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THE SPIRAL OF VILVOORDE:MEDIATIZATION AND POLITIZATION OF PROTEST.A CASE STUDY ON THE EUROPEANIZATION OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Eric Lagneau, Pierre Lefébure[1]

When we engaged in the study of the Vilvoorde's protest starting from the field of media and public opinion process, we had the intuition that the framing analysis which is a frequently used approach for the study of both media and protest could allow us to test the Europeanization hypothesis through a case study involving social actors from different countries. It indeed seemed to us that *social actors could be expected to act as Europeanized ones only if they could rely on some frame or schema emphasizing their European identity*, whatever its definition, and that media could provide such an identity which at the moment obviously lacks a deeply rooted history with important elements.

Thus we first imagined to look at the coverage of the "European Marches against unemployment" which were to gather in Amsterdam in June 1997 as a counter-EU summit. But suddenly arose the Vilvoorde's closure issue. As soon as the French carmaker Renault has announced that its Belgian plant of Vilvoorde (near Brussels) was to close did the workers decide to go on strike. And, to state it briefly before a more developed analysis of how the interactions process led to the "Vilvoorde's reference", since French as well as Belgian and European political incumbents get involved in this issue media focused on it. Not only in the two countries involved but over Europe as well journalists covered the story which lasted strictly speaking six months but with a judiciary aftermath till the sentence of Renault executives for breach of the Belgian labour laws in March 1998.

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The industrial settlements of Renault in four European countries (France, Spain, Belgium, Slovenia) can objectively lead to consider it as a transnational actor. The restructuration plan on which the closure's decision was based indeed included the transfer of the production to French and Spanish plants. Consequently co-ordinated reactions from trade unions through Europe could have all the more been expected that Renault has established a European group council (EGC) since 1995. Nethertheless the solidarity and joint protest ran by workers from different countries was an innovation. The year before, the decision to close the Portuguese plant in Setubal indeed ignited no such movement. It is thus proved that the idea of a common contentious response cannot be taken for granted. In brief, something more than a favorable context seems to be needed for transnational action.

The study is based on interviews with journalists and trade unions members as well as qualitative and quantitative analysis of data taken from European media (agencies, newspapers, televisions) at the time of the most contentious protest (02/27-04/05/97). After a recall of what makes the Vilvoorde's case so particular (1), we introduce to how and why the media cover these events (2), which leads us to analyze the interaction process between the different kinds of actors involved (3), the spiral resulting from these interactions being mainly determined by the frames and assessments provided by the media (4). Last, we conclude on the symbolic gains that this social conflict brought as the first step towards a Europeanized consciousness among social actors.

1. WHAT IT IS ABOUT: CLOSE A PLANT AND SEE EU BLAZE

On February 27, 1997, the French car manufacturer Renault announced that its Belgian assembly plant of Vilvoorde where 3.100 were employed would close on the following July. From immediate reactions of the wage-earners – strike (7 weeks), blockade of the plant and stocks (5.000 cars) - then actions and demonstrations including big ones (10.000 in Paris on march 11 and 70.000 in Brussels on 16) and to criticisms still expressed after the production ended in September, the "Vilvoorde's case" nourished spoken and acted protest. The trade unions - FGTB (socialist), CSC (christian), ACLVB (liberal) - decided to go on strike right away. With popular support the struggle lasted seven weeks until the resumption of work, voted only by two thirds of wage-earners and 50% of workers, frustration and dissatisfaction remaining. A few more days of strike then punctuate the production until the plant's closing down which finally occurred in early September.

The trade unions watchword was to keep the plant running and save all local jobs. Moreover, the debate on industrial strategy through counter-proposals

addressed to the executive board added in an offensive manner to this defensive purpose. It is thus a traditional social conflict, the target of contentious actions being always the potential negotiating partner, a short blockade of the Brussels-Paris Eurostar train excepted. But there is also an innovative transnational solidarity which is all the more interesting that before its new restructuring plans Renault used to promote competition between plants whose production was the same, for example between Vilvoorde and Douai in France. In this new industrial context, *solidarity appears to be a significant argument addressed to public opinion and political leaders through a strategy of mediatization*. But, this strategy was far from obvious and natural at the beginning of the mobilization since Belgians really thought that Renault intend to preserve France from social troubles by transferring redundancies into Belgium. The first Vilvoorde's workers demonstration is thus the occasion to advocate a boycott of Renault cars while the press denounced a French aggression. In this stream the Belgian Prime Minister and the government of Flanders addressed the French political institutions, because Renault is still 46% owned by the State. On the following day, the announcement of 3.000 job cuts in France balanced this anti-French feeling and strengthened *the "same boss, same fight" slogan*.

The will of the executive board of Renault was *to systematically avoid contact with employees*. It also had to challenge the idea of "social company" inherited from the former state-owned status stating that a private company facing competition and overproduction must restructure or die. The closing of Vilvoorde was sometimes said to secure the future of all the other plants but this kind of "social" argument did not alter the management's economical discourse.

Regarding political leaders, it happens that the Belgian Prime Minister used to be a Vilvoorde constituency MP, which made him react with anger very quickly. The issue was thus hoisted at a high level from the very beginning. Then the minister-President of Flanders summoned the chairman of Renault. And it could be said that there was a diplomatic approach to the closure. *Belgian politicians were indeed concerned with the deep discontent of their people because of many previous scandals (corruption, sex crimes) and social protests* including Clabecq steel factory strike that had started three weeks before the Vilvoorde's announcement, and whose closure was due to a recent EU Directive prohibiting governments to fund industry. Thus one of the issues on the agenda was the political responsibilities for industrial decline. This is mainly why the EU Competition Commissioner Karel van Miert reacted as a former Belgian socialist in spite of his famous preaching of free market within EU institutions. Last, on March 5 even the Belgian King expressed his great concern over the closure decision. In France, the same day, in spite of the "private company" argument supported by the Juppé government at the National Assembly, President Chirac said he was "shocked by the method". *In France, it seems that the*

debate on EU single currency tends to shape and give salience to any issue including a European dimension, which explains the so fast political crystallization of Vilvoorde. At the European level, the EU Commission President firmly criticized Renault, while the Social Affairs Commissioner claimed sanction powers similar to those available to his Competition colleague who had just refused to fund the Spanish Renault plant in Valladolid. In one week only, the most important political institutions in Belgium, France and the EU denounced at the very least how wage-earners were laid off by a multinational company. The following week, the European Parliament confirmed this tendency with a resolution supporting workers's struggle.

Through content analysis and interviews with some of them, journalists appeared to be very sensitive to two main elements. The first one, a professional habit to them, relates to *the primacy of politics in newsworthiness*: once an issue has been commented on by politicians, it reaches a greater status than those labeled "social" or "economical". But if this usual tendency to overrate the political heading were the only variable then the coverage of Vilvoorde would have probably lost most of its social content, which is not the case as the study of news framing indicates. There is a second element: *most of the chief editors chose their social staff as the leading team in the coverage of the issue.* And many social journalists had personal or professional expectations that social Europe will finally occur. And these social journalists who cover the issue were often enthusiastic:

"I do not say that we were too sympathetic in this regard but we never wrote, though we could have: they pretend to construct the Europe of demonstrators but it is a load of waffle! Because we tried to somehow believe in it too...".
"At the time, we really felt like it's the beginning of political and social Europe".
"Of course I found it very important and very happy it occurs".
"Some said to me I wrote articles which were too... some said I made articles very... favorable to the trade unions. Well, yes, I can't deny it".

After the short anti-French period Belgian media turned to frame their coverage in the wake of the French media: political issue, contentious actions, social Europe. Among the correspondents of the newspapers from other European countries, two tendencies also followed the French stream. Some, primarily working for the "left" papers, for example *Tageszeitung* in Germany or *Il Manifesto* in Italy, have a social feeling which made them send many articles and even more than their editor would finally publish. More balanced newspapers, for example *Frankfurter Rundschau* in Germany, *La Republica* in Italy or *El Pais* in Spain, are particularly interested in the European dimension of the issue and the chief editors asked for articles emphasizing it. In this respect, we must point out that the very conservative British *Daily Telegraph,* usually not that interested in social mobilizations, produced

one of the most regular coverage (10 articles in one month including 6 the first two weeks) so as to emphasize the difficult path towards EU integration. Because of the primacy of image, television news[2] reported only the great demonstrations in Paris and Brussels which strongly illustrated the idea of European solidarity. Thus the length of the media coverage can be explained by reasons that are both different and nevertheless converging onto the "social Europe" topic.

2. A HUGE MEDIA COVERAGE

Concerned about their image and how it could induce people to join their protest, social actors seek to influence how media report their mobilization. In this respect, one can identify three general uses of media : to mobilize supports, to set their claims on the political agenda, to sustain the mobilized people state of mind[3]. However, the scheme becomes strongly more complicated when, beyond the general concept of "social movement" appear plenty of actors, with various status, relationship and access to the media, and some of them, opposing the mobilization, are also likely to develop media strategies.

As a corollary to the rule according to which a social movement must be conceived as the outcome of interactions in which the media take part, the media coverage results from a lot of interactions that media could not control from the beginning to the end. Then there are two main questions about the media coverage of a mobilization: 1) did the media mention it? 2) if so, how? The quantitative and qualitative aspects of the coverage must be distinguished, since to draw the attention of the media is one thing and to obtain "a good" coverage (according to the hopes of actors) is another one.

2.1. A sustained media attention

The Vilvoorde case was long yet remarkably covered over time by the media. This sustained interest contributed to the duration of the event. However, the protest groups do not usually have a routinized access to the media and social actors took into account the difficulty as a CSC unionist recalls: "Perhaps nothing else was going on in the news (laugh)... And we did what was necessary to interest them. We tried to look after them well".

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[2] ZDF (Germany), RAI (Italy), TVE (Spain).

[3] Richard KIELBOWICZ, Clifford SHERER, "The Role of the Press in the Dynamics of Social Movements", in Louis Kriesberg (ed.), *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change*, 9. Greenwich, Conn : Jai, 1986, p. 71.

One should emphasize two important nuances before getting into the detail of the media coverage. First of all, to speak of sustained attention does not mean that the media interest was of an equal intensity. There are eclipses and resurgences. It is possible to distinguish different periods of the media coverage of which the AFP is a good indicator thanks to its gate-keeper and news selection functions. The curve of the daily number of AFP dispatches[4] (figure 1) clearly shows three periods (table 1).

Table 1: Evolution of the media coverage of Vilvoorde (number of AFP dispatches)

Period	nbr. of dispatches	nbr. of days	daily average
27/02 - 04/04	618	37	16,7
05/04 - 1er/06	90	58	1,5
02/06 - 31/07	234	50	4,7
27/02 - 31/07	942	145	6,5

[4] On the FRA wire (French users). These dispatches can then be translated to be used on other wires.

The first one adds up to 66% of these dispatches. The media attention is then very high, with a climax very quickly reached between March 3 and 7, and the maximum for a daily coverage on the 5 (79) and the 6 (71) of March. With 265 dispatches in 6 days (quite a high average of 44 a day), it totals 42% of the AFP production in this first period and 28% of the whole coverage. This is when the media spiral structured itself and Vilvoorde became a news "top story". Then took place a clear decrease with nonetheless a few peaks above 20 dispatches. Within the second period there is far less coverage. It reaches hardly 10% of the total with some medium peaks (10 dispatches) around April 14 (end of the first strike) 24 (protest action in Lille) and May 7 (decision of the Versailles Court). The third period (25%) sees on average a low coverage yet includes two peaks before the issue is slowly removed from the agenda. In fact, the media interest clearly resumed on June 3 (13 dispatches), because of the left victory in the general elections. Afterwards the events triggered brief surges of media interest: on June 10 the general meeting of Renault shareholders then on June 28 the final confirmation of the plant's closure.

Then it would be equally naive to believe that all the media gave the same importance to the case. It is thus necessary to deconstruct the global concept "the media". They indeed embrace hundreds of individuals fulfilling various functions, the organizations which employ them and the system (with its subsystems) that they form together. Studying a media coverage implies to be interested in each component, even if one would argue that some are more important than others. And, conversely, one cannot treat each component as an independent entity: at any level, it is partially determined by its position in the system.

It is possible to distinguish the French and Belgian media which are by far the most interested among the European media. That can seem obvious since the majority of the events took place in France or in Belgium. Moreover, a few exceptions set aside, the logic of the media remained strongly national, for the agenda-setting as well as for the qualitative treatment: even if this case somehow altered the media national stance no European public sphere really emerges insofar media from the various countries would develop simultaneously public controversies on the same subjects, according to common procedures and transnational cleavages. The corpus of analysis is selected accordingly. The biggest part is devoted to the French press. The Belgian press is only partially analyzed because of linguistic practice of Flemish. We balanced our selection in the daily press and some TV news of the largest EU countries. Lastly, the production in French and partially in English and German from the French news agency Agence France Presse was extensively analyzed over the long period (27/02-31/07/97). The productions of the Reuter news agency, that of the French daily newspapers and weekly magazines and of all the

evening TV news broadcasted by the two main national channels (TF1 and France 2) were also fully studied over the reference period (27/02-04/04/97) and selectively beyond.

Media interest is correlated to outstanding facts (statements, demonstrations...), at least those perceived as such by journalists which brings out the important question of the "newsworthiness"[5]. This concept refers to the somehow implicit criteria on which journalists rely to decide whether an unexpected, significant, spectacular, attractive or credible fact deserves to be put at the top of the agenda. Moreover a fruitful framework would envision separately the initial coming on stage (agenda-setting), the ability to hold the spotlight over time and, should the occasion arise, to make a come-back.

Adjusting for specific editorial tendencies, the AFP coverage periodization is valid for all the French media, since the news agency is used by them as a gate-keeper, but also because of their common professional theory and practice. Thus, Vilvoorde stayed on the front page of the daily newspapers from March 3 to 8. Evening television news by TF1 and France 2 dealt all the week long and opened several times their broadcasting with the case. Vilvoorde still hit the headlines until March 20 but discontinuously. In this respect the AFP curves and those of the other media show a remarkably similar structure. They acknowledgely differ but the dynamics of the agenda-setting are the same in terms of reactivity.

2.2. One event, several frames

The complexity and many dimensions of the case mainly explains the intensity and length of its coverage : "It's why it was enthralling", explains a social journalist of *Le Monde*. In this respect, the distinction between facts and comments is hardly possible. Even a neutral report tends to emphasize one aspect or another:

- economical requirement. Because of competition and overproduction in Europe, Renault simply did not have the choice and had to sacrifice Vilvoorde. Figures and statistics back up this thesis which is merely paraphrazing the management's argument. Pro-market media newspapers and politicians used it to prone not to interfere with a recently privatized company. Some even criticized a partial privatization perceived as ambiguous.
- the abrupt manner. This low version of "economical requirement" criticized the form but not the content of the closing decision. Many French politicians and the government used it. When used by leftists this argument is combined with the need for social measures for the laid off employees.

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[5] Herbert GANS, *Deciding what's News*. New York : Vintage Book, 1979.

- social brutality. The left oriented press denounced the so called human sacrifice and illustrated it with articles devoted to workers lives. The chairman of Renault, a former aide to a Socialist Prime Minister in the mid-1980s then embodied the notion of treason because converted to capitalism. The Belgian press and the majority of the European newspapers use this interpretation. Many references to the title of the success book by Viviane Forester, *L'Horreur économique,* added to this evocation of the social tragedy.
- united we will win. Not only was the theme of solidarity particularly emphasized by the most involved press but also frequently referred to by all media..
- general hypocrisy. Journalists and observers pointed out that before opportunistic speeches, national and European leaders often promoted free market.
- Franco-Belgian disagreements. Previous disputes had nourished an anti-French feeling upon which the Belgian extreme right wing as well as the Flemish popular press relied.

2.3. A coverage of great magnitude

"Social conflicts are seldom covered that much", notes a social journalist of *Le Monde,* his professional point of view backing the present analysis. To assess it, one can compare the main AFP wire (FRA) coverage of Vilvoorde over long period (27/02-31/07/97) and the reference period (27/02-04/04/97) to the coverage of the last French nuclear tests decided by Jacques Chirac (13/06-10/09/95) and to the coverage of the last general elections campaign (21/04-24/05/97). The primacy of political events is clear in the "newsworthiness" hierarchy but the coverage of Vilvoorde is relatively important during the reference period (table 2).

Table 2: Vilvoorde's ranking in the news hierarchy

topic	n. of days	n. of dispatches	maximum n. of dispatches	average dispatch./day
Vilvoorde	145	942	79	6,5
Nuclear tests [6]	99	1117	73	12
Vilvoorde (ref)	37	618	79	17
Elections [7]	34	5430	189	155

[6] Data: Grégory DERVILLE, "le combat singulier Greenpeace-SIRPA : la compétition pour l'accès aux médias lors de la reprise des essais nucléaires français". *Revue française de science politique,* vol. 47, n° 5, pp. 589-629.

[7] Data: Eric LAGNEAU, Couvrir une campagne électorale. Les journalistes de l'AFP et la campagne des législatives de 1997. [Master's dissertation] Paris : Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, 1997.

As recalled the AFP social service head, the journalistic status of the case was specific:

" It becomes the main "top story" of the current events and not an international "top story", but a European. Then, "one swings", i.e., as long as we are not covering a "top story", the number of words is limited... And then, suddenly, when one starts to cover a "top story", there are almost no more limits. The more we do, the better it is. What in normal time would have made an average coverage, i.e. the redundancies plan of Renault France [...] ...is really more important because of Vilvoorde.

Thus, when a subject becomes a "top story", the coverage changes independently of the facts themselves. It is especially true for a news agency such as AFP, because of its place in the media system. Any statement in connection with the "top story" is likely to be reported. Politicians and unionists are careful at this stage to shape "soundbites". The news agency journalists reporting TV or Radio political programs are waiting for this kind of reaction. They quote these soundbites in their dispatches that feed the other radios and televisions, and the newspapers of the following day. In this very routinized system, the media spiral is thus fed by interactions between actors and journalists and by their mutual expectations.

2.4. Protest Actions and coverage of the social movement

When a social movement reaches the "top story" status, protest actions are as expected as the soundbites of politicians even if the number of demonstrators is reduced. In his inspiring comparison between police and press sources, Olivier Fillieule writes in connection with the coverage of protests of great magnitude and with the methodological purpose of building longitudinal series[8]:

"On the one hand, the press starts to give importance to protest campaigns only when they have already reached a certain magnitude. From this point of view the media appear very "sheeplike". Besides, when these campaigns last, the attention of the media drops even though protest events remain important. From these two remarks, one can conclude that the press does not make it possible to correctly study the development of protest campaigns, since it never accounts for the whole of a cycle of mobilization with the rise of number of demonstrators and the evolution of the repertoire of action used".

[8] Olivier FILLIEULE. "Archives policières, sources de presse et manifestations de rue", *Les Cahiers de la Sécurité intérieure*, n°26, 4e trimestre 1996, p. 168.

Regarding Vilvoorde, the media attention for protest actions was immediate. Olivier Fillieule could be astonished about that. But one would observe that the first actions had already reached a great magnitude: blockade of the factory as soon as February 27 then 4.000 demonstrators on March 3 in Brussels. However be added that the Belgian Prime Minister and the minister-President of Flanders reacted as quickly as the trade unions and that journalists are very sensitive to the political actors involvement. After March 20, there is a clear decrease of the media attention for the protest actions. Social actors are aware of it. Karel Gacoms, FGTB spokesman of Renault workers in Belgium acknowledges: "we carried out too many spectacular actions from the very beginning. We get tired. After the great demonstration in Brussels on March 16 with Lionel Jospin, we could not do better"[9]. The journalist reporting his analysis: "I wrote it immediately, it was obvious. They had begun very strongly but they could not go further ".

One could thus claim that the reduced media interest after March 20 is due to a weaker mobilization. Social actors anticipated this law of decrease of the media interest and thus adjust their acts accordingly. But it is also necessary to stress out the elasticity of this "law" by taking into account the competition of the rest of other current events. Few events have an intrinsic media importance, the vacuum of the summer being favorable to minor events. When Vilvoorde occurred, it was not very competed with. Nevertheless, nothing is acquired forever: the national staff head at *L'Express* recalls that Vilvoorde was preferred at the last minute to the "made cow" issue for the cover (n° 2384, 13-19/03/97)!

Because of the competition for the agenda between current events and the gradual standardization of protest actions one could expect a lower media attention. Yet the AFP kept on reporting Vilvoorde even if the use of its dispatches by the other media changed: they are seldom used and for brief news only. Thus, for two eight-day following series, one counts 103 dispatches (12,9 a day) from March 12 to 19 then 94 (11,8 a day) from March 20 to 27. The AFP production is quantitatively similar in these two periods although the first series saw facts which are *a priori* more remarkable (EP debate on 12/03, euro-demonstration in Brussels on 16/03) that those of the second series.

The case of March 27 gives an explanation to this apparent paradox. That day, about 30 Vilvoorde workers who blocked the North France Wavrin stocking area for one week left the site while 500 others raided two Renault subcontractor factories. On the one hand, the AFP journalists followed the events almost minute by minute, and devoted 15 dispatches to them. This hourly coverage is especially

[9] *Le Monde*, 24/07/97.

intended for radio and TV which need renewed fresh news. On the other hand, *Le Monde* and *Libération* which were particularly involved in the coverage of Vilvoorde gave little importance to these actions. Similarly these raids aroused a short comment by the France 2 TV anchorman (30 seconds) and on TF1 as well (17 seconds). The conservative *Le Figaro* didn't even mention it while the popular *Le Parisien* offered a captioned photograph only. The optimists will be able to stress that the "top story" status still produced effects. Nevertheless, in spite of a significant number of participants and clashes with the police forces, the reactivity of the media is definitely lower than it used to be until mid-March. In fact, the fundamental difference in the agenda derives from the withdrawal of the political actors: their leaving the stage explains the case's change of status. What Schattschneider early pointed out is particularly true regarding the role of politicians' involvement: "the outcome of all conflict is determined by the scope of its contagion. The number of people involved in any conflict determines what happens ; every change in the number of participant, every increase or reduction in the number of participants, affect the result" (1960: 2).

With the law of decrease of the media interest one should add that *two identical "protest events" will not have the same echo depending on the context*, most especially the whole set of actors involved and not the relationships between protesters and media.

Nevertheless, the action remain an unavoidable topic for media to cover. The photographs of press and the TV footage make the mobilization visible. Especially on TV (whose rhetoric relies on images and where events usually are not even mentioned without fresh striking footage) protest actions are a key element of the coverage (figure 2). For the press, pictures are an equivalent of the images for TV. Admittedly, they are practically and aesthetically useful to the layout. But especially, when the status of "top story" was fading after mid-March a big picture illustrating a short text, or even a captioned one, kept the issue on the agenda. For example, on April 4, at the very end of the reference period, Nanterre court decision introduced a new and very important fact which has been largely covered. But though this episode favored workers, it didn't refer to their claim nor gave them any visibility. However, this very day, 500 up to 1.000 of them demonstrated once more in Brussels. As the mobilization was decreasing and the case shifted towards the courtrooms, journalists are not that interested in this action. There were just brief mentions of it in the articles and one can conclude that the context was unfavorable to the employees speaking up. But the legal dimension generating few images, action nevertheless fed the visual elements of the coverage on TV as in the newspapers. Similarly, photographs of the March 16 euro-demo in Brussels maintain the protest dimension when used to illustrate quite ulterior events. *As a simple and synthesizing*

metadiscourse, iconography holds a very important function of reminder to define the nature of the events. Thus there are significant differences in the choice of the pictures according to whether the newspapers favor the fight: the French leftist *L'Humanité* devotes more than 70% (32 out of 45) to the protest actions, the more balanced Belgian *Le Soir* 60% (38 out of 23) and the French conservative *Le Figaro* only 40% (8 out of 20).

3. INTERACTIONS

Social actors, the executive board of Renault, politicians, and journalists act separately according to specific sets of behaviors shared with peers but also get into interactions with each other and consequently adjust themselves to the new conditions they encounter through interactions. *Those of the interactions that most maintain the dynamics of the movement are linked to the media*. For example, the proportion of identifiable sources of the AFP dispatches between the 27/02 and the 20/03 seem to indicate only a low salience of Belgian politicians (7%). Nevertheless, during the first four days of the period, it totals 19% of the sources of the agency, which leads to think their involvement was decisive to set the issue at the top of the agenda (table 3).Through a process of spiral, the magnitude of the Vilvoorde's case was due to the involvement of media as well as it explained the length and intensity of their coverage. *The media thus appear to be a pivot of the protest phenomenon.*

Table 3: major source of the AFP dispatches including an identifiable one (27/02-20/03/97)

period (nbr. of disp.)	Executive board of Renault	Trade unions	Protest actions field	Belgian polit.	French polit. (gvt.)	French polit. (opp.)	EU polit
27/02-02/03 (31)	29%	45%	0%	19%	0%	0%	6%
03/03-09/03 (203)	13%	28%	11%	8%	21%	11%	7%
10/03-16/03 (98)	3%	35%	19%	4%	26%	9%	4%
17/03-20/03 (43)	0%	44%	42%	2%	12%	0%	0%
TOTAL (375)	10%	33%	16%	7%	19%	9%	5%

3.1. Showdown and opposed media strategies

In the afternoon of February 27, just as the decision of closing which had been taken several weeks before was to be announced and shortly after the chief-executive of the Belgian plant had exposed it in camera to the union representatives, he stated before the press nothing more than "measures which would have consequences for the factory of Vilvoorde". He was instructed by the executive board of the company just to keep silent, something he fully achieved all the conflict long. As for the Renault's general secretary, he made a day-long return trip from Paris to Brussels to inform journalists through an expeditious press conference. He did not go to Vilvoorde. Lastly, Renault's chairman denied trade unions his becoming their interlocutor. Summoned in Brussels on March 3 by the minister-President of Flanders, he kept away from Vilvoorde once more. Three days later, he again refused to receive a delegate of the factory while the company's central committee was held. On March 19, three weeks after the announcement, a first (and last) formal meeting finally took place. The deny of dialog was so obstinate that a Belgian representative of trade unions stated just after the meeting held on June 12 with the independent expert appointed by Renault under pressure by the new leftist French government : "After three months during which we could tell the executive board our arguments only through the media, it's really good to feel someone's listening to us".

Similarly, the executive board of Renault tried to communicate as less as possible with the media. The few press conferences imposed by the agenda were used only to restate the "irrevocable" character of a decision which is "necessary for the company". The few interviews dealt exclusively with the industrial future of Renault. This quasi dumbness is reinforced whenever possible through selecting the journalists. Thus the chairman gave his first interview to the Belgian press he considered too hostile a full month only after the closing's announcement[10]. This strategy of avoidance and discrimination is particularly perceptible at the April 4 press conference which was organized to react to the unfavorable decision of the French Court of Nanterre. Only the economical journalists or specialists in the car industry were called upon because they were supposed to hardly understand the jurisprudential importance of a decision which strengthens the status of European Work Councils within companies. Though they were generally chosen as leading reporters by their editor, social journalists are isolated. This operation is almost successful. At *Le Monde*, the journalist specialist in the car industry was busy with something else and his fellow-member of the social staff finally attended the information meeting. With his accurate knowledge of the issue, he wrote a long article which served as fulcrum for the leading article and some more news on the following days in other media.

The executive board of Renault also kept distance with other media. None TV news program had obtained an interview in France or Belgium. As long as the conflict lasted, the discussion programs relied only on the general secretary while the chairman finally entered the TV arena after the resumption of work at Vilvoorde with two other big bosses facing the leaders of the three major French trade unions[11]. The CGT-Renault Central Delegate remembers it with anger : "I was in the audience, in the studio, and I was very frustrated because there were three bosses who know well their company facing three confederal representatives who had a much overall approach. My general secretary had proposed that I take part in it, confronting Schweitzer [Chairman of Renault] but it was not possible [...] I wanted to manage a TV debate with my chairman on Renault, with equal weapons, two people who are as familiar with the case". Public confrontation between executive board and trade unionists of Renault thus did not really take place either in the media.

Contrary to the executive board, trade unionist are pleased with the media attention as some point it out :

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[10] *La Libre Belgique*, 27/03/97.
[11] *La Marche du siècle*, France 3, 23/04/97.

"The journalists jumped on us. Even in 1995 when there had been great strikes at Renault, one had never seen that".

"We are very pleased with the part done by the media. They were supporting us. Especially because of the way the closing was proceeded, its brutality. Usually, it is difficult to keep media attention a long time and to remain in the news. Most of the time, to make a struggle end, it is enough not to speak about it any more. But this time it was still going on".

And journalists confirm this feeling:

"Social conflicts are seldom so much covered".
"What would have usually been covered at an average level, i.e. the redundancies plan of Renault France, [...] becomes really more important because of Vilvoorde".
"Of course it was of huge importance, and even astonishing. And I have been asked to write many articles by my Italian editor".

Media success became a major objective. The Central Delegate [of the French] CFDT-Renault summarizes it as follows : "the emotion caused by the brutal closing of the Belgian factory proved to be very intense, and even surprising insofar reactions of public opinion, media and political leaders were strong [...] the active mobilization of public opinion was required to exert an effective external pressure"[12]. The choice of social journalists as the leading ones combined with the withdrawal strategy of the executive board undoubtedly explains why trade unions were so pleased with the media. For example, from February 27 to March 20, half of the 375 AFP dispatches with a clearly identifiable source included information from trade union or protest source while those including information from the executive board follow a very decreasing trend (see table 3). Moreover newspapers and TV news programs portrayed many times workers and their family, which contributed to sensitize public opinion and, through impressive shortcuts, to embody the claim for a social Europe radically opposed to a bureaucratic and anonymous vision of European integration.

Journalists identify "smart" trade unionists. The workers' meeting held on each Monday morning in the factory was used as a teasing session so as to resume the attention of journalists increasingly more sensitive to spectacular actions ignited from this place. The personality of Karel Gacoms, in charge of the [Belgian] FGTB-Steel regional federation and involved among strikers as if he were one of them proved to be of a great importance. "I work on Belgium 365 days a year and it is

[12] Daniel RICHTER, "Renault Vilvoorde. Un cas d'école et une occasion manquée". *Les temps modernes*, n° 597, jan-fév. 1998, pp. 94-97.

very rare to find a guy who can speak to journalists, who speaks to them, first, then knows how to speak to them, knows how they work. He was very good from the very beginning [...] and there was a game between Gacoms and the journalists", an AFP correspondent explains.

3.2. Politico-media crystallization

Politicians react because they keep in mind that voters are sensitive to such a dramatic illustration of unemployment. In the beginning, the Belgian press commented on the closing decided by Renault as a "nationalist" measure meant to protect jobs in France by sacrificing wage-earners in Vilvoorde. In France media conveyed this feeling because they first covered the issue by reporting Belgian reactions only. The FEM (European Steel Trade Union) General Secretary stated too: "Renault acted with political motivation to avoid social problems in France". And similarly, in his first statement, the Belgian Prime Minister mentioned a "unilateral and brutal decision [...] within a multinational which does not take the local social consequences into account". In the immediate aftermath of the closure's announcement, cancellations of ordering of Renault vehicles by local authorities and Belgian administrations, the summoning of the French Ambassador by the minister-President of Flanders and contacts between Belgian and French Prime Ministers indeed gave a political dimension to this issue. The fact that Renault is still a state-owned company up to 46% is systematically referred to in the media which, to some extent (depending on their editorial posture) attributed the responsibility of the closing to the French government.

In France, on March 4, the socialist leader and soon to be Prime Minister (once general elections were called before term in June 1997), pressed the government to reconsider the decision, stressing that it "affects the image of France in Europe [... and] neglects the need for a social Europe" then concluded: " to seek to set the employees of a country against those of another is a shame for a great French and European company". This political statement in the middle of the week following the announcement of the closing was part of the spiral process which then shaped the issue. Until March 5, the French government's strategy consisted in not commenting on the decision of Renault and circumscribing the issue to a business bargaining within a private company. But because of *the status* of the event, this position could not possibly last long : "In front of the social and diplomatic crisis caused by the announcement of the closing of Vilvoorde in Belgium, the Prime Minister pressed by his majority and criticized by the opposition, decided to get involved into an issue that brings new light on the debate on social Europe" (*Le Monde*, 06/03/97).

Besides, even before the issue was shaped by the observers and the actors as a debate on social Europe, and before trade unions appealed to EU institutions against the decision, these institutions got involved in such a way that it shows *the strong and fast political crystallization* around this topic. The day after the announcement of the closing, the Belgian Prime Minister asked his Social Affairs minister to inquire about potential breaches of European Directives, while the EU Social Affairs Commissioner actually ordered an investigation. On March 2, the City Council of Vilvoorde asked again the EU Competition Commissioner, the Belgian Karel van Miert, to appeal against the closing of the factory before the EU institutions. And on March 3, while the trade union of Vilvoorde asked their national representative to intervene at this legal level, both of the EU Commissioners stated that Renault has broken the European Works Council Directive and the Collective Redundancies Directive. Karel van Miert went as far as suggesting trade unions to take Renault to a national court. On March 11, with the opening of a new EU parliamentary session the flow of political criticisms resumed. On this occasion, the EU Social Affairs Commissioner spoke much harsher than the leaders of the ETUC (European Trade Union Congress) will ever officially do and denounced the Renault management for acting "in a manner which I can only describe as irresponsible". Then, on March 12, after a roar of applause granted to a delegation of Belgian, French, Spanish and Portuguese workers, Euro-MPs passed a resolution (385 for, 36 against, 23 abstentions) against the "inadmissible" decision, expressing their "solidarity towards the workers of Renault" and urged the European Union to penalize Renault.

By emphasizing the political dimension of the issue as they usually do, the media decisively contributed to set and keep Vilvoorde high on the agenda through a European set of themes. Later in May, the same political dynamics operated during the French general elections campaign to put Vilvoorde back on the agenda. Media in Belgium and all over Europe had already been very sensitive to the involvement of the French Left leaders in the huge demonstration of March 16 in Brussels. They then treated the Vilvoorde case as political once again. *There is a political structuring of the interactions between media and actors of the event.* As they are generally used to doing, politicians sought to talk on TV. Thus Karel van Miert "took part in every single TV debate on Vilvoorde in all European channels during 15 days", says the AFP correspondent in Brussels who covered the story. But he is not the only one. The Belgian Prime Minister was interviewed live on March 3 for the second French evening television news program. On the following weekend, a long interview of the EU Commission President is broadcasted in the first TV debate which is held in France[13]. And significatively, at the beginning of this program, three political guests meant to debate on another issue claimed to take part

[13] *Polémiques*, France 2, 09/03/97.

in the discussion on Vilvoorde : "The two trade unionists of Renault put aside, the others generalized immediately about Europe. One could easily understand that there laid a political issue", remembers the CGT-Renault Central delegate.

Media dynamics are thus increased and sustained by politicians whose involvement is itself induced by the previous media coverage. This spiral operated as a fulcrum and finally hoisted the conflict among big European issues through the social Europe theme. But simultaneously and independently, the contentious action was actually innovative with transnational solidarity and in this respect seemed to be perfectly fitted to politico-media language. Politicization of the event and media discourse gave way to a protest and mobilizing theme that social actors can in turn exploit and deepen, even if in the first place they were not the ones to identify it. "We did not get into action saying: this is for Europe. This idea came later to us. And it is true that once we got it we believed that we would be able to change Europe by our own", a CSC Vilvoorde's delegate explains. The journalist of the social service of *Le Monde* who covered the issue and was in permanent contact with the trade unionists agrees:

" Speaking of a "eurostrike" is a comment in itself. The media spoke about it first [...] This European dimension increased the public, the media, the editors awareness... and, in fact, tended to support the social movement, at the very least to give it a political importance and not only a social one [...] As of the 5-6 [March], as newspapers begun to speak about eurostrike, trade unionists, purposively or not, saw that there was this European aspect...".

The image of the spiral fits well to the dynamic and cumulative phenomenon resulting from the interactions between actors. The European characterization of the event thus appears to be an example of reality being socially built around media that are its pivot. This is why we want to analyze further the role played by media in such a complex process.

4. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE EVENT

One of the main issues within a social movement relates to the symbolic struggle between advocates and adversaries of the mobilization about its meaning.

4.1. The European framing success

Admittedly, some journalists can be thought of as pioneers of the European framing. On March 2, Ariane Verderosa, social journalist of the AFP delivered a major dispatch announced beforehand (by the editorial team) entitled "Renault: a social concern died, social Europe is not born yet". Rather than the neutral title suggested by its correspondent in connection with the demonstration of March 3 ("the employees of Vilvoorde demonstrate"), *La Croix* quoted a participant: "Europe should not be like that". On March 4, *Le Monde* advocates in a leading article "For a social Europe". On March 5, *Libération* wrote in its headlines: "Requiem for social Europe". But the European dimension is not yet prominent for the case becomes in France an issue of national politics focusing the attention on the important personalities which reacted to it: leader of the opposition, President and Prime Minister. Then came suddenly the phrase "eurogrève" ("eurostrike").

This does not come from the eight trade unions (Belgian ACLVB, CSC and FGTB, Spanish CC.OO and UGT, French CFDT, CFTC and CGT) which had called for a strike in all the European plants of Renault on March 3. Their text did not mentioned "eurostrike" and the media initially referred to this action by a long periphrasis. This thus confirmed that unionist and journalistic rhetorics share very little. The first mention of the term goes back to March 5 in an announced AFP dispatch by Ariane Verderosa: "Renault: Europe of Trade-unions to mitigate the lack of social Europe":

"[...] The brutal announcement of the closing of the Renault plant of Vilvoorde (Belgium) as already led to a striking innovation: the call to a "euro-strike" on Friday in the Belgian car industry and the Renault factories in Europe [...]".

"Euro-strike" does not appear in the "lead", the very important first paragraph in the news agency rhetoric. But it is the key point of the analysis which includes the main aspects of the argumentation to come. Ariane Verderosa recalls how she created it:

"I wanted to be somehow prospective about what was going to happen instead of keeping repeating. [...] That's the way the term euro-strike was born. It must have been on a Saturday or a Sunday when I was so bored and then "hop!" it was used and used again!"

The key role of the AFP in the media system and the common use of this type of dispatch by the newspapers the following day enables a wide spreading of the

phrase in the national and local French press and TV. Then came the variations on the following week ("eurostrike", "euro-lay off", "europanic", "euro-employers" and "euro-trade unions", "euromobilization", "eurodemo", "eurodemonstration", "euroconflict", "euroanger", "euro-walk").

4.2. Why such a success ?

The phrases built around the European topic are short and striking but are only journalistic tricks. Nevertheless, the media which did most often use the initial phrase or its variations were also the very ones which did most adopt the European framing. Conversely, the French and Anglo-Saxon conservative or financial media, *Le Figaro*, Reuter and *The International Herald Tribune* in particular, were reluctant. Thus, on March 7, Reuters spoke only about "one-hour strikes in 3 countries" and "brief strikes in several countries". The phrase "Eurostrike" appearing in English AFP dispatches is not used. At most, on March 16, the title of the dispatch was "Belgian jobs marchers slam euro-inhumanity" and mentioned trade-union leaders "who said it was the first truly pan-European March". Then a synthesis on March 18 indicated "Euro-restructuring prompt Euro-protests". The British conservative newspaper *The Times* had recourse to "pan-European March". Through their correspondents in France, European newspapers more favorable to the movement readily used literal translations of the phrase: "Eurostreik" then "gesamteuropäische Demonstration" (*Tageszeitung*, 8 and 17/03), "euro-demo" (*The Guardian,* 12/03), "euromanifestazione" then "europrotesta" (*Reppublica,* 12 and 17/03), "eurohuelga" then "euromanifestacion" (*El Pais,* 7, 8 and 12/03).

AFP's Ariane Verderosa says "we tried to somehow believe in it too...". His AFP supervisor confirms the passion of the moment. The national section supervisor at *L'Express* explains "we have a strong European concern [...] and, at this time, we had the impression that political and social Europe was born". The correspondent of *Tageszeitung* in Paris remembers: "Of course, I found that very important and I thought it was a good thing that happened". These testimonies indicate how much the expectations and sympathy of some journalists proved valuable to the movement.

Lastly, beyond these social journalists, continuously in contact with trade-union sources, there is also the more general intuition, especially in the head of chief-editors, that the public is sensitive to this type of struggle. A journalist of the Reuter office in Brussels summarizes: "Renault had bad luck. With time, I understood that journalists usually create the event far more than they cover it. Then there was a favorable atmosphere, more anxious people. It is a moment, an economical situation in history that journalists felt". And the context of the

preparation of the European single currency led out the political and media observers to comment on any related phenomenon.

This tentative of "media archaeology" underlines the processes of cross diffusion of the elements which constitute the European framing. *Between journalists, trade-union actors and politicians verbal relationships develop which form the main part of their interactions and strongly feed the dynamic of the protest.* The image of the spiral is appropriate for this phenomenon. However, with the image this time of a cyclone sweeping everything on its way, the dominating framing develops its own force, relatively independent of the movement initially mounted. In fact, the trade unions integrated the terms "eurostrike" and "eurodemonstration" into their literature only once they left physical public sphere and invest almost exclusively symbolic public sphere. It is in particular, after the change of government in France, their call to "save Renault Vilvoorde by the reduction of the weekly working hours" (*Le Monde,* 27/06/97). In the same way, the European dimension makes it possible to be retrospectively defined as pioneers. But, strictly speaking, this rhetorical evolution is no success at all for the employees first involved to save their job.

Trade-union leaders and politicians finally used the European framing in a rather opportunistic way and the institutional, established, and consensual bias of journalists is helpful to them. Having a privileged access to the channels of information only if they follow the agenda, they legitimate the main topic but also greatly benefit from it. These are, for example, Belgian EU Competition Commisioner Karel van Miert advocating Belgian interests, the spokesman of the French Juppé government stating without fearing contradiction with his position during the movement that "the eurostrike is a comforting and important element, because it is the signal that the destiny of the European employees is from now on linked"[14] and being immediately quoted by the AFP, and the ETUC general secretary who had never that much promoted his organization in the European media.

4.3. Favorable interpretation, unsatisfied claim: success or failure of collective action?

At the end of this exploration of media in the Vilvoorde case, one can wonder whether the framing selected in interaction with sources, particularly the "social Europe" framing, benefited the actors of the mobilization.

Analyzed in its dynamics, a social movement is composed of many actors, events, and evolutions which produce a multiplicity of changing aims and

[14] Alain LAMASSOURE, *L'Hebdo*, Canal+, 05/04/97.

thus is not very likely to be simply favored or unfavored in an exclusive and ultimate way by its media coverage. The European framing helped promoting the event and maintaining it on top of the agenda. But we have already mentioned that this symbolically political widening effect goes along with the demobilization of workers by removing them from the main stage. We could then convey the idea that, in general, "once protest enters the machinery of the political process, it encounters political games and institutional mechanisms that take it out of the control of its initiators"[15].

Besides, it would be wrong to presume that a favorable coverage necessarily leads to fulfill the initial claims. If there is a direct effect of the media, it should be sought first in the public sphere which is only an alternative sphere of influence, a second best far from being as propitious as the institutional sphere. The fact that these two spheres legally coexist characterizes modern democracies. However they are not absolutely connected to each other and the shift of gains from one sphere to the other is not that common. The symbolic advantage in the former must then be confronted to a complex balance of power which sometimes only contributes to change the decision in the latter. In the Vilvoorde case, the executive board of Renault always refused the logic of a confrontation of the points of view arbitrated by public opinion.

The reception of media discourse by the actors of the mobilization and the public is also difficult to assess. As Erik Neveu stresses it, "one of the interesting points of the frame analysis is due to its capacity to connect the representations of the mobilized groups and those of the media, in a more accurate manner than the often fuzzy and denouncing references to dominant ideologies and speeches"[16]. In this respect, William Gamson identifies three main frames of perception: injustice, agency, collective identity[17]. From this scheme, most of the authors consider that the media speech is not favorable to social movements on two aspects. First, the issues are seldom dealt with following the injustice frame which designates victims and culprits. Moreover, the influence of collective action is ignored since journalists comment on facts and events without analyzing the issue and its causes.

Here, the first point is not confirmed: the Vilvoorde employees are systematically presented like (1) good workers (2) having accepted the flexibility and thus (3) unfairly hurt by a decision which is at the very least contestable in its form.

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[15] Doug IMIG, Sidney TARROW, "The Europeanization of Movements? Contentious Politics and the European Union, October 1983-March 1995". Institute for European Studies Working Papers, n° 96-3. Ithaca : Cornell University, 1996, p. 11.
[16] Erik NEVEU, *Sociologie des mouvements sociaux*. Paris : La Découverte, 1996, p. 92.
[17] William GAMSON, *Talking Politics*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1992.

The second point is more ambiguous. While emphasizing the mobilization, most of the journalists doubted the ability of the movement to get satisfaction. None of the journalists interviewed about it thinks he/she gave rise to expectations on the core issue of the case (the closing down). In fact, both points are connected in most of the articles and reports: the ineluctability of the social tragedy (which goes against the mobilization) justifies and strengthens the indignation (which encourages the political reactions). As for the question of identity, it is most probable that the main topic of solidarity, including transnational solidarity, encourages the social actors and a broad part of the public to conceive a unity of condition likely to help forthcoming mobilizations. The rhetoric and the illustration of pain in the media thus depict a vain but fair and worthy fight.

CONCLUSION: VILVOORDE, AND SO WHAT ? AT LEAST A SET OF SYMBOLIC GAINS...

Though the employees of Renault were not the first ones to resort to transnational solidarity, they clearly added eurostrike and eurodemonstration to the repertoire of action of trade-unions. This type of coordinated mobilization was quickly implemented by the very active FST (EU Transport trade unions federation) against the total liberalization of road transport (strike in the fifteen EU countries and blockade at their borders, 09/06/97 then 08/09/98, 05/10/99) and against the liberalization of the rail-fret transport (demonstration in Luxembourg 18/06/98, eurostrike in six EU countries 23/11/98). Similarly while the first European summit on employment was held in Luxembourg on November 20 and 21 1997, the ETUC gathered some 30.000 demonstrators, mainly Belgian and French. Thus emerges a culture of articulating claims, related in particular to the reduction of the weekly working hours, which was a heavily debated issue during the Vilvoorde conflict. The unity is not however as broad as possible: the German DGB - although the powerful IG Metall is rather voluntarist-, the British TUC and the Scandinavian organizations are less active.

The distinction between protest speech and protest action is worthy from the point of view of actors at the time of the assessment of the mobilization. What the media called "eurostrike" actually refers only to solidarity between some plants in three countries and the "eurodemonstrations" were primarily Franco-Belgian. The support motion for Vilvoorde workers adopted on March 12 by 385 (out of 434) European MPs is more surely European than these protest actions. But it is true that comments produced by or in the media built a symbolic system exploited by the employees of Renault and useful for other protests in the future. The mobilization of Vilvoorde is likely to remain like a watershed.

The European framing was a protest resource by getting interested the media and by sustaining the determination of employees thanks to its innovating character whose political resonance enlarged the circle of supports. But its effect on the final concrete outcome of the conflict seems minor. Nevertheless, by providing an overall promising meaning, it brought a fruitful shift of scale. Primarily defensive and vain for saving threatened jobs, the mobilization became offensive and tended to succeed at a higher level where it takes a clear political dimension. At this higher level, the general *debate* on the choices of society, at least from the rhetoric point of view, goes beyond the sectoral *debate* on the car industry. This widened focus does not really apply to Renault employees in their struggle but it has turned this mobilization into a momentous event, a reference for the workers (e.g. interview of Karel Gacoms, *Le Monde* 24/07/97, or a huge iron memorial symbolizing the struggle with a fist in Vilvoorde), as well as other trade unionists all over Europe (e.g. "the refusal of another Vilvoorde" by the 1.500 employees of the two Belgian and one French plants Levi's has closed in 1998) and even important politicians (e.g. interview of the French new PM on TV news program of France 2, 03/07/97). And in this respect, one should particularly note that the EU Commission begun to shift from promoting static bargaining between ETUC and UNICE to submitting Directive proposals to EU member states after the Vilvoorde mediatization put social issues on the agenda. And the ETUC also considers the mobilization as a momentum – "The starting point [of its campaign for employment] was a demonstration in Brussels following the close of Renault Vilvoorde", says the *Report of Activities 1995-1998* before it finally promote protest action as appropriate again after leaving it aside from the mid-eighties:

" [...] The 9th Congress commits the ETUC to: [...] Campaign for full recognition of civic and social rights, trade union rights including cross-border sympathy action, including strikes, to be enshrined in the Treaty on the occasion of its next revision [...]" (*General Trade Union Policy Resolution. Adopted by the IXth Statutory Congress of the ETUC (Helsinki, 29/06 - 02/07/1999)*, VII, 57).

A cultural sediment was built in speeches and representations derived from the mobilization. The Europeanization hypothesis relying on the need for a new identity thus seems to be validated through the analysis of interactions and their outcomes. No doubt the mobilization against the closing of the Vilvoorde factory is more likely to produce such effects than the European Marches against unemployment. These Marches lasted for many weeks, were very efficiently organized and coordinated, and led by actors defining themselves as European. On a nearby topic, it is even a more transnational mobilization, but not as massive as the Vilvoorde movement because of its not leading to such a political and media

crystallization. Pointing it out, the present study promotes an approach that, without neglecting the context, gives a fundamental theoretical importance to the internal dynamics of movements and acknowledges that media do not only provide research with insights and methodological data but also are social actors taking part in the events and should be studied as such.

LIST OF INITIALS

ACLVB (CGSLB) : Confédération Générale des Syndicats Libres de Belgique
CC.OO : Comisiones Obreras
CEE : Comité d'Entreprise Européen
CFDT : Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail
CFTC : Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens
CGT : Confédération Générale du Travail
CSC : Confédération Chrétienne des Syndicats
ETUC (CES) : Confédération Européenne des Syndicats
FGTB : Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique
UGT : Union Générale des Travailleurs

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