

Transforming the State or Diluting the Nation?

Ideas, Interests, and French Discourse on European Integration

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Klaus Roscher, Researcher at the European University Institute, Florence

Draft - comments are most welcome!

Klaus Roscher
EUI - Robert Schuman Centre
via dei Roccettini, 9
I - 50016 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
phone: ++39 055 4685 757
fax: ++39 055 4685 770
e-mail: Roscher@datacomm.iue.it
<http://www.iue.it/Personal/Risse/Klaus>

1. Introduction¹

During the past fifteen years, we witness the continuous support to European integration in French politics, which exhibit according policy orientations and political decisions. The impression of what has been called the "European consensus" among political elites is not self-evident. In fact, the major French political parties seem to agree on the basic principle of European integration irrespective of their ideologies, relative power positions, and despite a changing domestic and international environment. Incentives to adopt anti-European positions are skipped and this field is conceded voluntarily to marginal parties at the fringes of the democratic spectrum.²

Europeanization presents a major challenge to the traditional model of nation-state. One strategy of inquiry would be to ask whether at all or how much transformation has actually occurred. I will rather concentrate on the perception of political actors of these transformations. (BR?) The study of ideas examines how policy orientations are constructed and mediated or ultimately turned into decisions. In political discourse, fundamental concepts about the nation-state are brought into accordance with the idea and effects of Europeanization. This cultural process of adaptation enables political elites to pursue their goal of European integration and provides a means of legitimization of domestic change.

Now it seems that a point is reached at which some argue for further adaptation, whereas others warn against it because this would destroy the nation-state. How do they refer in discourse to these changes, what are the arguments used by both sides, and how can the positions be explained? To the latter question, usually an interest-driven account is presented. I claim that both, interest- and idea approaches, are not mutually exclusive but can be combined.

This paper will therefore start by proposing a framework of analysis that integrates both accounts, followed by a short introduction to the political discourse. I will then go on by applying an idea- and an interest driven account to my case, in turn. Finally, some concluding remarks plead for the value-added of a combined approach to the study of political discourse.

¹This paper draws on the dissertation I am currently preparing at the European University Institute in Florence, in the framework of a research project on "The Europeanisation of nation-state identities?" directed by Prof. Thomas Risse, together with Daniela Engelmann-Martin, Hans-Joachim Knopf and Martin Marcussen. I would like to thank Frank Schimmelfennig for his very helpful comments on an earlier draft, which has been presented at the third pan-European International Relations Conference in Vienna, 16-19 September 1998.

² Or even over its edge. The term "marginal" here refers to the almost "social outcast" character of these parties in the eyes of the established political elite rather than to their electoral success. In the latter perspective, one could not call marginal any more the National Front, as it regularly scores about 20% throughout the 1990s.

2. Ideas versus interests or ideas and interests? An attempt in building a framework of analysis

The respective role of ideas and interests as driving forces of political actors has often been stressed in International Relations literature throughout the 1990s.

Against the presumably interest-driven accounts of "neo-realism", "neo-liberals" have pleaded to "bring ideas back in". This has led to a variety of approaches aiming to take ideas serious as a variable 'on equal ground' (see f. ex. Goldstein and Keohane 1993; Garrett and Weingast 1993; Jacobsen 1995).

Following the seminal article by Fritz Kratochwil (1982), interest-driven accounts have mostly been criticized for their behaviorist or rational choice micro-foundations of agency (see Finnemore 1996). Though, it seems that the reply of the "constructivist turn" (Checkel 1998) does not satisfactorily address the problem of agency, either. Drawing heavily on Sociological Institutionalism, mainstream constructivism trades in the dominance of structure. Still, as Stefano Guzzini reminds us:

"The problem is not that there are different levels and that we all know we have to combine them. Even if we proclaim that both levels are mutually constitutive, certainly the obvious solution, this does not help us in the actual explanation of a particular event, where we have to attribute the weight of causality or determinacy". (Guzzini 1998: 197)

The question then becomes what is the origin of the dynamic part of the theory. Effects (whether intended or not) of individual action or slowly evolving rules of the self-reproducing structure? Seen in this light, Giddens' often celebrated structuration theory becomes at least ambiguous as godfather for the new theory of agency (see also Jaeger 1996).

While, at the time being, it has not yet become clear what a really alternative micro-foundation of agency could be, there are some good reasons for not dropping the idea of interests altogether and to take actors' perceived interests serious.

For the case under examination here, in fact, it remains that the notion of "national interests" has always largely dominated French foreign policy. The Gaullist vocabulary of national independence and the place of France in the world had been adopted by all presidents of the Fifth Republic (Woyke 1987, Ziebur 1992: 486). French foreign policy, it is said, has essentially

been driven by economic and security interests, particularly the "German question".

Of course, the question what "French interests" meant concretely³ always remained open and has rarely been addressed at all, but it should not be forgotten that interest-arguments play an important role, as far as political actors consider these "restraints" as existent.

This does not mean, however, that one should reify "objective" *real* interests, but *perceived* interest still play a major role in driving actors' behavior. Not objective measures of power etc. become than subject to empirical scrutiny but how actors make sense of their observations of such factors and which meanings they attribute to them.

Now, if one takes this position, how can both accounts, ideas and interest driven, be accommodated so as to fit in a common research design? I will claim in the remainder of this section that Fritz Scharpf's (1997: 19-35) suggestion of "frameworks of analysis" is a possible solution to this methodological problem.

In presenting his "actor centered institutionalism", Scharpf starts from the observation that people act on the basis of perceived reality and of assumed cause-and-effect relationships. Preferences reflect actors' subjectively defined interests and valuations and their normative convictions about appropriate behavior under the given circumstances.

He occupies a middle position between the two extremes - one the one hand "mainstream economics" with the rational-actor approach, who wants to explain and predict, and, on the other hand "cultural anthropology and mainstream sociology", emphasizing extreme complexity and uncertainty of the environment constituted by other human actors. This middle position argues that the social construction of reality (Berger/Luckmann 1966) assures the convergence of cognitive orientations through social norms and institutionalized rules. The latter shape and constrain the motivations or preferences (culture and institutions are therefore key factors), but they also create behavioral regularities (appropriate behavior, roles).

Now, how does this meta-theoretical standpoint translate into a concrete research design? Here, it might be helpful to start with an observation on standard methodological 'recipes'.

As Scharpf demonstrates, the probably most prominent textbook for guidelines in the area of International Relations, King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) is typically useful for forward looking research designs. In such a design, the question is 'what does the independent variable

have as outcome?' In contrast, the guidelines of King, Keohane, and Verba appear to be not very useful for backward looking designs where the question is 'what independent variable has caused my outcome?' These are the most common research designs for political scientists, though.

A possible solution for this problem can be the qualitative comparative analysis as developed by Charles Ragin (1987). This method can handle and reduce relatively large sets of independent variables and, by focusing on combinations of variables, it not only accommodates the problem of multi-causality, but it also has no need to assume that variables are independent from one another. Although, this method is not applicable for my case as it is *comparative* by nature whereas I am dealing with a single-case study.

This argument can not easily be refuted by the idea to split up my case into various parts which could then be treated comparatively, by the way of sequencing, for example. The even larger problem is that this method necessitates a focus on a single, well-defined dependent variable. Unfortunately, this is not the case of my research as it investigates a *configuration* of factors that form its object of study and - even worse - it concentrates on *processes* that are dynamic over time.⁴

But this is common problem if your individual research question is focused on interactions of political actors. One can therefore conclude, again in the words of Fritz Scharpf, that "by ordinary standards our opportunities, not only for theory development through empirical generalization but also for empirical theory testing, are quite limited in interaction-oriented policy research." (Scharpf 1997: 27)

For consequence, Scharpf suggests to develop and employ orienting "frameworks" of analysis that provide guidance to potentially relevant factors, causal mechanisms, and contextual conditions.

A framework should provide an ordering system that describes the location of and the potential relationships among various partial theories or more limited "causal mechanisms" (Scharpf 1997: 30). When linked together, these small or medium-sized mechanisms, also called "modules", built the framework. The linkages among these modules could then be

³ And to an even larger extent: who defined them?

⁴ For the same reasons, it is not possible to solve my 'small n-problem' (which makes that my study bears a 'negative degree of freedom') by increasing the number of 'observation points' in the way suggested by King, Keohane, and Verba.

either narrative or they could themselves have the character of partial theories. In the latter case, they should be called causal mechanisms in a strict sense and this will have clear-cut behavioral implications. But in some cases ⁵ the model can not employ a set of "causal mechanisms" but rather it will require the introduction of narrative elements for a complete explanation.

To sum up, what I want to take from Scharpf here is essentially the idea that it is usually necessary to combine several such modules into a more complete explanation. These modules can either have the form of partial (causal) theories or narratives, while a mix of these two types is perfectly possible. Particularly when it comes to the connections between modules (even if they are partial theories), it seems that we will often depend on narrative rather than analytical methods (Scharpf 1997: 32).

The approach of frameworks in the sense developed by Fritz Scharpf can provide a highly helpful tool to address the problem of agency and structure, mentioned at the beginning of this section. In this way, ideas- and interest driven accounts can be integrated in a common design for empirical research. If both are seen as complementary "modular explanations", they can stand on equal grounds and there is no need for petty competition nor for artificial separation by the way of sequencing.

Before I turn to discussing explanations for French discourses on European integration based on ideas and interests respectively, I will now briefly introduce the Maastricht debate as my major empirical field on which to ground these discourses.

3. Rehearsing the Maastricht debate: Adapting France to | Europeanization versus diluting the Nation

French political discourse on European integration became most visible in the debates on the Maastricht treaty and its ratification. While the negotiation phase is very interesting in regard to its intergovernmental aspects (see Mazzucelli 1997) as well as to the study of processes of

⁵ Scharpf himself restricts these cases from a rationalist perspective to situations with several possible outcomes or no game-theoretic equilibrium (Scharpf 1997: 31).

European policy-making⁶, political parties did not play a major role at this time. Particularly parties in government silently followed the government's positions whereas opposition did not yet take up European policies as an issue of domestic debate or contestation. This changed in the ratification phase when public debates were waging in parliament as well as on mass media, reaching a level of intensity and a scope of publicity unequaled since the times of "the struggle" over European Defense Community in the 1950s. I will restrict myself here to this ratification phase,⁷ with the central concern to investigate by this example how central concepts about the nation-state have become transformed by European integration and how this transformation shows up in public discourse.⁸

Before turning to the content of the debate, it might be necessary, though, to clarify what I mean by this paper's central notions of political discourse and European integration.

In a broad sense, the latter will be understood as the historical process of building-up and deepening a particular regional regime of international co-operation with all its norms, rules, and institutions. With regard to the consequences, economic interdependence as a result of increasing inner-EC/EU interchanges of goods and services come to mind, leading to changes in various macro-economic indicators. It is assumed that this creates adaptation pressures that spill over to the sphere of politics.

The notion "political discourse", in general, combines two aspects.⁹ On the one hand, it can stress the context of discourse, then describing the sum of different forums in which political debates take place (like interviews or speeches transmitted in various media, party platforms, parliamentary debates, etc.). On the other hand, it can underline the structure of the discursive process, which qualifies it as a "discourse" (i. e. a process of argumentation, in contrast to other processes like, for example, coercion).

In handling both aspects, one has to disentangle the field of speech acts in order to assemble empirical data, as well as to clarify the "functional logic" of discourse within the framework of communication one wants to use.

While the quality of discourse as a semiotic structure, indeed, is recognized, suffice it to say

⁶ The fundamental work on these issues is Lequesne 1994.

⁷ On this phase see also Mazzucelli 1997, Chapter VII.

⁸ In this paper, only a very brief and cursory summary can be given. A more extensive empirical account has been presented elsewhere, see Roscher 1999.

⁹ I am particularly indebted to Frank Schimmelfennig for his clarifications on these points.

what interests me in this paper is not the (de-) construction of discourses but to design the field of speech acts, to begin with.

When it comes to the functional logic of discourse,¹⁰ one has at least to mention the recent debate in *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen* over communicative versus strategic-rational behavior.¹¹ At this point, I want to skip the question whether the theory of communicative action was meant to deal with ideal-types or if colonization of life-world¹² can be interpreted in such a way as opening up space for a mixed type.

Anyway, my research question leads me to look for such a mixed modus of action. On the one side, strategic-rational behavior does not take into account the very constitutive role of language in the definition of actors and situations and utility-maximizing underscores the normative, value driven and affective components present in all fundamental concepts about the nation-state. On the other hand, I claim that in most political day-to-day communication, one should not expect actors to put their truth- and validity claims at stake, as a strict interpretation of the theory of communicative action would require. This might happen at some (critical) moments in time, and the concepts have to be (linguistically) constructed in the first place. But by (re-) constructing own ideas, political actors usually rather seek compliance in a certain quest for legitimacy.

Now, in describing the functional logic of my notion of political discourse as "rhetoric action", I will follow Frank Schimmelfennig's qualification of a mixed theory of action. He argues that in contrast to strategic action, in rhetoric (and communicative) action, conflicts are settled by debate but not by game. In contrast to communicative action, the goal of rhetoric (and strategic) action is success and influence but not understanding and mutual agreement (Schimmelfennig 1997: 227).

Finally, what I have insofar referred to as "nation-state concepts" can be described as embracing:

- ideas of "state" and the "nation", traditionally seen as almost synonymous and used as inseparable pair of twins in the notion of "nation-state";¹³

¹⁰ One might almost be tempted to say, about what is the "modus" of the "discursive system".

¹¹ For a summary of this debate see Risse 1998.

¹² And, symmetrically, a "socialization" of system; such an attempt can be found in Götz 1997: 7ff.

¹³ France, and its historiography since the Michelet school of the nineteenth-century, likes to portray itself not only as a "human being" but also as the first nation-state at all and the very inventor of the whole concept.

- ideas of the republic and republicanism, understood as emanation of the Great Revolution and a secular process of democratization ever since (with the frictions and backlashes that are part of this process);
- further following the achievements of Revolution and Enlightenment - on the one hand a specific understanding of national sovereignty namely its indivisibility (as well as that of the Nation, resulting in a particular meaning of citizenship), on the other hand historical legacies like cultural radiation and "mission civilisatrice".

As already mentioned above, I will concentrate in this paper on sovereignty, as it appeared to be the most prominent - though not the only one - of these issues at stake in the Maastricht debate.

Turning now to the contents of dispute, at first sight this debate highlighted a 'pro-European' consensus of the French political class in exemplary ways. In fact, observing leading French politicians all across the political spectrum, one encounters an astonishing commitment to European integration throughout the 1990s. Only political actors on the extremes, both on the right and the left, fought against the treaty, nevertheless gaining widespread popular support. Though, the fact that these "contestants" were considered as marginal - or often even outcast - by the political elite itself and the Parisian media bears the danger of underestimating and/or overlooking them. This is common problem of analyses that concentrate on the elite level and my own research is no exception to this rule. It has to be recognized in passing, at least, that these marginal voices are not as marginal as they may seem. This applies for the left side of the political spectrum, where the Communist party is still influential, as it actually even participates in the contemporary French government. It applies as well for the extreme right, where the National Front has regularly scored about 20 per cent of votes on the national scale throughout the 1990s¹⁴ and where Pasqua and de Villiers have recently joined their "anti-European" efforts in view of the upcoming elections to European Parliament.

It remains that, in considering ideas on political order and European integration, one has to distinguish a dominant discourse - this is what I have called the "pro-European consensus" before - and a challenging, "Euro-skeptic" counter-discourse, even if concentrating on the

¹⁴ It remains open to see what effects the recent scission of National Front will have in terms of mobilization capacity. For an interesting study in images on Europe and the nation-state within the discourse of French nationalists, see Zølner 1999.

well-established political elite alone. The latter shall be delimited by three "families" of political parties which can be labeled respectively Socialists (PS), Liberals (UDF), and Neo-Gaullists (RPR).¹⁵

In respect to the Maastricht debate, I suggest to describe the pro-European position as part of a discourse that pleads for adapting France to European integration, in accordance to ongoing and inevitable changes of nationhood induced by the latter. The tenants of this discourse were the whole UDF, most of PS (except from its most leftist wing) and some parts of RPR (under the lead of Chirac and Juppé). Despite differences in ideology, they shared the view of sovereignty as a complex thing and imagined that certain parts of it could be shared and "pooled" in a supra-national way.

The Euro-skeptic position, by contrast, can be described as a discourse about the "dilution of the nation" by the way of squandering national sovereignty.

This discourse was most prominently hold by a part of RPR under the lead of Séguin and Pasqua, but it can also be found in a very similar way in the left wing of PS (Chevènement).¹⁶

Here, the vision of sovereignty was one of a homogenous bloc that can not be torn into parts without destroying the whole.

"Sovereignty can neither be shared nor limited. It is an all-embracing, indivisible concept. Either you are "sovereign" or not, but never by half. By essence, sovereignty is absolute. It excludes any idea of subordination and compromise." (Séguin 1992: 20)

This is a point where the inter-relation with other fundamental concepts of the nation-state becomes important. Particular understandings of Republicanism and the Nation shape the idea of sovereignty - as well as the former receive their meaning only by employing this definition of sovereignty.

For consequence, this view stipulates that as long as Europe was not a nation-state, France could not transfer even parts of its sovereignty. Only "the people" (i. e. parliament, because of nation = republic) can command what makes them a people, i. e. sovereignty. To give this away would destroy the whole construct. Therefore, "no parliament can delegate a power which only itself possesses."¹⁷ International co-operation could be imagined, accordingly, only

¹⁵ In fact, particularly in the case of PS and UDF, it is not really fair to simply reduce allied parties (case of PS) and "sovereign" as well as "semi-sovereign" allies and components (case of UDF) to the dominant and/or umbrella parties. For the sake of simplicity, though, I ask to excuse this undertaking here.

¹⁶ This position obviously is close to the "outsiders" (Communists, extreme right) as well, as explained above.

¹⁷ Séguin, speech at Assemblée Nationale on May 5, 1992; quoted in Stone 1993: 77.

in a clearly intergovernmental way under control of national parliaments.

Seen in this context it might become clear that the orthodox gaullist understanding of national sovereignty and independence, as exemplarily expressed by Séguin, was very strong as it referred to and resonated with classical French understandings that can be traced back to jacobinian republicanism. National independence was the basic idea on which the consensus of French political society was built (Grosser 1987: 418). In fact, it had dominated political discourse since the late 1950s and, as mentioned above, was still able to attract politicians from various ideological camps by the time of the Maastricht debate.¹⁸

Nevertheless, this vision had lost influence in mainstream political elite who had come to embrace a more open conception of sovereignty, prepared for integration even in supra-national forms. A reformulated concept of sovereignty had become dominant in the French political discourse by the early 1990s and the Constitutional Council approved and further legitimized this "new" pro-integrationist interpretation of the concept.

Seized on the Maastricht treaty, the Constitutional Council ruled that transfers of sovereignty were not in contradiction to the overall conception of political order as expressed in the French constitution. This decision, which became (in-) famous as the artichoke theory of sovereignty¹⁹ represented a significant rupture to the jacobinian tradition which always had imagined sovereignty as "one and indivisible unit".

So, while "Euro-skeptics" lost the battle over the definition of sovereignty on grounds of legal and political discourse, the result of the referendum with the very narrow 51.04 per cent victory of the Yes illustrated a broad skepticism among the population on the European case. Whatever the reasons of this result might have been (for a series of different explanations see Buffotot 1993; Duhamel/Grunberg 1993; Soutou 1993; Stone 1993), it became clear that the contestant discourse found far more resonance within the broader public than the established mainstream discourse had admitted.

One has to keep in mind that the almost unanimous reign of consensual 'European ideas' in the political class was paralleled by a profound isolation from society of this same political class.

¹⁸ For some more details on the building-up and shattering of the "Gaullist consensus" on political ideas, see Marcussen et al. 1999.

¹⁹ Conseil Constitutionnel, Décision no. 92-308 of April 9, 1992, published in Journal Officiel of April 11, 1992. Critics claimed that this interpretation would mean that you can take away one piece of sovereignty after the other. Once started, this process might go on until there was nothing left at all - like the way you eat an artichoke. They summoned the council to state when it thought that a critical point would be reached - i. e. when you touch the artichoke heart - which it rejected.

In the remaining part of this paper, I will analyze how these discourses on European integration evolved. In the sense of a framework as developed above, an ideas-based account will be presented first, which will then be complemented by an interest-driven module of explanation.

4. European Integration and change of ideas

In order to theorize on a modular explanation about the change of ideas in political discourse, one should start on the level of agency.

For all actors in the political arena, orientations towards Europe are highly related to their ideas about the nation-state. Usually, this relationship tends to bring about coherence. I assume that, in order to avoid cognitive dissonance, actors will want to bring the two elements, ideas and orientations, in accordance. This ultimately means adapting one to the other. I propose to think about this adaptation process as to work in two directions.

In one way, some of these concepts are "lifted up" to the European level. This means that elements, which formerly had been defined in a national context, are filled with new connotations by which their meaning is extended in such way as to encompass a larger unity, i. e. Europe.

This argument has been put forward namely by Danish scholars in the environment of Ole Wæver in the sense of an *Aufhebung* of France (see Holm 1997 and Larsen 1997).

I would agree that it could be argued that some ideas indeed are "lifted" up this way. These ideas then show up at the European level as specific "French" conceptions of political order. One might think, for example, of the primacy of government over parliament, an institutional design that materialized in the Fifth Republic. It then featured in all French plans on European political order from the 1960s until Amsterdam. In this sense, it holds true that France did not only want a European France but also a French Europe.

This is only half of the story, though. Most of the time, institutional settings as agreed upon on the EC/EU level did not exactly take the form the French had proposed. This could not have been otherwise, given the requirement of consensus among all member states. A recent example for this is presented by the dispositions of European monetary union, where the French

had a completely different model in mind than the one that was adopted in Maastricht.²⁰ The wide-ranging autonomy of the future European central bank was in clear contrast to French understandings of national and monetary sovereignty. This is where the structural element enters the picture. These institutional and other decisions on the European level present conditions that actors have to legitimize "at home". Therefore, this structural environment creates the need for actors to engage in adaptation processes of national concepts on the domestic level.

The adaptation process then works the other way round, as European "facts" (i. e. institutionalized ideas) trigger down and French conceptions change in order to recapture cultural compatibility. One example of this can be seen in the recent redefinition of sovereignty as developed in the ruling of the constitutional court with regard to the Maastricht treaty, as mentioned in the previous section of this paper.

To sum up my point here, I would claim that the dynamics of ideas' adaptation works in both directions. I would avoid speaking about *Aufhebung* not only for terminological reasons,²¹ but also because this term tends to impute one-sided process. Rather, we can witness the lifting up of national elements as well as the reformulation and re-incorporation of Europeanized elements that trigger down.

Applying this "partial theory" on change of ideas to the evolution of French political discourse on European integration, I will now briefly illustrate how the major French parties Europeanized their political ideas. This is also meant to show how the phenomenon that I have called the "European consensus" of political elites in the previous section has emerged.

The Christian-democrats already "Europeanized" their ideas in the 1950s. Even though this tradition represents only a small part of the party alliance UDF, Christian-democracy was able to imprint its pro-European mark on the latter.²² As French president, the founder of UDF Valéry Giscard d'Estaing supported a federalist and decentralized model of Europe (see Holm 1997: 141). Even though, after Giscard's defeat in 1981, the influence of UDF on the right of

²⁰ For details see Risse et al. 1998: 18ff.

²¹ Actually, I can not perceive the four elements in this process, which the use of this Hegelian notion implies. I therefore prefer to stick to a "simple" vocabulary and to describe the phenomenon as "lifting-up".

²² During the past ten years, the attachment of the Christian-democratic tradition to UDF has been oscillating between more or less "sovereignty". Still, on strategic grounds in face of the left-right division, the alliance has

the political spectrum declined and its ideological orientation became more distinctively marked by neo-liberal ideas (at least for some time), the pro-integrationist basic orientation of this party has never been questioned.

While the Socialists had taken a very active position in the creation of the European Communities in the 1950s, the new PS took a more critical stance towards the state of European affairs throughout the 1970s. Although one has to see the discourse of that time in the light of tactical concessions to the Communist, the "natural partner" in the alliance of the left, it is obvious that at least a strong fraction within PS seriously preferred "socialism in one country" over the construction of Europe. International interdependence, as increased by the latter, was seen as a thread to this plan of realizing "socialism" in France. The official guideline was, as Mitterrand used to repeat, that "Europe will be either socialist or it will not be" (see Lemaire-Prosche 1990: 75ff.).

This encountered, of course, the fact "Europe" was not about to become socialist and after his election for president in 1981, Mitterrand soon realized these contradictions in "his" party's ideology. On the ground of economic crises (I will come back to this issue in the next section), he was faced with the choice of either to opt-out EMS and therefore possibly damaging the whole integration process or to dramatically change his economic policies. Choosing the latter, Mitterrand indicated the way to replace socialism by Europe as new focal point. Following the left government's change in policies, the PS performed a fundamental change in its political ideas and discourse, by the way of an ideological *aggiornamento*. This process, thus, took far longer than the change of policies and the new orientations were put down in official documents only by the end of the decade (see PS 1988). Finally, further fuelled by another "critical juncture", the end of the cold war, unconditional pro-integrationism had reached almost consensual status within the PS at the beginning of the 1990s (see PS 1991). Only a very marginal left wing remained more reluctant and attached to closed conceptions of national sovereignty, as demonstrated in the last section, from a pronouncedly socialist point of view.

The gaullist understanding of national sovereignty and independence as basis of all foreign policy was still part and parcel of RPR doctrine until the 1990s (see RPR 1990, RPR 1991). Whereas official documents remained in traditional intergovernmentalist rhetoric, a large

never been questioned in a serious way.

"modernist" fraction had evolved throughout the 1980s and came to adopt a more "open" position towards Europe. As demonstrated above on occasion of the Maastricht episode, this part of RPR was willing to agree on some transfer of sovereignty, provided that "core elements" would remain on nation-state level. The contrast to another party fraction, taking a more "orthodox" standpoint, then became most visible.²³ It is important to note that the latter gained support mainly on local level and at the basis whereas the "modernist" fraction was dominated by the Parisian headquarters.

In sum, this leads me to speak of a pro-European consensus within party elites. To push integration further, in a way proposed by the Maastricht treaty, had clearly become the dominant discourse in France by the early 1990s. At the same time, an alternative discourse stressing the defense of national elements against too much internationalization existed, indeed. This is no contradiction to the argument of elite consensus, though, as the latter was present almost exclusively outside the core of Parisian party elites and only very few actors within this elite (in RPR and PS) echoed this alternative discourse. To the contrary, I claim that such process of exclusion is the very precondition for a dominant discourse to become consensual within a social group.²⁴

Having described how the dominant pro-European discourse emerged within French political parties let me now turn to consider the motivations of these actors to adopt this particular discourse. This means bringing in the interest-based modular explanation of my analytical framework.

5. European ideas and political interests

As the evolution of European discourse has shown, change in ideas is certainly driven by actors' interests. For the purpose of my study, I propose to distinguish two levels that come with different forms of interests.

On the one hand, on an international level, ideas of political order always have to deal with the position of France in the state system. The basic rule of foreign policy had to be to pre-

²³ In fact, this split had lead to some frictions around EP elections in 1989, already.

²⁴ This standpoint is informed, obviously, by a Gramscian understanding of hegemonic ideas.

serve the rank of France and secure its influence as an important medium power. The most important issue, in this light, was the question how to deal with the German problem. Obviously, Germany had to be "tamed" by binding to a multilateral system of security. The question remained whether this would be better obtained either by a regime approach or by a balance of power strategy. These competing approaches did translate in battles over different ideas of political order, then; lastly promises of supranational institutions versus intergovernmental co-operation of independent nations.

On the other hand, on a domestic level, parties usually pursue the goal of coming to/remaining in power.²⁵ This implies a continuous struggle over what are the appropriate ways to get/stay there. From this does not only follow to fight over economic and political ideas defined on the domestic arena alone, but, as "Europe" is an increasingly important structural constraint, ideas on European order became an issue of domestic power interests as well.

As the quest for power is preconditioned by electoral support, parties have to care for a match between the ideas they promote and the demands of their expected constituency. A party's ideological orientation presents a point of reference and identification for adherents and possible voters, but then it becomes a risky enterprise to change existing ideologies.

In-between and related to both, international and domestic levels, stand adaptation pressures as imbued by "globalization"²⁶ and Europeanization. The latter lead to changes, particularly in economic processes, which create the need to adapt concrete policies as well as political ideas. On the mere ground of economic fluctuations, the power position of states within the world system is threatened as well as political ideas and ideologies may be severely hurt by the turn events take due to these pressures of "facts".

These interrelated three traces of interests will become clearer when, turning back to the remarks on idea change made in the previous section, I will discuss the political discourse of the major French parties again, now.

²⁵ Some parties may reject this goal altogether, though, placing themselves outside the political system. For my study, I can exclude such cases. Even the parties I qualified as being at the fringes of the political spectrum are akin to take governmental responsibilities as soon as they can (see for example Greens and National Front), if need would be on the local level.

²⁶ I will not expand on this notion here. For a critical review see Beisheim and Walter 1997.

As outlined above, the Christian-democrats did not change their European ideas since the 1950s. They backed integration as it corresponded to their ideology of co-operation between westernized democracies. For tactical considerations, though, they had to cooperate with more Euro-skeptic parties on the right most of the time. Therefore, they sometimes had to understate their European zeal for the sake of "unity", which then lead to tensions that broke out most of the time on occasion of EP elections.²⁷ Despite some attempts to take their distances from RPR, strategic electoral interests made Christian-democrats to come back to rally among the right, in the case of doubt.

Additionally, in the domain of economic ideas, globalization pushed them to adopt more clear-cut neo-liberal ideas for some time, in particular throughout the 1980s. A similar trend could be observed within RPR and the right, for this time united, sought for new support by particular social groups in using this discourse.

On the level of international interests, both strategies were competing within the Gaullists. Whereas the "balance of power" approach became less influent over time, the regime approach strengthened. This was certainly due to the fact that the regime effects since the 1950s had proven to fulfill their goals and integrated (Western) Germany had become less dangerous and more trustworthy. It is not surprising, then, that a sharpened debate between both approaches reappeared by the end of the 1980s, when the question of German reunification came back on the agenda. This "shadow" of national interests, and the position of France in the world in the context of post-cold war era dominated the struggle of ideas on national sovereignty and independence, intergovernmentalism and supranationalism described above.

On the level of domestic interests, in turn, it is important to keep in mind institutional factors. In the last two decades, we witness an extraordinary willingness to change in the vote of French electorate. In fact, since that time, whenever called to the polls, French citizens rejected the government in power and sent in opposition.²⁸ This apparent volatility of electorate made it very difficult for parties who were searching for ever-new groups of support while trying to keep their traditional constituencies at the same time. While such situation is prone

²⁷ A typical example is the contemporary campaign, where Christian-democrat dominated UDF under Bayrou insists on running its own list despite the fact that after his resignation, Séguin as the "anti-European" obstacle has removed on the side of RPR.

²⁸ The only exception was when Mitterrand successfully defended his position in the presidential elections of 1988, which allowed him to stay in office for another seven years.

for competition of ideas, another factor came in to push for the modernist position within RPR. When Chirac, the leader of this fraction, accepted to form a government of cohabitation (1986-1988), he shared into the European politics of Mitterrand at the same time. The RPR-led government therefore legitimated these European policies towards its own basis and constituency. The orthodox Gaullist fraction was pushed on its defense, if alone for the sake of "governmental discipline".

Once back in opposition, it became more difficult for the Chirac-Juppé fraction to criticize the socialist government's European policy that was essentially the same like what they had been doing before. In respect to elections, it might have appeared to the modernist fraction that rather than changing course once more it would be more credible to stick to pro-European discourse in the quest for further developing support by the "new middle classes". The ambiguities and frictions within RPR reflect its insecurity about the way to adapt its ideology in the quest for electoral support in order to increase its power.

When it comes to the Socialists, the relation between international interests and political ideas was less problematic. After some reflection immediately after world war two, they opted for the regime solution in the 1950s. From the international interests' perspective, this fundamental orientation has never been seriously questioned ever since. Problems lie rather on the domestic level and the intermediate sphere of economic ideas.

Electoral power politics made PS adopt an Euro-skeptic discourse throughout the 1970s. This was due to the fact that a distinctively leftist ideology had to be promoted in order to gain widespread popular support. This process was further strengthened by two factors. On the one side, PS had to accommodate with the Communists in order to have any chance to come into office. On the other side, within PS itself, Mitterrand had to cherish the extreme left wing (CERES lead by Chevènement) in order to assure control of the party against the modernist right wing of "la deuxième gauche" lead by Michel Rocard.²⁹

As a result of government policies' turnaround in 1983,³⁰ socialist ideology was compromised, as outlined above. The result was a dramatic loss of support by traditional socialist constitu-

²⁹ This became particularly obvious at the party convention in Metz 1978; on the Mitterrand-Rocard rivalry see Liégeois and Bédéi 1990.

³⁰ For a problematization of timing the turnaround see Roscher 1994. The date of 1983 is now essentially confirmed by first insight into the "Mitterrand archives"; see Prof. Robert Frank, presentation at the EUI March 19, 1999.

ency (the phenomenon which became popular as "les déçus du socialisme") that materialized in opinion polls and was confirmed by losses in all elections up to the great defeat in general elections of 1986. PS tried to compensate by establishing Europe as its new ideal instead of socialism, and, more generally, slowly revising its ideology altogether. Back in opposition, a minority aimed at going back to socialist discourse. The majority followed the opposite way, though, pushing the party further toward social democracy. Mitterrand's victory and the successive return to power in 1988 legitimated the majority's view, as PS was capable to win back at least part of its former votes. It seemed that its constituency now "accepted" the new heading.

While a contestant minority discourse still exists, I would nevertheless conclude that the combination of domestic power political interests and adaptation of economic ideas and policies to globalization pressures explain the change of political ideas and the emergence of an European consensus within PS.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, I have investigated the discourse on European integration held by French political parties. Two competing discourses were observed at the beginning. The first adapts traditional concepts about the nation-state and ideas on European political order to a changing environment, therefore transforming the state. The second defends conceptions that preserve the national advantage and accuses advocates of the former of "diluting the nation" by dissipating core element of its self-definition.

In my empirical section, I demonstrated that this is most visible in the uses of the concept "sovereignty" and also retraced the development of a "pro-European consensus". Whereas the counter-discourse still exists, it has been pushed to the sides of the political spectrum and outside the range of legitimate ideas, thereby allowing the dominant discourse to form the hegemonic consensus of the elite.

In my analytical parts, I have traced back these developments to change of ideas and shown how they can be explained by a differentiated account of interests. It has to be stressed once again, though, that this is about perceived interests only. While acknowledging that structural

factors are materially given out there (votes are being counted, and at least some elements of globalization effects are measurable), it is not helpful to reify absolute "facts" by abstracting from agency. Actors have to position themselves in the field of interests. While they can not³¹ opt-out from structural constraints, they still have a certain leeway in defining their interests. Different actors can interpret the same structural constraints in different ways, and for different actors different kinds of interests are more important than others.

Therefore I claimed in my theoretical part that abstractly looking on interests alone does not explain changes in policies nor ideas. The latter are fundamental to legitimate choices that political actors make according to their perceived interests, in face of the public. Policy change (as well as the change of ideas themselves) further on necessitates that new ideas promoted by political actors "resonate" with pre-existing ideas that are embedded in national institutions and political cultures.³²

The confrontation of idea- versus interest driven accounts therefore is not helpful if one wants to seriously examine political processes. On methodological grounds, an application of the concept of frameworks of analysis, as developed by Fritz Scharpf, allows for integrating both perspectives. Taken together, the "module of ideas" and the "module of interests" present a more satisfactory framework for explaining in a complementary way what has been going on - and still is today - in French political discourse about European integration.

³¹ Or do not, see footnote 25.

³² In this sense. Martin Marcussen has developed the concept of "ideational life-cycles"; see Marcussen 1998.

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