

**TRAPPED BY THEIR IDEAS:  
FRENCH ELITES' DISCOURSES OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND GLOBALIZATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

Until relatively recently, French elites seemed to have found a winning combination for the communicative discourses through which they legitimated European integration and responded to globalization. First, the Gaullist discourse underplayed the loss of sovereignty by emphasizing the gains to interests and identity through French leadership in Europe. Next, the Mitterrandist discourse updated the ideas in the Gaullist paradigm to legitimate further institutional integration while it added a new rationale for greater economic integration: Europeanization as a shield against globalization. The discourse in the Chirac years did little to change or update this discourse. The problem today is that neither the institutional nor the economic ideas in the discourse are persuasive: the public is convinced that France no longer leads Europe and that Europe no longer protects against globalization. And yet, French elites seem trapped in the old discourse, unable to develop new ideas capable of legitimating France in Europe and the world. This was dramatized by the French 'no' vote on the Constitutional Treaty.

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## **TRAPPED BY THEIR IDEAS:**

### **FRENCH ELITES' DISCOURSES OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND GLOBALIZATION**

When the French voted 'no' in the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty for the European Union, it sent shock waves throughout France as well as the rest of Europe. How could a country so patently pro-European, which had exercised such significant leadership in building the single market and the single currency, now seemingly turn its back on the Europe for which it had been a major architect?

The negative outcome of the referendum did not in fact so much reflect French citizens' sentiments about the European Union *per se* as their concerns about the impact of European integration and globalization on the national economy and polity. The 'no' vote constituted neither a rejection of the EU as such—opinion polls across time show majorities favoring membership in the EU—nor even of the notion of having a 'constitution'—since before as well as after, majorities in opinion polls claimed to favor a constitution for the EU. The 'no' vote was not even so much about the Constitutional Treaty—although many complained about various parts of it (in particular Part III)—or its proposed institutional reforms. Rather, the negative outcome had to do primarily with national concerns about the tremendous changes France has experienced as a result of European integration and globalization, in particular since the mid 1980s. These concerns encompass not only EU-related economic policies—which many 'no' voters on the left condemned as reflecting the EU's 'excessive Anglo-Saxon neo-liberalism' and its role as a conduit for globalization—but also the EU's very institutional presence—which many 'no' voters on the right were convinced undermined national sovereignty and identity. An unpopular government, needless to say, did not help matters. But the outcome also reflects a longer standing problem related to the failure of political leaders to develop sufficiently legitimating discourses about European integration and globalization and their impact on the national economy and polity.

With regard to the EU's impact on the economy, French leaders have emphasized the EU's economic benefits for France in their general discourse, invoking

Europeanization as a shield against globalization, at the same time that they have mostly shifted the blame to the EU for unpopular policies while taking the credit for popular policies without even mentioning the EU's role. With regard to the EU's impact on the polity, political leaders have remained trapped by a discourse that, beginning with de Gaulle, sought to deflect concerns about the EU's effects on French sovereignty and identity through a discourse about France's leadership in Europe and Europe's benefits to national interests. Although this dominant discourse worked reasonably well in the early years, it has worked less and less well over time despite the incremental changes in ideas introduced by political leaders such as Mitterrand in response to new EU-related initiatives. By now, the discourse has lost much of its effectiveness as France's leadership role has been slipping, its identity has come into question, the economy has stalled, and there are growing questions about whether the EU does actually serve national interests.

In making its case, this article uses the newest of the 'new institutionalisms' as its methodological approach: 'discursive' institutionalism (see Schmidt 2002, Ch. 5; 2006, Ch. 5). Discursive institutionalism focuses both on the substantive content of ideas—including cognitive arguments about their necessity and normative ones about their appropriateness—and on the interactive processes by which they are conveyed—consisting of a '*coordinative*' sphere in which policy actors generate such ideas and a '*communicative*' sphere in which political actors present those ideas to the public for deliberation. The 'institutionalism' in this discursive approach, moreover, suggests that our concern is not only with the content of ideas or 'text' but also with the institutional context in which and through which ideas are communicated.

In the French case, its institutional context as a *simple* polity in which governing activity has traditionally been channeled through the executive (also the case for the UK) ensures that its communicative discourse to the general public is more elaborate than its coordinative discourse, which tends to be highly restricted. This contrasts with more *compound* polities (like Germany and Italy), in which governing activity tends to be more dispersed through multiple authorities, and where the coordinative discourse among policy actors is concomitantly more elaborate, the communicative discourse thinner (see Schmidt 2006). But it contrasts even more with the EU, which is a *highly compound*

polity with an especially elaborate coordinative discourse and a particular thin communicative discourse. As such, the EU's lack of 'fit' with French institutions poses a significant challenge to France's traditional institutional order as well as to democratic ideals attached to it—since superimposing the highly compound EU on France's more simple institutions necessarily disperses the traditional concentration of authority in the French executive. Add to this the significant economic policy impact of the EU, and it becomes clear why what political leaders say in their *communicative* discourse to the general public about Europe is extremely important with regard to public responses to the EU.

Significantly, the French communicative discourse to the general public about the EU and its impact has not been systematically examined across time—if it has been considered at all. Sometimes, accounts of European integration take a rational choice institutionalist approach to France's involvement in EU construction, and impute interests to actors, regardless of their ideas or discourse, for example, by claiming de Gaulle to have been motivated primarily by economic interests (e.g., Moravcsik 1998; see critique in Parsons 2003, Ch. 4). Other times, they take a historical institutionalist approach, by considering the neo-functionalist mechanisms of 'spillover' by which the EU has developed into a supranational entity (Stone-Sweet and Sandholz 1997). Yet other times, they offer a sociological institutionalist account of how national ideas about identity shifted in response to EU institutional development (Risse 2001). Even when they take ideas seriously as drivers of change—as in Craig Parsons' (2003) detailed discursive institutionalist account of the ways in the French ideas about constructing EU institutions became the institutionalized ideas which constrained subsequent French leaders' ideas and actions—the coordinative discourse of policy construction in the EU is the main focus of inquiry. Although this is extremely useful in providing insight into how the political battle of ideas among French political elites affected EU construction, it does not detail how these coordinative ideas were conveyed in leaders' communicative discourse to the general public or in the public deliberations which helped construct French public attitudes toward the EU.

Equally importantly, we don't get a sense of how the ideas projected in the communicative discourse fit with the material reality of EU institutional development

over time. One of the main problems with the French discourse is that it has become increasingly disconnected from the realities it purportedly describes. Taking ideas and discourse seriously, in short, helps us not only explain the success of French leaders' ideas in building the EU, making it an ever greater economic and institutional reality, but also their increasing failure to reconcile their ideas and discourse about France in Europe with the reality.

The article begins with a brief discussion of the economic and political-institutional challenges the EU has posed for French ideas about itself in the EU. The article follows with an examination of political elites' ideas and discourses about France and Europe, first in the years from de Gaulle to Mitterrand, then in the Chirac years. It concludes with an analysis of the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty.

### ***The EU-Related Challenges to Ideas about France in Europe***

French political elites' discourse of leadership in Europe had solid foundations in reality in the early years, as did their discourse about how European integration promoted national interests. Whether this was enough even at the time to obscure issues regarding the losses in sovereignty and identity remains in question. But there can be no question that over time, the discourse of leadership became increasingly hard to maintain in the face of a reality of diminishing French leadership in the EU and increasing EU institutional encroachments.

French leadership in the EU—as part of the Franco-German partnership—constituted the 'motor' for Europe, producing an ever-expanding European Community that brought such grand initiatives as the European Monetary System, the Single Market, and the Single Currency. By the 1990s, however, France's economic leadership role in Europe had begun to slip (Cole and Drake 2000). This is when French leaders had to give up their initiatives on EU level industrial policy and to give in on deregulation in the '*services publics*' (public utilities) arena with regard to telecommunications and electricity, something which they had long resisted (Eising and Jabko; Thatcher 2004). Moreover, once the budgetary austerity linked to the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) became more onerous in the early 2000s, France (along with Germany) lost the high ground in economic leadership, as it let its public deficit go above the agreed upon criteria of 3% rather than make the painful cuts to spending that would have been

necessary. This said, France did succeed in getting the SGP criteria suspended, managed to delay reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, and to limit the remit of the trade negotiators in the Doha Round. But these can hardly be categorized as economic leadership.

Equally importantly, France has lost its claim to 'political' leadership in an enlarged EU, mainly as a result of the geo-political shift toward Germany. The partnership with Germany, moreover, which had constituted the 'motor' for Europe through much of the postwar period, was in tatters by the early 2000s, in particular at the time of the Nice Treaty. Only with the Iraq war was there a renewed *rapprochement*, which deepened at the time of the Constitutional Convention, when France compromised on its initial constitutional preferences in order to successfully engineer an institutional solution in tandem with Germany (Jabko 2005). The failure of the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty, however, killed off whatever hopes French elites had of building on this renewal of French leadership.

While the 'bottom-up' influence of France as leader in the process of European integration has been waning, the 'top-down' impact of Europeanization on France has been increasing. France has altered its policies across an ever-growing number of areas in response to EU mandates. In monetary policy, France fully transformed its monetary system from a state-directed credit allocation system informed by neo-Keynesianism to an EU-driven interest-rate based system informed by monetarism (Ross 2004; Howarth 2002). With regard to the welfare state, the austerity budgets linked to European monetary integration, combined with changing demographics, pushed France to cut pension costs as well as to rationalize expenditures in social services (Palier 2002). In competition policy, France has time and again been sanctioned by the EU for its market-distorting state aid to businesses, whether for its subsidies and bailouts to individual firms, such as to Air France, or to an entire industry, as in the case of the textile industry (LeGalès 2001). Finally, compliance in the implementation of EU directives has been a serious issue for France in a range of areas, including environmental policy and social policy (Börzel 2001; Falkner et al. 2005).

The impact of the EU can be seen not only in terms of policies but also in terms of institutions. The lack of institutional fit of the *highly compound* EU with France's *simple* polity affects French institutional structures, policymaking processes, and even politics.

The EU undermines the unitary architecture of the French state by diffusing the power of the executive through EU-level decision-making. The loss of executive autonomy is evident not only in the EU's policy impact but also in the increase in the autonomy of subnational authorities through direct access to EU venues and resources and in the independence of the judiciary which has responsibility for carrying out EU law even against the executive. The EU also affects France's statist policymaking patterns by opening up EU-level access in policy formulation to interests traditionally denied access at the national level while demanding regulatory or legalist policy implementation in place of the traditional pattern of accommodation. This has been a particular problem with regard to interests which, lacking input in EU-level policy formulation and denied national level accommodation in policy implementation, engage in confrontation on issues they impose—as in the case of public service workers and truck drivers protesting deregulation (Schmidt 2006, Chapter 3).

Finally, the EU is unsettling to France's majoritarian politics, where the very presence of the EU, combined with the ambiguity of the EU's interest-based compromises and consensus-oriented politics—a kind of *policy without politics*—is likely to cause problems for an electorate which expects its votes to translate immediately into action through the politically demarcated policies of a clearly divided right and left (see Schmidt 2006, Chapter 4). The EU's direct effects on French politics can be seen in the fact that it became a source of cross-cutting cleavages for parties on the right as much as the left in the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty. Its indirect effects involve removing more and more policy areas from the national political arena, thereby narrowing the policy repertoire and space for political deliberation (see Mair 2006), and leading to a *politics without policy* (Schmidt 2006, Ch. 4). This contributes to the twin problems of voter demobilization on the one hand—evident in increasing levels of abstentionism in French elections (Bréchon 2002, p. 103)—and voter extremism—evident not only in the Constitutional Treaty but also in the 2002 presidential election.

These difficulties of institutional adaptation also challenge French ideas about the organizing principles of democracy which have roots in the French Revolution and Jacobin philosophical principles. Although these ideas have evolved and been contested over time, their basic premises remain at the heart of the Fifth Republic (Hazareesingh 2002). Such Jacobin principles serve to legitimate the concentration of power and authority in the ‘one and indivisible’ Republican state, which is represented by the elected executive who is charged to carry out the ‘sovereign’ will of the ‘nation’ and to act as the guarantor of national unity, the protector of citizens’ universal ‘rights of man,’ and the carrier of universal revolutionary values (see Rosanvallon 2004). Moreover, because republican citizenship is constituted by membership in the ‘nation’ and established not so much by birth as by socialization into a shared political community and commitment to French civic culture, French identity is all bound up in this civic nationality (Weil 1991, p. 472; Brubaker 1992, p. 10). The result is that ideas about French identity and citizenship tend to fuse, making any undermining of the French state an attack also on identity. Any form of supranational institution, and not just the EU, therefore, necessarily challenges these basic premises of French democracy, since it reduces state autonomy while undermining national identity constructions based on French civic nationality.

The institutional development of the EU, therefore, represents a particularly significant challenge for French identity and sovereignty which has only increased over time. The challenge for French leaders has been to come up with discourses that serve to reconcile ideas about national sovereignty and identity with an increasingly supranational EU which previous French leaders were instrumental in building—whether they liked it or not (see Parsons 2003). This was as true for De Gaulle in 1958, confronted with the *fait accompli* of the European Economic Community (EEC) agreed by Fourth Republic politicians, as it was for Mitterrand in 1983, who took two years to accept the implications of membership in the European Monetary System (EMS) agreed by Giscard d’Estaing; for Chirac in 1995, who took six months to accept the consequences of European Monetary Union (EMU) agreed by Mitterrand; and for Jospin in 1997, who took only two weeks to accept the constraints of EMU. Importantly, French leaders were constrained not only by the EU’s institutional realities but also by the communicative

discourses of legitimation that their predecessors had crafted to legitimize the EU, beginning with President Charles de Gaulle.

***Discourse on France and Europe from de Gaulle to Mitterrand***

President Charles de Gaulle's discourse could be seen as the foundational paradigm for French discourse about Europe, setting the path along which other leaders' discourse would build incrementally, whether by adding new layers of meaning or reinterpreting earlier ideas. De Gaulle's discourse on France in Europe claimed to maintain national sovereignty and state autonomy by exercising a strong French leadership in Europe. This, he maintained, would serve to promote not only French national interests but also French identity, by bringing back French *grandeur* as it projected France's universalist values onto the rest of Europe. European integration was to enable France to increase its own power in the world through Europe, since Europe was a '*multiplicateur de puissance*' (multiplier of power). But no need to worry about sovereignty or identity issues—and not just because de Gaulle was vigilant against supranational encroachments, as the 'Empty Chair Crisis' attests. The state could not be subsumed by Europe, de Gaulle insisted, because it was there to defend republican values, because it was sovereign "*pour la nation et par la nation*" (for the nation and by the nation), and because Europe, rather than federal, was '*une Europe des patries*' (a Europe of nations). In this Europe, France would have a leading role, as first among equals, Germany would be France's partner in the building of Europe, and Britain, with its alien "Anglo-Saxon" approach, would be kept out (See Cole 2001; Risse 2001; Larsen 1997, p. 97).

This was the predominant communicative discourse about European integration of the right-wing governing coalition that remained in power between 1958 and 1981. But there were continuing internal splits with regard to visions of Europe that remained largely in the coordinative sphere, dividing the 'traditionalists' who resisted the development of the EU and put France first, the 'confederalists' who accepted some modicum of supranational economic cooperation, and the 'federalists' who favored significant supranationalism (see Parsons 2003, Ch. 5). In particular, many Gaullists continued to have underlying concerns about national sovereignty while the federalists among the centrists (UDF) wanted to go farther faster—and did so under President

Giscard d'Estaing. It was during the negotiations of the European Monetary System (EMS), that the internal policy disagreements came out most clearly in the communicative sphere. For example, while Giscard emerged from meetings with Helmut Schmidt in September 1978 to announce to the press that “the spirit of Charlemagne blew through Aachen throughout this Franco-German summit” (*Le Figaro*, Sept. 15, 1978—cited in Parsons 2003, p. 168), Chirac in a statement in December 1978 in the last stages of negotiation of the EMS denounced Giscard's UDF as “the party of foreigners” (*Le Figaro*, Dec. 8 and 14, 1978—cited in Parsons 2003, p. 160).

In the opposition, only the Communists (PCF) were vocally opposed to the EU project as presented in de Gaulle's communicative discourse, suspicious of European integration because they saw it as a capitalist plot that would expose workers to the dangers of market liberalism. The Socialists didn't have any clearly defined position in the early years although later, in the 1960s and 1970s, they split between the more pro-European ‘second left’ (PSU) behind Michel Rocard and the more radical, anti-European left (CERES) under Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who were mainly hostile for reasons similar to those of the Communists. In between were the followers of Mitterrand, who were mostly pragmatic (Cole 1996). Mitterrand's call in 1973 in the Socialist party platform for French socialism and European integration to proceed in tandem was a brilliant discursive strategy which enabled pro and anti-Europeans alike to believe that the platform reflected their views (Parsons 2003, p. 159).

When François Mitterrand was elected president of the French Republic in 1981, little changed in the discourse or policy with regard to Europe until after the Socialist government's great U-turn in economic policy in 1983, deemed necessary if France was to stay in the European Monetary System. Mitterrand justified this by claiming “to not isolate France within the EEC.” It was following this that Mitterrand began to modify the Gaullist paradigm as he, together with Chancellor Kohl in Germany, helped construct the Single Market and European Monetary Union. In his discourse, Mitterrand sought to construct a new vision of France and Europe which conjoined the future of the French nation with that of European integration, since “*tout se rejoint, notre patrie, notre Europe, l'Europe notre patrie*” (everything comes together, our nation, our Europe, Europe our nation) (Mitterrand 1986, pp. 15, 104). This new vision was one in which

France in a more federal Europe was to be the country's future, France's *grandeur* was to be that of Europe, and France's sovereignty was to be extended within the context of a larger European sovereignty (Risse 2001; Larsen 1997). As part of this, moreover, even more discursive value was placed on the role of the Franco-German partnership pushing further integration, whether with the Single Market or EMU. But Mitterrand promised that such European construction would not affect France's unitary institutional structures because, as he consistently reiterated, he was the guarantor of '*l'unité nationale et la solidarité sociale*' (cited in Labbé 1990, pp. 157-158).

Mitterrand left the legitimization of economic policies linked to European integration as well as globalization to the successive prime ministers of the left and the right. Under the Socialist government, Prime Minister Fabius' communicative discourse provided much cognitive justification for the austerity budgets linked to the 1983 U-turn in macroeconomic policy—arguing that remaining in the European Monetary System would act as a shield against globalization—and for his creation of a more competitive and deregulated environment—to meet the 'challenges of globalization.' But there was very little normative legitimization beyond appeals to French national pride in the 'economic combat' for national survival and national revival. However, both Mitterrand and the Socialist government pledged to defend social solidarity, as did the subsequent right-wing government of Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, despite a neo-liberal program which promised to increase individual responsibility and independence while engineering a retreat of the state (see Schmidt 2002, p. 275-7). The same discourse continued under subsequent governments of both the left and the right, despite the fact that increasing unemployment and '*exclusion*' as a by-product of industrial modernization and budgetary belt-tightening seemed to belie the pledge to protect social solidarity and to give the lie to the refrain about Europeanization as a shield against globalization.

Mitterrand's renewed communicative discourse about France in Europe predominated, largely unchallenged politically, until the debates preceding the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Before this, although there were moments of negative communicative discourse with regard to particular European policies—such as the decision by the Competition Commissioner to veto Aerospatiale's takeover of de Havilland, decried as a loss of national sovereignty—the left largely accepted

Mitterrand's vision. The exceptions were Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who defended the unitary, Republican state against all loss of sovereignty to Europe, the Communist party, more concerned about economic issues, and the more marginal parties on the extreme left. On the right, the divisions ran deeper. On the extreme right, Le Pen's National Front was obsessed about issues related to immigration and sovereignty, while on the far right, Philippe de Villier's *Mouvement pour la France*, was intent on preserving traditional values. In the center right, there was a split between those who remained faithful to de Gaulle's vision of Europe, with a strong state and Republican values in a Europe of nations (Philippe Séguin and Charles Pasqua), and those who also chose to embrace Mitterrand's new vision, the centrist members of the UDF as well as, however reluctantly, Gaullists like Jacques Chirac. When he became Prime Minister in 1986, Chirac felt coerced into accepting the Single European Act by the UDF centrists as well as by Mitterrand. His view, as apparent in his coordinative discourse to reluctant members of his own RPR, was it "should have been better; it could have been different; but we are not fundamentally opposed" (Parsons 2003, p. 197).

All of these divisions were to reemerge with the debates surrounding the Maastricht Treaty. They had their most communicative moment in the televised debate between Mitterrand and Philippe Séguin. Séguin argued that to ratify the Maastricht Treaty was to give up national sovereignty and democracy, with a European Monetary Union (EMU) controlled by technocrats taking decisions without consideration of national interests, and leading thereby to an undesirable federal system in which French interests would be subordinated to those of foreign interests. Mitterrand responded that neither national sovereignty nor democracy would be jeopardized as the technocrats in charge of EMU were simply executing the will of elected officials; there was no necessary transition to a desired (for Mitterrand) federal system, given the reluctance of other member-states; and neither French interests nor French preferences were in any danger of foreign domination, even if certain competences had naturally and necessarily been transferred over the previous thirty-five years to the European level ("Dialogue" 1992). Mitterrand won the debate, and the referendum, but barely (50.8% to 49.2%). This nonetheless settled the matter for a while, at least with regard to questions related to

the political-institutional impact of EMU. Its economic impact was another matter, however.

### *Discourse on France and Europe in the Chirac Years*

Since Jacques Chirac became President in 1995, there has been little innovation in the communicative discourse about France in Europe, despite its increasing economic and institutional impact. The fact that Chirac came late to being pro-European, having fought against every major prior EU initiative at its inception (see Parsons 2003), may go some way toward explaining his difficulties coming up with new legitimating ideas. But although in his election campaign in 1995 Chirac made his support for EMU sound very conditional as he pledged to ‘heal the social fracture’ as well as to meet EMU fiscal obligations, Prime Minister Juppé’s actions six months later in announcing major reforms of the public pensions system spoke more loudly than words—especially since Juppé sought to impose his policies without any communicative discourse of legitimization to the general public or even any coordinative discourse with the public sector unions (Schmidt 2002, Ch. 6). The ensuing crippling strikes by the unions in late 1995, for which there were high rates of public support, made clear public concern about the economic impact of European integration and globalization more generally on the welfare state. Added to this were mounting fears that EU deregulatory policies related to the *services publics* utilities conflicted with French perceptions of identity and sovereignty with regard to the obligations of the ‘Republican State.’

Despite all of this, from the Maastricht Treaty to the run-up to the 1997 elections, there was a virtual taboo among mainstream parties against criticism of EMU, at least in the view of its marginalized critics (e.g., Todd 1998). Only in the debates surrounding the 1997 elections did all of the concerns about European integration, political-institutional as well as economic, resurface. They found expression in divisions within the right and the left, as the “*souverainistes*” on the far right, Pasqua in particular, split from the mainstream right to create his own party and Chevènement split from the Socialists to do the same. The internal divisions in the Socialist party also grew, especially between those who had and those who had never accepted the 1983 U-turn, such as Henri Emmanuelli. The debate on Europe, however, showed no clear-cut

cleavages between mainstream parties, with both sides largely pro-European, including the Communists (Evans 2003).

When the left took power after the surprise win in the legislative elections in 1997—inaugurating cohabitation with the right-wing President—there were only subtle changes with regard to the discourse on Europe. President Chirac largely continued to resist conceptualizing Europe as federal or in seeing France as anything other than unitary. In his response to Joschka Fisher’s call for a more federal Europe which started the discussions that culminated in the Constitutional Treaty, Chirac insisted that the EU was always to be a ‘federation of nation-states,’ and that although a federal system was fine for Germany, it was not for France which “has succeeded in maintaining a unitary tradition which helps to preserve the cohesion of its national community” (speech to the Bundestag, June 27, 2000). At the same time, moreover, Chirac continued to reiterate Mitterrand’s (and de Gaulle’s) vision of France’s leadership role in Europe. Illustrative is a later speech to the European Parliament in Strasbourg (March 6, 2002), in which he declared that: “To build and perfect Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to pursue France’s great adventure...to make the great voice of France heard: it will spread afar these high standards and these republican values to which our compatriots are so deeply attached...”

Prime Minister Lionel Jospin maintained the same basic approach, noting in response to Joschka Fischer that he was a “never partisan of a Europe of the regions” but rather of a “union of nations” because “Europe is not meant to replace the nations. It can, however, be their extension” (speech to the Socialist Party’s Summer University, La Rochelle, Sept. 3, 2000). At the same time, however, the Socialists had more to say about the economic issues. On globalization, the refrain was: ‘yes to the market economy but no to the market society.’ On Europeanization, although they continued to present European economic integration as a shield against globalization, they qualified this by talking about the need to balance the commitment to EMU with the defense of the ‘European social model’ against the excesses of ‘Anglo-Saxon liberalism’ and United States-led globalization. This also meant seeking to limit the impact of Europe-led deregulation on the *services publics*.

The Raffarin and de Villepin governments continued in the same vein as previous governments with regard to the EU on polity issues. With regard to the economic issues,

however, a growing split became evident between right-wing governments and Socialist opposition, largely focused around attempts to reform work and welfare regimes. While right-leaning political elites welcomed the EU as providing further legitimization for seeking to increase labor market flexibility and reduce the cost of the pension system, left-leaning political elites increasingly came to describe the EU as promoting unwelcome neo-liberal reform, and more and more as a conduit rather than a shield against globalization—in particular during the Constitutional Treaty debates.

Over the course of the Chirac years, while the discourse on the general economic impact of the EU became increasingly split between right and left, the discourse about particular policies had more to do with their relative popularity. For unpopular policies, there was much shifting of the blame to the EU, especially when interest groups protested against them, as in the cases of public utilities deregulation, trucking deregulation, or agricultural reform. For popular policies, by contrast, the general pattern has been to take the credit without mentioning the EU's role. The EU-related institutional issues, moreover, were greeted by almost total silence. There are, after all, no incentives for French political leaders to admit that they have lost their powers in an increasing number of areas, or to say that they are no longer responsible or in control, but still have to implement policies to which they are not necessarily even politically committed. Instead, we see leaders increasingly speaking about purely national issues—law and order, unemployment, the 35 hour work week in Jospin's prime ministership, decentralization and public sector pension reform in Raffarin's tenure, or the abortive first working contract (CPE) in de Villepin's time in office. But although such a focus on French issues is certainly politically useful, in the long term the dearth of substantive discourse and deliberation about the impact of Europeanization on the polity—even as policy change is the focus of an extensive but mixed press—only contributes to public disaffection.

Public opinion, however, for all the increasing divisiveness in the political debate and the blame-shifting policy discourse, remains largely favorable to the European enterprise (Brouard and Tiberj 2006; Schmidt 2006, pp. 174-178, 184-5). A French TNS-Sofres poll in 2006, moreover, found 44% enthusiastic and 38% favorable, versus 8% skeptical and 7% opposed. In addition, the French remained largely positive about

EU level control of policymaking in a wide range of areas, including foreign policy (fluctuating between 70 to 80 percent in favor in Eurobarometer polls between 1994 and 2003), currency policy (60 to 80 percent), and immigration and defense policy (50% to above 60%). Only areas that one would naturally assume that citizens would prefer to keep in the national domain, were, as in the cases of culture, justice, and health and welfare (see Schmidt 2006, pp. 183-4). This said, despite their willingness to give up a large number of policy areas to the EU, close to a majority of French (49%) were also concerned to maintain national sovereignty even if this would end up limiting European powers of decision (IPSOS, June 2003). But while sovereignty may have remained an issue for the French public, identity did not, with a larger majority seeing little threat to national identity from the EU. Sofres polls (1992-2001) show that only around 40% of respondents felt that European construction would end by destroying French identity and values, whereas those who saw no menace averaged around 54%.

Interest and awareness of EU issues, however, came way behind French issues. Discussion of the EU in quality newspapers in France—as a measure of the deliberative aspects of the communicative discourse—was minimal in the 1990s and early 2000s, other than with regard to EMU (Koopmans 2004, pp. 22-24, 39-45; see discussion in Schmidt 2006, Ch. 4). Only in 2003 did interest in the EU pick up, with discussions about whether the Constitution should mention God; how enlargement, in particular with regard to Turkey would affect the EU; and whether France should conform to the Stability and Growth Pact. The discussion of Europe became a major focus of public attention mainly beginning in the fall of 2004—as a result of contentious debates by the Socialists over the party position on the referendum and by the Parliament over Turkish membership in the EU—and then again in the spring of 2005, building up from February through to the May referendum campaign, when the EU became the primary focus of attention (Piar and Gerstlé 2005, pp. 54-56).

### ***Ideas and Discourse on France and Europe in the Referendum Campaign***

In the year preceding the referendum, most thought that there would be little problem in getting a positive outcome. Opinion polls on the Constitutional Treaty itself showed that close to two-thirds of French respondents (62%) felt that the EU should have a constitution—lower than Germany's 68% and Italy's 78% but much much higher than

Britain's 42% (Eurobarometer 2004). It is important to note that six months after the failure of the referendum, over two-thirds of French respondents still agreed that the EU should have a constitution, with 69% feeling that it should be renegotiated (Eurobarometer 2005). The problem was that whereas people felt that the EU should have *a* constitution, was it *this* constitution? A year after the 'no' vote, the French were still divided over the decision—47% dissatisfied, 46% satisfied (TNS-Sofres 2006).

By the time of the referendum, a more general mood of pessimism had taken over the country, with growing levels of dissatisfaction with the government—mostly focused on the President. There were also rising concerns about the economy, the problems of which were increasingly linked to Europeanization and no longer mostly just to globalization. When Europeans were asked what they feared most in a list of issues related to European integration (which also included such things as loss of language and identity, and of agricultural supports), the transfer of jobs to other member-states where production is cheaper came out on top, with close to two in three worried about this (73%), but nine in ten of the French (89%) (Eurobarometer 2005).

The failure of the French referendum occurred for a wide variety of reasons (see Laurent and Sauger 2005; Brouard and Tiberj 2006). Among these, the failure of the ideas and discourse of the partisans of the 'yes' by contrast with those for the 'no' was a major contributing factor.

First, people spoke past one another in the debates. While those in favor discussed the Constitutional Treaty, those against focused on the problems of France, which they now blamed on EU policies. De Villiers, on the extreme right, said it all in his campaign posters against the constitutional treaty when he claimed that: 'We all have our reasons to vote no.' For those on the right in particular, the Constitutional Treaty raised worries about sovereignty and identity. But they engaged in little active campaigning, since their constituency was already well primed. It was on the left that the 'no' campaign was most vibrant not just on the extremes but even among the moderates—especially once former Socialist Prime Minister Laurent Fabius claimed that voting 'no' was really a 'yes' for Europe, since the Treaty could and should be renegotiated for a more 'social' Europe.

In the ‘no’ camp, some on the left focused on the simple fact of the ‘Constitution,’ like José Bové, who argued that it would ‘fix’ for all time the neo-liberalism that was threatening the quality of French life. Others focused on Part II, on the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights, to claim, for example, that the Charter’s mention of the right to life meant that abortions would be outlawed; that its guarantee of the right to work was a retreat from the French constitution’s right to have work; and that to talk of services in the ‘general interest’ meant that France’s public services would ultimately be destroyed. Most of the detailed criticism was focused on Part III, however, which merely reiterated past treaties. But this became the opportunity to question the free market basis of the EU since the Treaty of Rome and the economic changes since the 1980s in which the EU was the Trojan Horse bringing in the forces of globalization, destroying French *services publics*, and undermining the welfare state.

The pro-ratification camp did not know how to respond to the negative onslaught—especially since they were on the defensive. They started campaigning late—the Socialists had been preoccupied with their internal fall campaign on whether to endorse the Treaty and, after Fabius broke ranks, with whether and how to sanction this; the government and the UMP were preoccupied with the question of whether Raffarin should or could lead the battle, given his great unpopularity. Moreover, the ‘yes’ camp had very little sense about what to say, and lacked the grass-roots organizing, the internet connections, or the mobilizing activism of those against ratification. Most importantly, however, they didn’t seem able to find a discourse with new ideas that worked. To say that the Constitutional Treaty was not about the impact of EU policies on France but rather about the EU as a polity seemed to beg the question. Even speaking to the EU Constitutional Treaty was not easy, since the best one could do is to say that it did not change much other than ameliorate the institutional workings of the EU and constitutionalize the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights, thus responding to the citizens’ concerns about an EU level democratic deficit. President Chirac, in his televised appearances, only made things worse when, on the issue of whether the EU was ‘too liberal,’ rather than challenging the basic presupposition—that liberalism was something imposed by Brussels and bad for France—he reinforced it when he claimed that he would protect France by fighting in the EU against “Anglo-Saxon ultra-neo-

liberalism.” It hadn’t help that the services directive had come up in mid March, just before the referendum campaign, with visions of ‘Polish plumbers’ invading France.

Studies of TV news on European issues show that social issues were a much greater concern in the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty than on Maastricht ( 24% in 2005 vs. 4.5% of the discussion in 1992—Piar and Gerstlé 2005, p. 71). This was reflected in opinion polls on voting intentions, where concerns about the EU’s effects on standard of living, unemployment, or social rights (welfare) were as key for those voting ‘no’ in the referendum as were concerns about the EU’s effects on identity and on sovereignty (Brouard and Sauger 2005). The vote also showed a major cleavage between elites and masses, with a large majority of people with high incomes (+3000 euros a month) in favor while those with low incomes (under 1000 euros a month) against, with 79% of blue collar workers, 67% of employees, and even 53% of the middle class against (IPSOS poll, May 30, 2005).

## **CONCLUSION**

The failure of the referendum was no accident. The immediate causes are the combination of an unpopular government, economic and social pessimism, and fear of the ‘other’—meaning immigrants as much as the EU (Perrineau 2005). It was also a safe way to express one’s concerns, because this was not about electing a government, only expressing an opinion in a referendum. And the French have generally been unpredictable in referenda—De Gaulle’s defeat in the 1969 referendum on the reform of the Senate—which led to his resignation—is a case in point. Equally importantly, the referendum is a sign that the voting public has finally become interested politically in Europe, and wants greater input into EU decisions (Dehousse 2005).

The deeper reasons have to do with the fact that the French have not come to terms with the Europe that they themselves have played a central role in building. De Gaulle’s vision of French leadership in a Europe that enhances French identity while having little negative impact on sovereignty, combined with Mitterrand’s assurance that the French economy gains from Europeanization acting as a shield against globalization, remain at the core of the political leaders’ communicative discourse about the EU and its relationship to France fifty years on. But the French public clearly sees that France now no longer leads Europe, French identity is in crisis, French sovereignty is in question, and

the French economy is not doing well when judged by the high levels of unemployment and the crisis of the welfare state. The result is a French crisis in confidence not just in European governance but also in the French government. To remedy the situation, French political elites need to come up with new ideas and discourses that address not just the cognitive necessity but also the normative appropriateness of France in a regionalizing Europe and a globalizing world. And this is not easy.

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