

The Summit of The Hague and the European Council

Narratives in a nutshell: from narrative sentences to narrative sequences

I. Five paradigmatic narratives (in a nutshell) about the summit of The Hague and the European Council

Narrative 1:

“The summit of The Hague opened the door for the Communities to enlarge. Less than four years later, the UK, Ireland Denmark joined. Since then, ever more countries acceded to full membership of the European Communities, respectively European Union.”

Narrative 2:

“At the summit of The Hague, the heads of state and government launched a threefold programme, under the heading of “Completion, deepening and widening”. Widening was successful, since the UK, Ireland and Denmark joined the Communities four years later. Completion was a failure (despite some achievements, like the full implementation of the CAP), since the Common Market was not achieved. Deepening was a failure, too, since the landmark projects – EMU (Werner) and Political Union (Tindemans) – were not implemented throughout the 70s.”

Narrative 3:

“At the summit of The Hague, the heads of state and government launched a threefold programme, under the heading of “Completion, deepening and widening”. Which are the criteria for success or failure of this ambition? They obviously refer to the Rome Treaties, the criteria are to be found essentially there. A second(ary) reference may be the criteria formulated throughout the 60s, about what that meant, and this was paradigmatically done by Hallstein, in 1965.”

Narrative 4:

“The European Council was established in 1974, on the initiative of Valéry Giscard d’Estaing and Helmut Schmidt. They built on an increased use of summits to solve overall problems. The first of these summit, which paved the way to the rise of summitry, was the summit of The Hague, in 1969.”

Narrative 5:

“The European Council was established in 1974, on the initiative of Valéry Giscard d’Estaing and Helmut Schmidt. In this way, they responded to the “stagflation” crisis, which urged for a holistic approach at the European level, which ministers, with their sectoral views, were unable to provide.”

II. Some analytical comments:

Narrative 1: Focus exclusively on enlargement – success in this field is the criterion for selection

Narrative 2: Focus on 1969 onwards, linked to the 70s – a look back with hindsight

Narrative 3: Focus is on the way to 1969, linked to the 60s

Narrative 4: Focus is on the European Council 1974, in a perspective of “summitry”, going back to “The Hague”

Narrative 5: Focus is on the European Council 1974, explanation derived from topic incentives of the time

III. Some characteristics of narratives:

1. They bind various phenomena, which occurred at different moments in time, into one coherent story:
 - Narrative 1 extends over the period from 1969 to today.
 - Narrative 2 covers the period from 1969 to 1980.
 - Narrative 3 covers the period from 1958 to 1969 (and beyond, if success/failure are assessed).
 - Narrative 4 covers the period from 1974 back to 1969, looking back instead of forward.
 - Narrative 5 extends over the period from 1973/1974.

2. Narratives give (narrative) sentences in a row, and suggest by this technique causal relations between the phenomena referred to. They do not necessarily have to explicitly spell out that they suggest causality. (In the example nutshell narrative, no “because” or “therefore” or any other causal conjunction appears.)

3. Narratives make (often unconsciously) use of the (implicit) assumption, which is inherent in most cognitive processes mediated by language, that “what comes first, is the cause of what comes next”. The timeline of the narrative suggests causality in the real world, because causes occur before their effects.

4. Narratives streamline facts into a coherent, explanatory story, and thereby eliminate other facts, which are considered either to be not explanatory or belonging to other cause-effect-relations.

(to be continued ...)

IV. Lessons ...?

1. Which are methodological criteria, to which narratives should comply?
2. How should narratives be conceived in order to comply with these criteria?
3. Applied to the summit of The Hague (and the European Council): what does this mean?