

'Europe' in the 2002 French elections

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Abstract

French relations with the European Union (EU) have found themselves on trial in the opening years of the 21st century. The French presidency of the EU's Council machinery in 2000 was charged with faulty diplomacy; and the events and results of the 2002 French presidential election suggested the existence of a sizeable minority of the French electorate prepared to give voice to a persistent anti-'Europeanisation' – if not anti-EU – sentiment. France's international image has emerged tarnished from these high-risk developments.

This paper evaluates at close range the significance of the 2002 French presidential and legislative elections for the course of French European policy in Chirac's second presidential term. It measures the extent to which 'Europe' featured in the election campaigns, and interprets the significance of 'Europe' in the election results. It analyses the impact of the elections for the role played by the European question in French party political life, for France's international image, and for its policy options. The paper concludes that the elections both confirmed France's troubles in elaborating a European *strategy*, yet – paradoxically? – suggested a new phase in French *activism* in Europe.

Introduction

The 2002 French elections offered up few definitive clues as to the future course of French relations with the European Union (EU). 'Europe' was widely seen as absent from the electoral campaigns, and insignificant in its impact on voter behaviour. Neither the re-election of President Chirac, nor the return of a presidential majority to the National Assembly, augured a decisive turn in French policy towards Europe. More broadly, France's image within the EU was tarnished by Jean-Marie Le Pen's startling performance in the first round of the presidential elections.

In the analysis that follows, we begin by recalling the context in which the elections occurred, identifying the dominant trends in France's relations with the EU, and the challenges that they faced in 2002 from within and outside France. We then analyse the electoral promises regarding Europe made by the presidential candidates with reference to these trends. Finally, we summarise what it is that France seems to want, and is likely to get, from its membership of the EU in the early 21st century. We conclude that ideological battles in France over European integration are far from over, and can be expected to eclipse the significance of nationalist arguments and strategies made in the Gaullist name. 'Europe' in the 2002 elections demonstrated this hierarchy of concerns, but did not presage a clear or strategic response.

The Context

It was not unprecedented, or even unusual, for a French presidential election to focus on domestic, rather than European or foreign policy issues. 'Europe' had shown itself to function as an electoral issue of secondary concern to the French population during the 1980s and 1990s, even at European elections, when anti- or sceptical European votes were generally cast as part of a broader protest against the status quo (Flood, 2002; Milner 2000). The salience of Europe as a distinct and separate

issue was therefore always likely to be low for voters in 2002 in comparison with issues perceived as more pressing, and it is not surprising that most candidates played to this fact of political life.

Nevertheless, 'Europe' in the French public consciousness also seemed to function as a set of latent and powerful expectations (of political leadership; of policy solutions; of the protection of French interests and ways of life; of France's status in the world...), rather than as a specific and separate preoccupation in the manner of unemployment, retirement provision, personal safety and prosperity, and so on. The French electorate may not vote for or against a candidate because of what they say or do not say about 'Europe' per se; but they are interested in the candidate's ability to control the link between European and national life. This link is evident to the French, and it concerns them, particularly when politicians appear complacent or confused in this respect.

By way of example, the 'national debate' conducted by the French government in 2001 (Braibant, 2002)¹, while not exhaustive, indicated that at many layers of French society, voters not only accepted and expected that French and European policy-making should be intertwined, but increasingly looked to Europe – specifically, but not exclusively, the European Union – as a prime source of negotiated, consensual solutions to French problems. In Frank's terms (2002: 199), fifty years of French membership and leadership in the EU has resulted in a residual public acceptance of 'Europe' – an *'inconscient européen'*. Dubois (2002) refers to the results of this consultation exercise when she concludes that amongst the French there is no radical rejection of the EU, nor even its enlargement; but there are concerns, principally about the impact of 'Europe' on daily lives; and politicians' ability to control it.

¹ This 'debate' was orchestrated from the top down, and to a large extent involved preaching to the converted, since those who attended the various meetings and forums were by definition already interested in and aware of the European dimension to numerous aspects of French life.

It has also been argued (Frank, 2002), that periods of waning enthusiasm are as characteristic of France's membership of the EU as the grand initiatives with which France is associated (the first Communities; the single currency; Maastricht), and that this *cyclothermie* of advance and retreat has become part of the national French psyche. But the early 2000s were marked out by a concentration of developments which seemed to constitute an overly long period of disengagement, on the part of French political leaders, from the forward movement of the EU towards its fifth enlargement. Events had occurred – or in some cases not occurred – that had culminated in a loud note of defensiveness in French political discourse on 'Europe,' in the face of a charge-sheet of failings, and which provided the backdrop to the 2002 elections.

The French presidency of the EU Council machinery, from July to December 2000 for example, probably marked a low point in the *eurofrilosité* that Frank had detected in the French position on Europe over the previous decade. Two areas best illustrate this point: the state of the Franco-German relationship; and cohabitation between Left and Right in the core French executive. With respect to France's relations with Germany, the Nice summit in December 2000, which marked the end of France's six-month presidency of the EU, demonstrated the difficulties that the two countries had been experiencing in the running of their relationship. A habit of cooperation appeared to have been replaced by a propensity to open conflict over policy differences and diverging visions of Europe's future. Germany's leaders, at Nice, explicitly challenged the founding pact of parity tacitly established between the two countries in the 1950s, which had successfully absorbed their differences over the years; French leaders defended the pact with equal enthusiasm. German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer's very public address on the subject of Europe's future in May 2000 had already challenged France's role as intellectual leader in the EU, and had shaken the French presidency semester before it had even begun. From early 2001, the two leaderships worked at relaunching the bilateral relationship, but this

was interrupted by the final stages of cohabitation, and by the 2002 elections themselves. Following the 2002 elections, the machinery of Franco-German relations was strengthened, with the aim of working towards at least one common goal, in the shape of the *refondation* of the friendship in time for the 40th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty, in January 2003. Policy differences persisted, however, as we see below.

Cohabitation between President Chirac and Prime Minister Jospin led to further erosion of the French President's capacity to decide upon European policy in the *gaullien* style. As President and Prime Minister, Jacques Chirac and Lionel Jospin had, for reasons of personal credibility and national tradition, largely succeeded in agreeing upon the substance of European policy, and had consciously avoided seeking to differentiate themselves on this score. They also sought to maintain the cohesion of their respective majorities, and so avoided where possible provoking the passions within their camp on the European question. As rival political leaders in office, thus, bold initiatives or radical departures from the status quo had become politically risky, and the relative lack of French suggestions for EU reform during the 1997-2002 period can be partly explained in these terms. As rival presidential candidates, however, this posture carried its own risk, namely that the two men could not suddenly stray far from their consensus without losing credibility, and so could not seek to clearly differentiate themselves over Europe; yet differentiation should be the name of the presidential first round game. The vacuum, predictably enough, was filled by other candidates, as we see below. Cohabitation itself, moreover, was also frequently experienced and perceived negatively by France's partners, foremost of which Germany's Chancellor Schröder.

By the time of these elections, therefore, the bases of certain of France's key claims to a leadership role in the EU – a semi-autonomous political executive unified around the presidency of the Republic; French intellectual hegemony amongst EU member states; a Euro-enthusiastic population – had been undermined by events

having their roots in changed circumstances in France and abroad. France's political leaders had, moreover, detached themselves from the successful transition to the single currency in January 2002. Whilst it is true that the controversial political decisions leading to this singular development had in many respects occurred years beforehand, the challenge of how to manage eurozone economic and monetary policy was far from resolved. The realities of the constraints placed – voluntarily so – on member state governments by the adoption of the single currency were already known, before the 2002 elections, to be at variance with Jacques Chirac's tax-lowering promises, and with predictions of a slowdown in economic growth. Avoiding the issue of 'Europe' unsurprisingly emerged in the 2002 elections as an implicit campaign objective of the front-runners. Yet as others have argued (and not only those with the benefit of hindsight), the 2002 elections were precisely the occasion on which French leadership hopefuls could have demonstrated their intentions and plans to regain the initiative in such significant matters (Fitoussi, 2002). It can also be argued that the demand for decisiveness was heightened in 2002 by a combination of other developments, largely outside French control: the increasing European activism of a post-unification, post-Nice Germany, and of a more engaged Britain; the pressing goal of EU enlargement; and the ongoing Convention on the Future of Europe presided over by former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing: would France's leaders, in 2002, want to be seen falling short of Giscard's ambitions for Europe's future?

Le dit et le non-dit: presidential promises for 'Europe' in 2002²

The presidential candidates' programmes between them signalled a variety of positions towards the EU (and 'Europe' and the 'outside world' more generally), very

² For this analysis I have used primarily the campaign leaflets sent to all French households shortly before the first round of the presidential election. I have supplemented these sources with a variety of material, including candidates' speeches; candidates' and parties' official websites, and commentary reproducing the candidates' proposals.

few of which were particularly well-defined or conclusive or convincing. The **European Union (EU)** was explicitly discussed by a only small minority of candidates, with an even smaller minority raising detailed institutional and/or policy matters. Jospin had the most of substance to say on the subject, followed by Chirac; this is unsurprising given their desire to consolidate and justify their European policy of the previous years. Of the two, Jospin's was the more reformist and ambitious agenda; and Chirac's, nominally, the more visionary of the two (depicting the EU as a source of opportunity, change, stimulus and protection). Both used the terms 'EU' and 'Europe' interchangeably but, unlike other candidates, included much that was specific to the EU in their discourse. Both candidates' positions regarding Europe combined defensiveness (of French interests), ambivalence (principally in the form of ambiguous terminology) and ambition (rousing rhetoric) in roughly equal measures.

With reference to institutional reform, both leaders proposed that there should be a Federation of European Nation States (FENS) laid down by a new European Constitution. In lifting these hitherto terminological taboos, both men were reacting to the steady stream of proposals for EU institutional reform that had emanated from many points on the political spectrum over the previous few years (see Nestor, 2000); we can also surmise that they were hoping to counter and limit the impact of the more far-reaching of these proposals with their own, and to regain the initiative in the face of German and British proposals, including those made within the Convention. These, then, were positions that were as much defensive as innovative or radical; and they were not new, since one objective of the French EU Presidency of 2000 had already been the drafting of an EU Constitution.

Chirac described the FENS as a way of preserving national sovereignty and democratising the EU's institutions. For Jospin, the FENS would first and foremost allow for the defence of French interests at a time of EU enlargement. Neither candidate offered a definition as such of the FENS, although Jospin referred to it as a

new version of Victor Hugo's nineteenth century idea of a United States of Europe.³ Chirac's proposals nevertheless betray a more 'traditional' (Parsons, 2000) – or, to be more precise, Gaullist – scheme of institutional preferences for the EU: an EU President elected by the European Council, for example. This was in contrast to a more 'community' (Parsons, *op.cit*) version from Jospin, who suggested a more representative European Parliament (EP); and a Commission President linked (how exactly was left open) to the EP's majority. In these respects, Chirac can be assumed as having sought to play to both federalists and *souverainistes* in his own camp. De Barochez (2002) noted that in Chirac's speech of 6 March 2002 in the symbolic town of Strasbourg, the president-candidate was indeed attempting to 'square the circle' of building a strong Europe while preserving the *status quo* of French national identity. Such an ambition was unoriginal for a French leader, and offered no new perspective on how the goal might be achieved.⁴

Chirac was more positive, but vague, about the goal of enlargement (to bring the EU to 25 members) itself than Jospin, who stated explicitly that new member states would have to accept the entire *acquis* if enlargement was to work. In policy terms generally, Jospin's platform was by far the more explicit and substantive regarding the EU. In it, he turned to the EU as the site and source of an entire

³ This echoes the position adopted by Jospin's European Affairs Minister, Pierre Moscovici, when interviewed by *le Monde* on 27 February 2002. Moscovici was (and remained, following the elections) the representative of the French government on the Convention of Europe, which had just begun its proceedings. In the interview, he referred for the first time to the concept of a United States of Europe (*Etats-unis d'Europe*) as a goal for European integration: '*Peut-être, après tout, la notion d'Etats-Unis est-elle plus séduisante que celle de fédération d'Etats-nations, tout on voulant dire la même chose. (...) La formule des Etats-Unis d'Europe dit un peu, d'une façon plus ambitieuse, plus politique, ce que veut dire la fédération d'Etats-nations. C'est une unité et c'est donc reconnaître la capacité fédérale de l'Europe de demain.*' When asked why the term seemed appropriate to Moscovici when it would not have done five years earlier, he explained its use by saying that '*peut-être est-ce parce que nous sommes en train de fêter le bicentenaire de la naissance de Victor Hugo, qui était le chantre des Etats-Unis d'Europe.*' Moscovici also said that 10 or 20 years earlier he would have felt comfortable using the expression, even if not five years previously.

⁴ Chirac said: '*L'Union respectueuse du fait national: c'est ce que reflète le concept de Fédération d'Etats Nations; Il est légitime de défendre nos spécificités nationales (langue, service public, diversité culturelle, agriculture, DOM); L'influence de la France en Europe dépendra des politiques qu'elle mène au plan national; Etre ambitieux pour l'Europe, c'est poursuivre la grande aventure de la France.*'

agenda of reform. His manifesto strengthened earlier Socialist Party calls for a European 'economic government' as a counterpoint to the European Central Bank. He wanted a common European police capability; the prospect of a European prosecutor's office, and a European judicial area; a more ambitious European social policy, with the goal of a European social treaty; a common European space for education and culture; a common European cultural policy, a European environmental agency, and a European defence policy. Such a policy agenda represented continuity with Jospin's European policy whilst in office (Howarth, 2002), and in practice meant that his was the most substantive of the presidential manifestos regarding the EU. François Bayrou ranked 'Europe' as the highest of his ten priorities (and was the only candidate, alongside Le Pen, to put Europe first), but on the EU in particular was less expansive than either Jospin or Chirac, limiting his proposals to institutional reforms in order to democratise the EU. Here he went further in a federal direction than either Jospin or Chirac since, alongside a Constitution, Bayrou envisaged an EU President directly elected by Europeans.⁵

Where the EU was specifically mentioned by the other presidential candidates, it was for a variety of purposes, mostly negative: to call explicitly for a renegotiation of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, or of the EU treaties in general (le Pen; Hue; Gluckstein); or to denounce the current structures and policy orientation of the EU (le Pen; Hue; Gluckstein; Madelin; Saint-Josse; Mégret) without offering much in the way of constructive vision for reform. Hue's oblique engagement with Europe in these elections represented continuity with the party's 'uncomfortable Euroconstructive' approach (Milner, 2002), unhappily adopted as a tactic to smooth its experience of government in the 'plural left' of 1997-2002.

More optimistically, Noël Mamère, for the Greens, called briefly for a federal European constitution and new common policies, and in this was in keeping with the Green's pro-European radicalism of the 1990s under the guidance of Dany Cohn-

⁵ See Bayrou (2002).

Bendit. Corinne Lepage also proposed a European constitution from a human rights perspective; whereas Christiane Taubira proposed a federal Europe based on a constitution which provided for an elected president and a citizens' assembly: hers in particular comes across as a very benign, idealistic EU. For Christine Boutin, a new European Treaty by 2004, and a 5th convergence criterion *axé sur la lutte contre la pauvreté* were suggested as ways of, essentially, safeguarding Europe's moral and cultural values as she saw them. Hers was the least coherent of the campaign platforms regarding the EU, although others were more adventurous in their proposals (le Pen's call to restore the franc; Gluckstein's abolition of VAT; Besancenot's and Mamère's Tobin tax on capital flows).

Where candidates said little about the EU, but did mention 'Europe', the latter generally functioned as a malign force or context to which France was subjected or even subjugated, and in the face of which an alternative Europe was proposed. Clarion calls for une autre Europe were not new in France, having been popularised by Philippe Séguin as the basis for his opposition to the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. For Séguin and his Eurosceptic successors – Phillippe de Villiers; Charles Pasqua; and in 2002, Jean-Pierre Chevènement – the 'other' Europe in question was more a question of a return to traditional, Gaullist values of *grandeur* and national independence than anything actually new. In many respects, the criticisms and proposals here, especially those on the Left and far Left, were strictly speaking more closely related to the phenomenon and costs of Europeanisation – taken here as the impact of the EU upon the balance of power between institutions, actors, policy preferences and norms at the national level – than to the idea of the EU per se, and were sometimes nostalgic, and all resistant, in tone. This is not quite the same thing as Flood's 'EU-scepticism', (Flood, 2002), where the object of criticism is still the EU as system, polity, and set of ideological and political ideals, rather than specifically the impact of this system upon the domestic arena, although this impact is implied.

In these cases, a specific and recurrent cost of Europeanisation was national sovereignty; in a few cases 'Europe' was also a synonym for the broader processes of *la mondialisation* or, for le Pen, *le mondialisme*, at the cost of French independence. In Jean-Pierre Chevènement's view, whilst France should propose *grands projets* in Europe to re-establish a democratic Europe based on nations, the French must ultimately decide for themselves *parce que la souveraineté appartient au peuple*. This was a clear case of *le souverainisme* at work. In Daniel Gluckstein's case, Europeanisation was part and parcel of the existence of 'reactionary' institutions, in place of which he called for constituent and sovereign assemblies to take decisions in favour of working and agricultural class interests, and the young. For Olivier Besancenot, 'Europe' was little mentioned other than as, in its current form, a target for anti-globalisation protesters including himself, and the site of his struggle for workers' and peoples' cooperation. Milner (2002) notes how candidates such as Besancenot (self-confessed 'revolutionaries') were representative of a 'new generation of spokespeople' on the far left, who were prepared to engage more fully, albeit still critically, with the EU, 'with a series of demands for a European regulatory space and a more detailed critique of the EU's policies and institutional workings'. This new generation, we can note, contrasts with Arlette Laguiller, who made virtually no mention of 'Europe' or the EU in her presidential campaign. We can also read such willingness to engage with Europe, however critically, as a response to the cumulative effects of the Europeanisation process in France.

Jean Saint-Josse equated the EU with its negative effect on the interests of those he claimed to represent since, in his view, the EU had become a self-serving religion of supranational, centralised uniformity at the hands of technocrats; whereas his own proposal was to build a *Europe des différences* in which all peoples can maintain their identity. Bruno Mégret, finally, implied both that French identity derives strength from belonging to a European civilisation; and that France can only be itself if it regains its national sovereignty – and identity. He wished France to be first in

Europe, and Europe first in the world, but by means of national, sovereign government.

More of the same, or something new?

Taken as a whole, what do these presidential proposals, and the electoral responses to them, tell us about the state of French relations with the European Union in 2002? It is hard to claim that they presaged a new, optimistic phase in Frank's *cyclothymie européenne*, since although they do allow us to detect signs of change, and movement, we will see that wherever we look – to French party politics and public opinion; to policy priorities and preferences; to France's institutions, or to France's national image and identity – the eye is drawn to a complex and troubled future for France in Europe.

Public and party attitudes to Europe: anti, sceptical or indifferent?

The mainstream candidates were by and large defensive and cautious, and Eurosceptic attitudes were well-represented. Outright anti-European attitudes also seemed to have crystallised on the occasion of these elections, amongst both candidates and voters. There were eight anti-European or Eurosceptical candidates: Le Pen, Laguiller, Chevènement, Saint-Josse, Hue, Megret, Boutin and Gluckstein (in descending order of success); and nine pro-European voices. Between them, the anti and sceptical candidates scored approximately 40% of the votes in the first round (ignoring abstentions). Those that we could term the 'hard' anti-Europeans – Le Pen, Mégret, Boutin and Gluckstein) scored approximately 22% of the votes between them; and the sceptics (Hue, Saint-Josse, Chevènement) approximately 20%, i.e. a roughly equivalent performance. In rank order terms, however, each of the sceptical candidates performed better than the anti-Europeans, with the obvious exception of Le Pen (the sceptics coming 5th; 6th; 9th and 11th; and the antis only reaching 12th, 13th and 16th places).

These results seem to confirm ongoing trends in France, at the time of the elections, regarding the phenomena of Euroscepticism and anti-Europeanism: both existed, which consisted more of a sense of indifference, and lack of commitment to the current content and direction of European integration, rather than an outright rejection of the EU itself, or of the European idea/l. Flood (2002) records how, on the basis of cross-referred opinion surveys conducted between 1999 and 2002, 'we gain an impression of a substantial population who at the very least lack commitment to the recent and current direction of the EU'. He also interprets the facts as evidence of 'quite high levels of dissatisfaction with aspects of the EU's governance and the direction of integration'; to conclude that 'EU-scepticism at mass public level can be understood as being as much about lack of positive commitment as about active doubt or hostility.'

There was evidently, in 2002, a broad, anti-*something* vote, but this appeared to relate more to a specific set of concerns about how to preserve treasured aspects of the 'French exception', than to more abstract questions of France's power and influence, measured in institutional weight, in Europe and the world. As Milner argues (2002), 'there remains a strong potential for grassroots mobilisation around social anti-Europeanism which may prove more durable than abstract and distant issues of constitutionalism and EU institutions, and which responds to a different – economic – cycle currently entering a downturn.' We can classify such attitudes to 'Europe' as ideologically-informed, and they found their closest match in those presidential candidates most marginal to the party political system. We note here with interest that in preparation for the legislative elections, the Socialist Party hardened their critique of the EU's social orientation; and the UMP⁶ similarly sharpened their language in respect of French interests and their protection in an enlarged Europe.

Furthermore, this relative insignificance of the abstract in contrast to the concrete, in voters' minds, contributed to the unexpectedly poor result for Jean-Pierre Chevènement and his Pôle Républicain, whose EU-scepticism was, as we saw above, focused on intellectual, Gaullist notions of national sovereignty and independence, which in themselves appear to have little public resonance. This observation links to a further point relating to the party system. If, as events would indicate, *le souverainisme* and its variants are losing the battle for public support, and Chevènement's very poor showing in 2002 was the latest demonstration of that fact, then we can surmise that the mainstream political Right, for whom *le souverainisme* had, during the 1990s posed the greatest challenge of identity and cohesion, regarding Europe, were facing happier times after these elections.

Conversely, the mainsprings of Euroscepticism on the political left – the ideological, policy-oriented factors discussed above – had certainly not disappeared by 2002, but on the contrary were prevalent, and strongly linked to broader anti-globalisation attitudes and protest. Since the elections, moreover, signs have appeared of splits within the Socialist Party over the extent of its association with the anti-globalisation voices to its left. Twenty years after François Mitterrand helped shape the rules of the European single market, the troubling implications of his 'Europe' for all parts of the 'plural left' have hit home hard.

Finally, it should be noted that the future ability of the UMP to maintain the cohesion of its parts is of course untested, and the rhetoric of Gaullism cannot be expected to disappear into thin air; the new party name – *Union pour un mouvement populaire* – is rich in connotations in this respect. Where President Chirac is concerned, moreover, his Euroscepticism is probably as skin deep as his pro-Europeanism, and we have to assume that either could be

⁶ From November 2002, the *Union pour un mouvement populaire*

sacrificed as circumstances dictate. As Flood (2002) observes, 'The EU had a negligible place in the parliamentary campaign which followed the presidential election, and since that time the preparations for a new presidential term, for Chirac, supported by an apparently solid centre-right majority, have done nothing to raise the EU's salience in the public sphere.' This was true to a point, since from September 2002, 'Europe' did become headline news, and President Chirac's ability to control events – including his government – was sorely tested.

Policy priorities and preferences

Where candidate Chirac did stray onto policy-specific ground in the electoral period, his promises essentially amounted to problems stored up for the post-electoral period. He appointed a Prime Minister, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, known to be favourable towards the EU, but saddled him with policy commitments, in particular a programme of tax cuts (30 billion euros over five years), that set the government on a collision course with the EU's growth and stability pact. There was in fact a whole set of ongoing disputes between France and other member states and/or the EU, which the elections had, if anything, exacerbated, as Chirac sought to curry favour with his various electorates: France's illegal ban on British beef imports (and the running sore of the Sangatte refugee camp which had soured Franco-British relations for several years previously); Chirac's personal resistance to re-opening or accelerating reform of the CAP, despite the opportunity for change that his relatively strong political capital with the farmers gave him (Grabbe, 2002); Chirac's opposition (shared by Jospin) in March 2002 to the pace of energy liberalisation within the EU, which put France in a minority of one; Chirac's desire to delay by several years the moment at which the growth and stability mechanism brought national budgetary deficits into balance, which initially brought opprobrium from the European Commission, Germany, and the Medef in France; France's controversial demands to the European

Commission to propose VAT reduction in the restaurant and 'cultural' sectors; finally, French attachment to the French model of public service provision.

The overall impact of these clashes and differences was to create a air of great uncertainty surrounding French policy towards the EU throughout 2002. It was predictable, as discussed above, that Chirac would decline to see the elections as an opportunity *par excellence* to resolve such problems. It was also clear that he was mindful to avoid the chain of events that had occurred following his election as President in 1995: promises that he later reversed, leading to severe social unrest, leading in turn to his ill-starred decision to call early elections in 1997, leading to five years of cohabitation with the French left. But whilst the EU and other member states could be expected to indulge France's *flou artistique* (le Monde, 25/05/02) regarding its European commitments for the duration of the electoral period itself, France's leaders encountered sustained and public criticism thereafter, with a broad spectrum of French economic policy – on pensions; social security spending; state reform – coming in for very public scrutiny and criticism from Brussels – and Berlin.

This picture was not entirely conclusive, however, since by late autumn 2002, events had started to make France look less isolated in its opposition and resistance to the course of EU economic policy-making. As other EU member states – foremost of which Germany – encountered difficulties in adhering to the rules of the growth and stability pact, the future of the pact itself was thrown into considerable doubt. Once Commission President Romano Prodi had himself appeared to denounce the letter of the rules as 'stupid' (Leparmentier and Zecchini, 2002), anything was possible. Support within France for some sort of stand against rules taken in different circumstances (and which French leaders had never been entirely comfortable with), also gathered pace. This prospect of a new role of negative leadership – leading member states away from their previous EU commitments – further complicated France's image and choices in the European Union.

Image and identity: challenging the norm?

The whole 'strange affair' (Cole, 2002) of the 2002 presidential and parliamentary elections in France invites closer analysis of France's image and identity as an EU member state. Jean-Marie Le Pen's first round victory in the presidential election, and the post-electoral policy clashes referred to above, brought France some of the most damaging international publicity since President Chirac's decision to resume nuclear testing in the summer of 1995 (which the sorry Nice summit of December 2000 had done nothing to rectify). Commentary in the French press and from France's leading European spokespeople – Jacques Delors as past EU Commission President; Pascal Lamy (Lamy in *le Monde*, 11/10/02) and Michel Barnier as France's EU commissioner in 2002 – was no less challenging. *Le Monde*, for example (08/10/02) was uncompromising in its criticism of Chirac's European policy, singling out for comment the President's self-styled role of *cavalier seul* (on the EU's budgetary rules); the *rudesse de ton* of Economy Minister Francis Mer, on the same topic; *le raidissement du gouvernement* in general, regarding EU policy; *le refus de Paris* (to countenance CAP reform); and a mindset *bloqué* (on energy liberalisation, for example); the cynicism behind Chirac's *soi-disant* federalist proposals for a European President, seen here as counters (as earlier in the election campaign) to more fervent federalists in Chirac's own camp.⁷

France's self-image, let alone projected image, as a founder, leading and exemplary EU member state appeared to be cracking, under pressure from within as well as outside, and a number of themes emerge from the onslaught. Institutionally-speaking, the power to determine EU policy has become ever more diffuse in the Fifth Republic. Chirac may well have found himself enjoying a period of 'absolute presidency', and we saw above that the divisions in his camp over Europe had become less obvious, and apparently less salient, by the time of the 2002 elections.

⁷ Such as Pierre Lequiller, UMP President of the National Assembly's Delegation for the European Union.

Nevertheless, presidential autonomy over the *domaine réservé* of foreign and European policy has been progressively eroded by the Europeanisation process itself, which has inevitably brought more and more political actors into the equation, not least of which, the Prime Minister and his/her government, whatever their relationship to the presidential majority. The difficulties encountered by President Chirac in getting his government to cohere on 'Europe' is one example of this diffusion of power regarding European policy; as is the timid, unconvincing flirtation by candidates Chirac and Jospin with the terminology of federalism and constitutionalism when discussing the EU's future. Much of the criticism emanating from France's men and women in Brussels has focused on French leaders' apparent inability to construct and convey a credible discourse about 'Europe', the EU, and its impact domestically. This is nothing new in the course of French relations with the EU, but the uncertainties displayed by the French electorate in 2002 regarding the capacity of their political leadership to steer them through domestic and international change, would that suggest a point of crisis has been reached. Presidential prestige and preeminence itself has also been challenged, and incrementally so. The Nice summit, and Chirac's victory by default over le Pen in the 2002 elections did nothing whatsoever to restore the glory of the presidential office, and constituted precedents for public challenges to the President's prerogative in EU matters, in France and from outside.

Conclusions: 'What does France want?'⁸ – and what will it get?

What lessons have we learned from our analysis of 'Europe' in the 2002 French elections – and what are the likely scenarios for the foreseeable future? First, we only have to look at the ranking of this issue within the 16 candidates' platforms to see that the question was indeed marginalised, often occupying last place amongst the presidential promises. Second, we have advanced at least two different reasons for

this: either 'Europe' was so far integrated into the French national sense of identity and purpose that it was deemed irrelevant as a separate issue; or, on the contrary, Europe was still too controversial an issue – within the party blocs; within the parties themselves; within the French population – for candidates to risk their electoral chances by making an issue of it. Trends up to the election, as well as the results themselves – although these were not conclusive – did suggest an electorate concerned by many of the dimensions of European integration and seeking reassurance in this respect. As Hoffmann argues (2001: 65), 'reference to or interference from European institutions and policies' constitute the 'biggest change in French affairs since 1958'. But, third, nor did the elections really tell us 'what France wants', to use Klau's terminology. The electorate were clear, in extremis, about what they did **not** want: institutionalised xenophobia, racism or authoritarianism; a withdrawal of the social, economic and political gains of the Fifth Republic; nor an official denial that, as François Mitterrand had insisted, Europe was France's future.

We have surmised above that the French did seem to want something different, which most commentators have deduced to be a restored sense of control over events – but without the overly Gaullist connotations of sovereignty and independence as pushed by the *souverainistes*. Through an overview of the supply and demand regarding Europe in these elections, we have suggested that the 'something' is perhaps more specifically related to the process of Europeanisation than to France's role in the European Union *per se*, or the institutionalisation of power differentials in the EU's institutions. Unlike the UK, the French have consistently demanded more and better Europe, and feared that their leaders will fail to secure it for them, or will do so at untold cost to personal lives. None of the presidential candidates specifically discussed the phenomenon of 'Europeanisation', although plenty spoke of 'globalisation', and negatively so. Indeed the term *l'eupéanisation* does not exist in French political discourse, whereas *la*

⁸ The title of Klau (2002)

mondialisation is everywhere, as an object to be feared, regulated, tamed or opposed.

The primary traditional rationale for 'Europe' in France is, essentially, former Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine's notion of a '*Europe-puissance*' – Europe as a force to be reckoned with on the world stage. By October 2002, the proposals from the Elsyée for EU institutional reform reflected precisely this priority (Vernet, 2002). One of the inherent dangers of such an approach to Europe's future is that it is confrontational in tone and ambition; as was the case in practice during de Gaulle's own day as European leader. In de Gaulle's case, the rationale for the rationale was the preservation, promotion and multiplication of French power, and influence. In the early 1950s, however, the solution to the imperatives of Franco-German reconciliation, and French socio-economic modernisation, had been less ambitious, and its scope was inward-looking: resolving conflict and shaping relations within the Communities' boundaries; building a community of interests – the most literal sense of *la construction européenne*. The more strategic and ambitious – 'traditional' – vision of Europe co-existed in the French political elite (Parsons, 2000; 2002) at the same time as the 'community' vision, which prevailed. De Gaulle strengthened this 'traditional' strand in French political thinking about European unification, in an extroverted vocabulary of *grandeur* through *coopération inter-nationale*.

To a significant extent, the 'mainstream' candidates in the 2002 French presidential election still prioritised this discourse of power and national self-projection, asking 'What can Europe do for us?' Jean-Marie Le Pen's cunning was to ask 'What has Europe done to us?', as part of his discourse of conspiracy and danger. What Europe has 'done to' the French is to Europeanise it; but where it is officially encouraged to fear and despise globalisation, Europeanisation is still taboo and largely off-limits as a subject for rational, informed debate. Those candidates that did explicitly raise and criticise the process did so to further moral (Boutin, Mégret), intellectual (Chevènement) or ideological (Hue) crusades which were already running

out of steam. The irony is that the most reformist platform for Europe was Jospin's; and whilst Prime Minister his government had demonstrated that a degree of national *volontarisme* in socio-economic policy **was** possible within the confines of EU rules and regulations. But such activism, partly through the constraints of cohabitation, and partly through habit and inertia, and Jospin's own reservations regarding 'Europe', had not by 2002 been converted into a powerful strategy for reforming the EU's policy orientation. The substantive debate had been largely side-tracked, if not hijacked, by the woolly politics and discourse of labels and slogans (*against* a 'neo-liberal' EU; *for* a Federation of European Nation States....).

A further irony is that following the 2002 elections, France looked set to influence the course of EU events once again – including the pace of enlargement – by negative leadership: the tactical obstruction of the 1963-1969 Gaullist phase. The focus of such resistance was the defence of acquired interests (the CAP), and the protection of French influence in the EU institutions, and could not be described as a strategy. In the aftermath of the 2002 elections, French diplomacy in the EU, for example, remained inconclusive. On the one hand, French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin attempted to limit the damage done to France's EU credentials by encouraging a downgrading of the '*débats théologiques entre fédéralisme et modèle intergouvernemental*' (le Monde 29/7/02) in favour of a less threatening 'imagination', and a 'global vision' of Europe's future. As unconvincing and untimely as such claims may have appeared, he also sought to reassure France's partners by, for example, the appointment of former French ambassador to the EU (and former *directeur de cabinet* to Elisabeth Guigou when European Affairs Minister, 1990-1993), Pierre Vimont, as his *directeur de cabinet*. Pierre Moscovici, European Affairs Minister in Lionel Jospin's government, was also retained⁹ as the government's representative to the Convention. Raffarin's European Affairs Minister Noëlle Lenoir, similarly showed willing by appointing a German diplomat as advisor within her

cabinet. Signs of continuity with the past were therefore in evidence. Where public opinion was concerned, moreover, 2002-03 was to offer '*un grand rendez-vous populaire sur les questions européennes*', with poster and brochure campaigns on the question of the EU's enlargement, and a programme of regional *Forums d'Europe*, orchestrated by the Prime Minister's office.¹⁰

On the other hand, through its resistance to the course of EU developments – the EU's agreed economic policy targets and rules; the costs of enlargement (and, further afield, relations with the USA within the UN over Iraq) – France appeared to be entering a new phase in its membership of the European Union, in which its intermittent challenges to the orthodoxy of the single market showed signs of cohering, almost by default, into a more substantial agenda of reform. A return to 'absolute presidentialism' in France does therefore seem to have lent reformist confidence to the French political leadership in respect of European integration, if not a sense of strategic purpose. And there are other French voices beside the President's and the Government's – in the European Commission, as we have seen; in the Convention; on the French left; in the press and intellectual circles, amongst MEPs, within the UMP itself. These groups and individuals can certainly be expected to influence the image that France projects of itself within the EU, but how significant they will become in informing President Chirac's 'policy' regarding Europe is, for the present, uncertain.

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⁹ Until November 2002

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