representatives were at the core of political debates. The Social Democrats paid a fee to their Reichstag members, and journalists such as the Liberal Eugen Richter secured their living by reporting from the Reichstag. Ignaz Auer (SPD) openly supported a debating parliament and the turning of elected representative into professional politicians who make 'das Parlamentieren, das Diplomatie und Politiktreiben als Volksvertreter sich zum Berufe' (GE: 26 November 1884). The Reichstag voted repeatedly in favour of modest payments for members.

This gained the support of the federal Bundesrat only in 1906, thus affirming a certain degree of professionalisation of parliamentarians (see Palonen 2012b, 55–61).

In Britain the success of the parliament led to an expansion of its agenda, and loopholes in the rules of debate were ‘misused’ in an obstruction campaign by Irish members around 1880. To prevent a paralysis of parliament, governments introduced procedural reforms aimed at limiting the speaking occasions and the length of speeches that could be given (Redlich 1905; Palonen 2014). Critics foresaw in this a danger of growing governmental power which could render the parliament into a simple ratifying assembly for government motions. The Newcastle Radical Joseph Cowen sketched a nightmare scenario of a powerless parliament:

If we are merely to vote as we are told—which is the motto of the Caucus—why are we sent here? It is a great waste of power, of health, of time, and of temper. Instead of 600, 60, or, indeed, 6 would suffice. All that is wanted is a body of experts to whom the decisions taken in the different constituencies might be sent ... The work of legislation might be greatly simplified by such a course of procedure. Government shrinks from such a result; but it is the logical, inevitable, and irresistible outcome of their course of action (UK: 10 November 1882).

With this *reductio ad absurdum*, Cowen defends a parliament with wide, elected membership, and regular and thorough debates on the items on the agenda according to procedural rules. For him, the parliamentarian represents the quintessential politician. Westminster preserved the idea of a deliberative parliament as a point of reference when debating the payment of members. Fears that the procedural reforms on parliamentary time would disempower parliament have not been realised (see Campion 1929; Evans ed. 2017).

In the Commons, Rowland Blennerhassett (Irish Party) warned against the US type of professional politician: ‘The most perfect electoral machinery, the most complete and elaborate political organization, will be necessary to reach and to wield the new masses of voters. The professional politician, the skilled electioneer, the accomplished and unscrupulous wire-puller will be all-powerful’ (UK: 4 March 1879). Samuel Smith (Lib) feared that ‘to supplant the voluntary with

the professional politician' would lead to 'abuse' and 'corruption' (UK: 29 March 1889). George Curzon (Cons) defended parliamentarians of independent means and ventured that the respect for MPs in Britain persisted because nobody could gain financially from membership (UK: 29 March 1889). Austen Chamberlain (Cons) warned of 'the new and undesirable type of professional politician' (UK: 10 August 1911) but declared being himself 'in one sense, a professional politician. I have given up practically the whole of my life to politics' (UK: 21 March 1907; see also UK: 16 May 1911). For him, dedication to parliament and investing the time it demanded were the marks of professionalism: functionaries and party-appointed officials were at best second-rate politicians.

The paradiastolic alteration of the normative tone neutralises its object, whether a concept or an actor, and leaves open a range of evaluative possibilities in actual cases. In academic discourse, Max Weber's *Parlament* pamphlet from 1918 neutralised the figure of the professional parliamentarian. What he says on the *Berufsparlamentarier* has a wider significance for the polity:

Der Berufsparlamentarier ist ein Mann, der das Reichstagsmandat ausübt nicht als gelegentliche Nebenpflicht, sondern – ausgerüstet mit eigenem Arbeitsbüro und -personal und mit allen Informationsmitteln – als Hauptinhalt seiner Lebensarbeit. Man mag diese Figur lieben oder hassen, sie ist rein technisch unentbehrlich, und sie ist daher schon heute vorhanden. (Weber 1918: 244)³.

For Weber, the professional parliamentarian is already there, liked or not by the public and regardless of the wishes of the members themselves. An efficiently debating and controlling parliament presupposes professional politicians as members with offices and staff. Economically independent members were already rare in Weber's time. The new problem was about how to enable living for politics among those who were living off politics in parliament. The neutralisation of professional politicians justified for Weber the treating of all properly paid parliamentarians as professional politicians.

³ 'The professional member of parliament is a man who exercises his mandate in the Reichstag, not as an occasional or subsidiary duty, but as the main content of his life's work, equipped with his own office and staff and with every means of information. One may love or hate this figure, but he is indispensable in purely technical terms and is *already there with us today*' (Weber 1994: 190).

In the parliamentary debates after WWI, suspicions towards professional politicians persisted. In the German-language speeches of the Swiss parliament, polemics against *Berufspolitiker* were particularly common. The Social Democrat Johannes Huber saw the danger that political affairs would be conducted by *Berufspolitiker* and no farmer, entrepreneur (*Gewerbetreibender*) or persons from the free professions would be included, but only secretaries, journalists and government officials (*Regierungsräte*). What he called *Berufspolitiker* referred to groups who were available to the membership in parliament on a continual basis, as opposed to the ancient Roman Cincinnatus' ideal of returning to the farm when the mission was completed (SWI: 5 January 1921).

In Westminster, Charles Fenwick (Lib) said in the 1911 payment debate, in a sense close to Weber's views: 'The professional politician is a living entity at this moment... many of them, who occupy seats on the Front Opposition and Front Treasury Benches ... are professional politicians' (UK: 10 August 1911). After WWI, the willingness of political leaders to call themselves professional politicians increased. The Conservative leader Andrew Bonar Law admitted that '[p]eople ... like myself are more or less professional politicians' (UK: 4 March 1921). Ramsay Macdonald as Prime Minister of the National Government declared: 'We are politicians who are legislators', and in contrast to law professors, we politicians can change 'certain of our most cherished constitutional principles' (UK: 18 October 1932). He thus connects parliamentary sovereignty to the leadership of politicians.

The shift reached even backbenchers. Frank Kingsley Griffith (Lib) declared: 'We are all professional politicians in one sense. No one has levelled any accusation against those whose political job is their only job, and to whom it is their whole life' (UK: 23 January 1930). David Graham Pole (Lab) agreed: 'I am not afraid of being called a professional politician ... if anyone is going to stand for Parliament, he ought to make Parliament his first job and be ready to give his time to the job' (UK: *ibid.*). George Buchanan (Independent Labour) illustrated *ad hominem* how it was possible live on the modest payment provided for MPs: 'I only have my income as a Member of

Parliament' and 'I have lived on my £400, and lived not badly' (UK: [ibid.](#)). These members did not praise their dedication to politics but recognised that they were expected to do politics by facing a growing number of issues in a professional way. The professional politician has here become neutralised in its normative tone.

After WWII, several members recognised politics to be the point of sitting in parliament. Frank Pakenham (Lab) addressed Patrick Berkely Moynihan: 'I must ask the noble Lord to remember that when he joins us on these Benches he is a politician; he belongs to this fraternity which he is so anxious to discredit' (UK: [Lords, 28 October 1948](#)). To Walter Fischer's (Cons) declaration, 'I am not a professional politician like the hon. Lady and others', Jennie Lee (Lab) responded: 'I suggest that when Members of this House do not respect their status and their profession as Members of this House, they are not fit to sit in this Chamber' (UK: [27 October 1949](#)). Herbert Morrison (Lab) also said on some adversaries that they do not deserve to be called politicians (UK: [28 May 1946](#) and UK: [27 November 1948](#)).

Around 1970, several Conservative MPs also identified themselves as professional politicians. Harry Legge-Bourge understood that 'the more we [may] become professional politicians, and may become so because of the pressure and burden of work in the House' (UK: [19 November 1968](#)). The frontbencher Quintin Hogg praised parliamentarians as debaters over military experts, 'because ... we are professional politicians who are known to have a double dose of original sin, and for all our faults, are more sensitive to nuances than professional soldiers are' (UK: [9 April 1970](#)).

After the new beginning of parliamentary politics in West Germany, parliaments and politicians long remained suspect in the media and amongst academics (see Ullrich 2009). In the early Bundestag debates, several members distanced themselves from being a *Berufspolitiker* (for example, Max Becker, FDP, GEdb: [17 July 1952](#); Fritz Becker, Deutsche Partei, GEdb: [26 May 1954](#)). Nonetheless, Hans-Joachim v. Merkatz (Deutsche Partei), regarded the contempt (*Diffamierung*) for professional politicians as posing a danger for democracy (GEdb: [22 September 1950](#)), while

Bundestagspräsident Eugen Gerstenmaier (CDU) recognised that payment of members enabled them to be independent of outside financial influence (GEdb: 18 April 1958).

At the end of the 1960s, the parties took the initiative for a reform of the Bundestag procedure that would strengthen the powers of the Bundestag and improve the status of individual members (see Recker 2018). Hans Apel (SPD) was a vocal advocate in favour of recognising the Bundestag members as professional politicians: he proposed that membership in the Bundestag demanded the interest of the entire person (*den ganzen Mann*) and the will to be a professional politician (*den Berufspolitiker zu wollen*) with staff and other resources (GEdb: 27 March 1969). During a social-liberal government, *Bundestagspräsidentin* Anne-Marie Renger (SPD) argued that members should be professional politicians for their entire parliamentary term, as taking a seat in the Bundestag poses a risk for their career: realisation of the free mandate depends on providing remuneration and resources for Bundestag members (GEdb: 18 June 1973).

The *Diätenurteil* of the *Bundesverfassungsgericht* from 1975 judged Bundestag membership to be a full-time activity, that is, that remuneration-receiving professional politicians without other professions can be expected to be the rule and others the exception. After that, no major debates on the professional politician have arisen. The debate has shifted instead towards the duty to report members' extra-parliamentary incomes. The neutralisation of the figure of professional politician has also been widely accepted among the members of the Bundestag.

Weber was afraid that the party apparatus would take the place of parliamentarians in political leadership. However, since WWII full-time members with staff and other resources have gained the upper hand. Jens Borchert (2003: 27) rightly emphasises how the paid parliamentary mandate has become again a precondition for being party leader or a minister. For major parties, the professional parliamentarian is a major indicator of the well-working of democratic parliamentary polities.

The neutralisation of the professional politician marks a point in history where becoming a member of parliament is neither an honour nor a sign of a selection to an elite, and where members no longer need to worry about popular contempt. The elected members have learnt to accept that they are both treated and expected to act as politicians, and that their power in parliament depends on their willingness to act as politicians.

3. The Francophone dichotomy: *hommes politiques* vs. *politiciens*

Renaming is for Skinner one paradiastolic way of altering the normative colour. An interesting practice of renaming politicians lies in the French distinction between *l'homme politique* (in the all-male Third Republic and in Belgium) and *politicien*, adopted from the US practice in the 1860s (on the dictionaries, see Zimmermann et al. 2007: 151–53). After about 1880, the French Third Republic was a parliamentary regime in which plenary debates played a major role (Roussellier 1997 speaks of un *parlement d'éloquence*), but contempt for *politiciens* and their *politique politicienne*, or politician-style politics, remained widespread.

Affirming the parliamentary paradigm, former Prime Minister Louis Barthou wrote: 'Le Politique exercer or il veut exercer son action dans le Parlement ou dans le Gouvernement' (Barthou 1923: 14), but '[l]e politicien et le Politique sont des choses différentes, comme sont choses différentes la politique et l'intrigue' (ibid., 105-106). The term *intrigue* connects the *politiciens* to the pre-parliamentary figure of cunning and tricky persons.

In the Third Republic, *politicien* remained mostly a pejorative term, as in a speech by Henri Joseph Dugue de la Fauconnière (Union des droites): 'il s'agit d'opter entre deux politiques: la politique des politiciens et la politique du pays' (FR: 10 June 1886). The politics of *politiciens* is seen to consist of petty intrigues against the *raison d'état*.

The syndicalist-style stereotype of a proletarian MP denying being a *politicien* is visible in a speech by Jacques Lauche (Parti socialiste), who claimed to be unable of lying: ‘pour être un *politicien* avisé, il faut savoir mentir, je ne serai jamais ce *politicien*’ (FR: 23 November 1911). In contrast, Alexandre Bracke (Parti socialiste) asserts ‘Entre le *politicien* et l’homme nous n’acceptons le partage’ (FR: 28 Novembre 1917, for a critique of the anti-political left, see also Jean Jaures (Parti socialiste, FR: 30 October 1903).

The common contempt for *politiciens* was explicitly questioned in a debate in which Paul Beauregard, a centrist (Groupe progressiste) professor of Economics, contrasted science with the noisy politics of politicians: ‘tant que quelque *politicien* ne vient pas de requiller des bruits’ (FR: 31 Janvier 1902). Marius Devèze (Union socialiste) asked him from the floor:

M. Devèze. Qu’est-ce que un *politicien*?

M. Paul Beauregard. Ce n’est pas très difficile de savoir

M. Devèze. Un *politicien* est un homme qui fait de la politique. Vous êtes donc un *politicien*. Vous avez abandonné votre chaire pour venir à la Chambre.

M. Paul Beauregard. Je ne parlerai donc pas des hommes, mais des circonstances amenant du nécessité de parler quelque peu des principes (FR: *ibid.*).⁴

Beauregard, an academic notable in parliament, distances himself from *politique politicienne*. Devèze, however, assumes that everyone who acts politically is a *politicien*, that is, every elected member of parliament should understand oneself as a politician. Beauregard sees himself as being above the daily politicking of *politiciens*, whereas Devèze wants to neutralise the

⁴ M. Devèze: Who is a *politicien*?

M. Beauregard: It is not so difficult to know.

M. Devèze: A *politicien* is a man who pursues politics. Hence you are a *politicien*. You have abandoned your academic chair for membership in the Chamber.

M. Beauregard: I don’t speak of men, but of the conditions that make it necessity to talk about principles. (trans. KP).

term and to consider all elected parliamentarians as *politiciens*. This view is shared by Alexandre Zevaès (socialiste independent): ‘Ceux que vous appelez les politiciens dependent du suffrage universel’ (FR: 15 January 1909), whereas in the first parliament after the Great War, the former Socialist Florentin Levasseur declared: ‘Nous sommes des législateurs et nous ne sommes pas des politiciens (FR: 21 January 1921).

In the Belgian Chambre, the distinction between *hommes politiques* and *politiciens* was also disputed already before WWI.

M. Helleputte, ministre des chemins de fer, postes et télégraphes. — Je suis un homme politique et non pas un politicien.

M. Furnémont. — Vous vous trompez, vous êtes un homme d'Etat. (Nouveaux rires sur les mimes hues.)

M. Lemonnier. — Quand on est votre adversaire, on est un politicien, et quand on est un ami, on est un homme politique (BE: 12 April 1910).⁵

The Catholic minister Joris Helleputte's declaration received two interjections from the floor. The Socialist Léon Furnément parodied him, using the honourable title of *homme d'État*, which hardly few parliamentarians would dare apply to themselves. Liberal Maurice Lemonnier's reply then ridicules the making of a distinction between the term.

An ironic use of the conceptual pair was repeated 40 years later, when the Socialist Gaston Baccus commented on a letter from general Terlinden against those whom he ‘nomme, avec un mépris non déguisé, “les politiciens”’. Baccus was also casting an ironic aspersion upon ‘M. Scheyven, qui, comme chacun le sait, n'est pas un politicien, mais un homme politique’ (BE: 30 January 1950). Both Terlinden and Scheyven show their contempt for les *politiciens*; the latter claims to be un homme politique.

⁵ M. Helleputte: Minister of railways, post and telegraph – I am a *homme politique*, not a *politicien*.

M. Furnémont: You are mistaken, you are a Statesman. (laughs, mimic crying)

M. Lemonnier: Who is an adversary, is a *politicien*; who is a friend, is a *homme politique* (trans. KP).

Although the pejorative tone remains strong in the French and Belgian debates, the term *politicien* is frequently used of political adversaries in a slightly neutralising way. The Belgian examples and French MP Charles Eugène Lacotte (non-inscrit) ('Messieurs, le débat est devenu purement politique, je pourrais même dire purement politicien', FR: 21 Janvier 1921) apply the common rhetorical tools of irony, parody and ridicule. The rhetorical distancing of the speaker is also achieved by disputing the legitimacy of the distinction between *hommes politiques* and *politiciens*.

In the French Fourth Republic (1946-1958), *politicien* continued to be mostly a pejorative term and the Communists (PCF) were responsible for most of the fierce polemics against it. Jacques Duclos, the number two of the party, in his diatribe against *politiciens*, instrumentalises the Assemblée nationale for his anti-parliamentary polemic by opposing party militants in parliament to career politicians: 'Nos élus ne font pas carrière politicienne; ils restent des militants au service du peuple' (FRd: 19 November 1948). A declaration of the agrarian right faction (Groupe paysan) was equally militant against les *politiciens professionnels* (FRd: 30 December 1953).

My selective searches debates of the French Fifth Republic indicate that, at least for the Gaullist period (1958–1969), even the derogatory use of *politicien* disappears from the debates, as if the word itself had become a part of unparliamentary language. In later scholarly discourse, the word seems to be completely outdated. 'Politicien. Le terme a été progressivement évincé du marche linguistique pour raisons politiques et scientifiques. Et au fond, il avait trop servi. Du coup le terme "professionnel de la politique" s'est imposée.' (Damamme 1999: 60). My guess is that this French *Sonderweg* is connected to the de-parliamentarising turn of the Fifth Republic.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the French-speaking Swiss parliamentarians did not, however, have problems with addressing each other and referring to themselves as *politiciens*. For example, the Liberal François Jeanneret contested the intervention of politicians into labour market relations: 'les politiciens n'ont pas pour tâche de régir dans le détail les relations des employés et des salariés' (SWI: 13 March 1963). The Radical-democrat Carlo Speziali spoke of himself in the following way:

‘Mais je suis un politicien et préfère terminer par des considérations politiques’ (SWI: 19 March 1976).

4. The parliamentary ‘we’

As a final step in analysing the paradiastolic neutralisation of the (professional) politician, I turn to the parliamentary uses of ‘we politicians’. The expression assumes that the parliamentary mandate, as such, renders members politicians, without denying that members of local assemblies, party activists and functionaries might also be politicians. The point lies in the shared identity of parliamentarians as politicians, across party lines and other divides.

‘We politicians’ allows different rhetorical uses regarding the quality and range of the parliamentary ‘we’ among the members. The parliamentary ‘we’ can be inclusive or exclusive, the latter situating the speaking member and her/his party outside the parliamentary ‘we’. Its normative colour is neutral, enabling different relationships to be implied towards the voters.

I looked for ‘we politicians’, the nominative first-person plural that emphasises the shared professional identity of political actors in the plenary debates. I extended the search to parliaments in: Britain and Ireland; France and (French) Belgium; (West) Germany, Austria and Switzerland; and Sweden and Norway.

4.1 A history of regularisation

The profile of the uses of ‘we politicians’ is by and large similar in these parliaments. The first examples are occasional uses, then the usage increases and finally there is a regularisation of the uses. I have focused on the early examples and on the period of increasing momentum, whereas the regularised uses are too frequent for my approach.

‘We politicians’ in the British parliament was used 4 times before 1914, 22 times from 1914 to 1944, and 21 times from 1945 to 1959. Taking the decades to be the unit, I found 35 ‘hits’

for 1960–1969, 41 for 1970–1979, then a slight decline: 59 for 1980–1999, then a new expansion: 201 for 2000–2019. Compared to Westminster, the numbers in the (West) German Bundestag are low in the early years (4 for 1949–65), begin to grow with the CDU–SPD grand coalition (9 for 1965–69) and the social-liberal coalition (67 for 1969–83), and remain at the higher level after that, without showing any definite profile according to coalition.

A similar trend with increasing momentum and regularisation of usage can also be discerned in other parliaments. In Britain, the momentum for ‘we politicians’ can be noted already in the years 1927–1930. A rather simultaneous momentum for ‘we politicians’ can be dated to the 1960s in four countries: West Germany, Austria, Sweden and Norway, which I studied together as a group. In Ireland, Belgium and Switzerland, there is no clear momentum, and Gaullist France seems to be an exception, avoiding any usage of ‘politicians’ at all.

According to the digital search, the earliest use of the formula can be found in the Belgian Chambre, when the Catholic Eugène Verhaegen disputed that *nous hommes politiques* follows a heart like ours and instead he emphasised our duty (BE: 24 January 1859). Here ‘hommes politiques’ with the ethos of the duty refers more to an older layer of *homines politici*, i.e. to persons passionate about politics, than it does to ‘we politicians’.

The Liberal Jules Guillery regarded street demonstrations that were staged for ‘us politicians’ as detrimental to freedom: ‘parce que nous, hommes politiques, nous comprenons qu’elles ne peuvent servir la cause de la liberté’ (BE: 29 November 1871). He seems to restrict politics proper to the elected parliamentary representatives, as does Jules Bara, Liberal Minister of Justice, who polemised against accusations made against mandated politicians on private grounds (BE: 24 November 1882; see also the Liberal Paul Hymans on the priority of *hommes politiques* over associations, BE: 5 June 1905). Reflecting on responses to a strike, the Socialist Samuel Donnay regarded militant critics of it as bad *politiciens* and neutralises the term by applying it to others, as he

says they are commonly called: ‘Quant à nous, politiciens, comme on nous a appelés pendant ces événements, ce conflit nous a également donné à réfléchir’ (BE: 7 February 1911).

The earliest Westminster user of the parliamentary ‘we’ was, according to Hansard, Wilfrid Lawson (Lib), who used it to emphasise the contrast between opinions inside and outside parliament: ‘Whatever we politicians may think sitting here in the calm and security of this House, that is not the opinion out-of-doors’ (UK: 17 May 1876). He exercises self-criticism in deference to the popular opinion. Hugh Cecil (Cons) argues in a similar tone: ‘We politicians have so often said that all sorts of great issues are involved that the people have begun to think that politics is an unreal occupation in which people use a great deal of language to which they attach very little importance’ (UK: 12 March 1913).

In the 1920s and 1930s, there were few mentions of ‘we politicians’ in the parliaments of Austria, Ireland, Norway and Switzerland, and none in the Belgian Chambre or the French, German or Swedish parliaments. Patrick James Hogan, Irish Minister of Agriculture (Fine Gael), was critical of politicians: ‘I mean we politicians have got to get on it, the inferiority complex. We ought to realise that the farmer is very much more important than we are’ (IR: 6 June 1929). A counter-position was taken by Alf Mjoen (Arbeiderdemokraterne) in the Norwegian Stortinget, who insisted that, despite lacking popularity, ‘we politicians’ bear the burden of ruling: ‘Vi politikere er ikke sa svært populære Der er nu endgang så med dem som styrer’ (NO: 31 January 1933).

4.2 The Westminster momentum in 1927–1930

In the British House of Commons, the parliamentary ‘we’ gained momentum in the years 1927–1930 towards a neutralisation of ‘politician’. Ramsay Macdonald (Lab) used the term as follows: ‘Of course we politicians can fight as much as we like about our varying political opinions, but... we should have uniformity of public administration’ (UK: 1 March 1927). He insisted on a strict division between partisan politics and non-partisan administration at the local level, on the

grounds of the equal treatment of citizens. Carlyon Bellairs (Cons) shares Macdonald's view on separating politics from administration but thinks that many Lords 'have not taken part in politics' and are better administrators, and he asserts: 'We politicians are outsiders when we come to govern the great Departments' (UK: 11 July 1928). Henry Graham White (Lib) supports 'an inquiry ... should be carried out free from any political preoccupation with an open mind, and especially should it be free from the political bias from which we politicians find it so difficult to dissociate ourselves' (UK: 4 April 1930). Frederick Macquisten (Cons), in contrast, deplores politicians' loss of powers: 'We politicians here are mere corks on the water for Government officials' (UK: 31 October 1930).

An actively policy-oriented view was represented by Cecil Wilson (Lab), who asked: 'What can we do, we politicians in the House of Commons, to help forward the improvement of trade and industry in this country?' (UK: 19 December 1927). David Kirkwood (Independent Labour) rejected a reduction in wages in Britain and opposes 'amongst my colleagues those who say ... that we politicians should leave it to the trade unions and the employers' (UK: 25 June 1930). Henry Snell (Lab) regarded the government's appointment policy as better than the Church's and concludes: 'We politicians have at least as high a moral standard as ecclesiastics' (UK: 13 June 1928). His formula thus disputes the popular view on the immorality of politicians. Samuel Rosbotham's (Lab), who said 'we politicians were apt to forget, but I do not think that we ought to forget seeing that we represent the people of the country' (UK: 12 November 1930), shows that, for Rosbotham, being a parliamentary representative suffices for the definition of being a politician.

These different speech acts take for granted that House of Commons members are politicians. By their speeches, they form a parliamentary 'we', neutral in tone.

4.3 The 1960s momentum in four parliaments

The relative simultaneity of the momentum of talking about 'we politicians' was prevalent in the 1960s in West Germany, Austria, Sweden and Norway independently of the different

political constellations. It marks a routinisation of parliamentary government, including a strengthening of the resources of parties and MPs, while challenging the post-war continuities in the government constellations, which were different in each of the countries.

The president of the Austrian Nationalrat, Alfred Maleta (ÖVP), while contesting the popular view that ‘we politicians’ are narrowly self-interested and stupid disputants, admitted that ‘we politicians’ might be in our doings *betriebsblind* (AU: 27 April 1965). Viktor Kleiner (SPÖ) accepted that ‘we politicians’ must be transparent and occasionally dressed down (*bis aufs Hemd ausgezogen*) (AU: 8 June 1966). In the Norwegian Stortinget, Olaf Watnebryn (*Arbeiderpartiet*) noted that ‘we politicians’ must accept that we can be played out of the game (*hengt ut*), but we are also able to withstand much criticism (NO: 9 April 1964). Helmut Schmidt, the SPD parliamentary leader in the Bundestag, parodied the politician-bashing of economics journalists: ‘wir Politiker uns in den Niederungen befinden’ (GEdb: 8 November 1967). Being subjected to criticism is an obvious occasion for using a parliamentary ‘we’.

As in the British practice, a self-criticism by *politicians* was part of many ‘we politician’ speeches. One variety involved *politicians* limiting their own intervening in business and administration. In the Bundestag, Hans-Georg Emde (FDP) disputed whether ‘we politicians’ do have a mandate to decide on the burdens (*Belastungen*) of the people indefinitely (GEdb: 16 April 1964). The Swedish Social Democrat Per Edvin Sköld thought that ‘we politicians’ tend to overestimate the significance of our doings (SWE: 10 January 1965) and his party-fellow, finance minister Gunnar Sträng, warned that ‘we politicians’ should avoid giving people false visions of swift improvements (SWE: 22 February 1967).

In Austria, the Proporz system of dividing posts between the conservative ÖVP and social democratic SPÖ was criticised by supporters of the new ÖVP majority government beginning in 1966. Matthias Kreml spoke of the *Politikerklause* that ‘we politicians’ now accept creating a *sachlich* space, operating with ‘economic necessities’ instead of distributing benefits between the

parties (AU: 16 December 1966). Hermann Withalm demanded that ‘we politicians’ must rationalise political decision-making in order to bear the responsibility entrusted by the people (AU: 27 October 1967). Walter Suppan required that ‘we politicians’ must reduce our privileges (AU: 2 December 1970). These demands combined economic liberalism with the dismantling (*Abbau*) of bipartisan appointments.

Another topos regarding ‘we politicians’ involves their attaining office in popular elections. Its passive variant emphasises the dependence of politicians on voters; the active version emphasises the parliamentarians’ responsibility for decision-making. In the Austrian Nationalrat, Friedrich Peter of the nationalist FPÖ declared ‘We politicians must orient ourselves to the voters’ (AU: 2 December 1970), while Herbert Kohlmeier (ÖVP) demanded that ‘we politicians’ should be consistent in order to be taken seriously by the Austrian population’ (AU: 10 December 1970). Hertha Firnberg (SPÖ) saw that Austrian women regarded female politicians (*Politikerinnen*) of all parties as no longer trustworthy (AU: 14 December 1968). In the Swedish Riksdag, Axel Georg Pettersson (Centre) thought that, to be credible, ‘we politicians’ must take seriously the public talk about equality and reforms (SWE: 12 November 1969). In the Norwegian Storting, Gunnar Garbo (Venstre) judged that overcoming the reluctance towards development aid depended on how ‘we politicians’ present the topic (NO: 17 December 1962).

Others argued that the people need the guidance of politicians. In the Bundestag, Johann Baptist Gradl (CSU) maintained that ‘we politicians’ should present the situation, the ways and the difficulties to the people (*dem Volk*) by keeping in mind that they rarely possess such political virtues (*Tugenden*) as patience and persistence, and that they need encouragement and trust (DEdb: 14 March 1968). In the Riksdag, Ingrid Sundberg (Högern) asserted that changes in the environment are not produced unless ‘we politicians ... guide (styra) them’ (SWE: 14 November 1968).

Several Swedish Liberals (Folkpartiet) submitted that ‘we politicians’ have a responsibility (*ansvar*) to overcome popular prejudices regarding development aid (Olle Dahlen,

SWE: 17 April 1967) and environmental questions (Sören Norrby, SWE: 11 May 1967). Party leader Sven Wedén thought idealism and enthusiasm were not enough, as ‘we politicians’ have a duty to obtain practical results (SWE: 16 May 1968), while Bo Skårman admitted that ‘we politicians’ are in part responsible for the bad conditions (*misförhållandena*) and their removal (SWE: 9 February 1969). These members were more open to new items on the political agenda than the ruling Social Democrats but lacked the latter’s belief in ‘the people’.

In the Bundestag several members discussed *Politikberatung*, the relation of scholarly advice to parliamentary decision-making. Heinz Frehsee (SPD) looked to science (*Wissenschaft*) to help politicians identify prospective developments (DEdb: 27 June 1962), and Käte Strobel (SPD) relied on social scientists (*Sozialforschern*) to help politicians with their knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) over the state of affairs (DEdb: 24 April 1963). Walter Hammersen (FDP) was critical of areal planning (*Raumplanung*), and called on ‘we politicians’ to be ‘manly enough’ (*Manns genug*) to defend the constitutional rights and freedoms (DEdb: 4 December 1963). Kurt Schober (CDU) stated even more openly that ‘we politicians’ should not let our decision-making powers slip out of our hands (*nicht die Entscheidung darüber aus der Hand nehmen lassen*) (DEdb: 7 February 1968).

In the Nationalrat, Michael Luptowits (SPÖ) saw the day approaching when ‘we politicians’ could only say ‘yes’ (*ja*) to what science and technology presuppose (*vorsetzen*) (AU: 17 June 1966). He also thought that poets and writers have a deeper knowledge of social life than do ‘we politicians’ (AU: 29 November 1966). In line with this pessimistic vision, he insisted that ‘we politicians’ should not leave university politics to executives and specialist commissions (AU: 24 April 1968).

The use of ‘we politicians’ in discussions of the 1960s added new topoi, e.g. relating to scientific knowledge, to the earlier British ones. The parliamentary ‘we’ addressed the collegiality and mutual respect between parliamentary members. It allowed different views on such issues as the range of action of politicians (which economic liberals wanted to reduce), optimistic and pessimistic

views on the powers of politicians, and the government vs. opposition divide. British Labour members used the ‘we politicians’ formula more willingly than did the Conservatives, whereas in continental parliaments, no such clear division was to be found. Unlike in the context of professionalisation, there was no need to insist on politics as the main occupation of parliamentarians: the rhetoric of a parliamentary ‘we’ tacitly assumed it.

5. The rhetoric of translation

Paradiastolic redescription is a commonly used tool for judging political action. In this chapter, I have used this rhetorical scheme for illustrating the rather complex history of the *politician*. The examples from different parliaments provide, in Koselleck’s (1972) sense, both indicators and factors for the modification of the normative colour of politicians, who have been a notorious target of contempt and lamentation through commonplaces frequently repeated across time and place.

In a previous study (Palonen 2012b), I discussed the apologetics of politicians and their different rhetorical devices in the twentieth century. Here, I have focused on neutralisation as a major change in the speech of politicians in twentieth-century parliamentary debates as a rhetoric of modesty. The emphatic form ‘We, the politicians’ is inapplicable to parliamentary debates. The growing acceptance of professionalisation and increased use of ‘we politicians’ in the second half of the twentieth century are signs of agreeing to use politician as a neutral denomination. This corresponds to the growing awareness what parliamentarians do and can do, independently of their party affiliation or national traditions.

Although the reputation of *politicians* in popular opinion, in the media, and in parts of academia is as bad as ever, this is perhaps a sign of the Weberian insight that *politicians* are an indispensable part of parliamentary and democratic polities. When members of parliament across countries have identified themselves with *politicians*, they have responded to the public expectations

as well as reflected upon their own experiences. Declarations of not being a professional *politician* or accusing others of being one still exist, but they are marginal in parliaments.

Speaking of an inclusive parliamentary ‘we’ reflects the character of the parliament as a thoroughly political site of action, which largely transcends the dividing lines between members and parties and exemplifies the parliamentary way acting politically with a common agenda and specific procedures and conventions. The parliamentary language of politicians is largely independent of their ‘natural’ languages. While parliamentarians do have opposing purposes for their actions, it is precisely this political dissent, this agreeing to disagree, that underlies and informs the use of the parliamentary ‘we’.

To summarise in formal terms the conceptual changes: the ancient Greeks’ ambivalent vocabulary has been applied in modern languages. In early modern use, the terms describing writers on politics as laudable were confronted with terms condemning, but *politikos* described a person, or *Politikus*, who combined both. The decisive move towards regarding parliamentarians and ministers as politicians retained a link to the older ideals, and it was rather easy to reactivate the old condemnations when talking about the intrigues of second-rate politicians focussed narrowly on their own electoral success. In the French, the dualism resulted in two words: *homme politique* and *politicien*.

Early debates on the payment of parliamentarians concerned the opposition between a dedicated living for and an instrumental living off politics, as well as the frequently opposing demands of parliamentary performance versus adapting to voters’ opinions. With the growing agenda and workload for parliaments, the distinction between living for and living off politics lost its cogency: ‘doing politics’ became the main justification for membership in parliament. Full-time membership became the rule and, with the ability of the formula ‘we politicians’ to transcend party lines as well as the government vs. opposition divide, a parliamentary ‘we’ was formed and later

regularised. However, in France the neutralisation of the term *politicien* failed. With the exception of the populists, European parliamentarians today willingly understand themselves as politicians.

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