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Table Ronde 5 « Les résistances à l'intégration européenne »

Session 1

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Délibération publique et discours de légitimation en France et le Royaume Uni face à l'Intégration Européenne
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[Public Deliberation and Discourses of Legitimization in France and Britain in Response to European Integration]

France and Britain have had very different responses to European integration over the years. Whereas Britain has long been the 'awkward partner' (George 1990), France has been, until very recently, the EU's self-described 'political leader' and one of the principal motors of Europe in such areas as the Single Market and EMU. While Britain has from the beginning been home to the greatest number of Euroskeptics, France has long been largely pro-European, notwithstanding the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty. And whereas France pushed for Economic and Monetary Union, the Social Charter, and the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights, Britain demanded (and obtained) opt-outs from all three.

By the same token, however, Britain has consistently pressed the EU for further deregulation and liberalization in the Single Market while France has increasingly resisted, in particular in the public services sector. Britain has promoted ever-more enlargement to the east, whereas France has periodically balked, rejecting British entry in its 1963 application, hesitating on the Central and East European countries in the early 1990s, and opposing Turkish entry most recently. Finally, Britain has one of the best records on compliance with EU directives at the same time that France has one of the worst, as illustrated by Britain's record with regard to infringement proceedings between 1998 and 2004 (see <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/index.html>)—although it is Britain which complains most loudly about EU legislation, voicing concerns about European policies reducing flexibility, increasing red tape, and thereby destroying British competitiveness.

And the list goes on, which leads one to ask whether there is anything these two countries have in common with regard to the EU. There is one: both countries have faced similar challenges in adapting institutionally to the European Union, as a question of institutional 'fit.'

Both are 'simple' polities in which governing activity has traditionally been channeled through a single authority as a result of unitary states, statist policymaking processes, and majoritarian representation systems. This is in contrast to more compound polities like Germany and Italy, in which governing activity is also dispersed through multiple authorities

by way of federal or regionalized states, corporatist or even clientelist policymaking processes, and proportional representation systems. But it is in even greater contrast to the EU, which is a ‘highly compound’ system in which governing activity has been highly dispersed through multiple authorities as a result of quasi-federal institutional structures, semi-pluralist policy formulation and regulatory implementation processes, and a highly proportional representation system.

The EU, by setting its highly compound system on top of that of its member-states, tends to be disruptive to all national polities, by altering the traditional workings of national democracy. But it tends to be even more disruptive to simple polities than to similarly compound ones. Superimposing the highly compound EU on the more simple institutions of France and Britain necessarily disperses the traditional concentration of authority and legitimacy in the executive, whereas it complements the traditional dispersion of authority in compound polities like Germany and Italy, where legitimacy tends to rest in the system as a whole (see Schmidt 2006a).

Importantly, however, institutional design is not destiny. Ideas and discourse matter. The EU may serve to alter national governance practices. But how national leaders and publics think and talk about this makes all the difference. The same goes for responses to EU-related economic policies with institutional impact. It is telling that although the EU has had a greater institutional impact on France than Britain, it is Britain which has had the more negative response.

This suggests that a historical institutionalist approach which focuses on structural regularities and the logic of path-dependency can only take us so far. It may well serve to describe how member-states have been affected by the EU, with simple polities more disrupted than compound, and France more than Britain; but it cannot serve to explain why they responded so differently, with Britain more resistant than France. A discursive institutionalist approach, by contrast, which elucidates the contextual meaning of ideas and the communicative logic of discourse, offers the methodological key to understanding why Britain and France responded the way they did.

Britain’s problems in adapting to Europe have much to do with the fact that its national leaders since the beginning failed to articulate a legitimizing discourse about the impact of the EU on national democracy, relying instead primarily on ideas about economic interest alone to convince an increasingly skeptical public—worried about threats to sovereignty and identity by an EU ‘superstate’—to go forward with European integration. This is in great contrast to leaders’ extensive discourse about globalization, which has been highly successful in promoting public acceptance of liberalizing reforms (Hay and Rosamund 2002).

France’s problems in adapting to Europe are of more recent vintage, although they also have their roots in the earlier discourse of legitimization, in which national leaders sought to promote European integration by emphasizing ideas about France’s political leadership in Europe, the EU’s enhancement of national identity or *grandeur*, and its role as a shield against globalization while ignoring its actual impact on French sovereignty and democracy. Lately, France’s difficulties have stemmed in large measure from the fact that the old discourse no longer convinced a public that recognized the country’s loss of leadership, worried about national identity and sovereignty, and viewed the EU negatively as a conduit for globalization.

In short, whereas France today needs *a new vision* of France in Europe, Britain needs *a vision* of Britain in Europe. To make this case, the article considers the ideas and discourses of political leaders in France and Britain at certain critical junctures, when public statements and debates about the institutional impact of the EU on questions of sovereignty, identity, and democracy could not be avoided. These include three major moments of European integration: accession to membership, membership (or not) in the Economic and Monetary Union, and ratification (or not) of the Constitutional Treaty. The paper begins with a brief account of the historical institutionalist perspective on the EU's institutional impact, which has been the main focus of scholarly research. It then offers an argument for why a discursive institutionalist approach provides the necessary additional account. And it subsequently proceeds to the comparison of British and French ideas and discourse about the impact of the EU, with emphasis on the three critical junctures of membership, the euro, and the Constitutional Treaty.

The EU's impact on France and Britain in Historical Institutional Perspective

This paper's starting point is historical institutionalism, an approach which considers the historical rules and regularities defining countries' institutional development (see Steinmo et al. 1992; Immergut 1998; Hall and Thelen 2006), and which assumes that history progresses through a logic of path dependency and 'positive feedback mechanisms of reinforcement' which are very hard to break (Peirson 2000; Mahoney 2000). Historical institutionalism helps us to explain the similarities in our two countries' problems as '*simple*' polities with regard to the impact of the EU over time on their institutional structures, policymaking processes, and representative politics, and to contrast them with more '*compound*' polities like Germany and Italy.

First of all, the EU's 'quasi-federal' set of institutional structures have been more disruptive to the traditional balance of power among national branches and levels of government in simple polities with unitary states like Britain and even more so France than in compound polities with federal states like Germany or regionalized states like Italy (Schmidt 1999a, 2006a, Ch. 2). In France and Britain, executives which have traditionally had hierarchical control over other branches and levels of national government have lost significant autonomy as a result of the diffusion of decision-making upwards to the EU, where they are only one of 27 around the table; downwards to regional authorities, which have increased in autonomy through EU access and funding (Loughlin 2001); and sideways to judicial authorities, which have been empowered as an enforcement arm of the European Court of Justice (Conant 2002). Only the parliaments could be seen as having lost even more power than the executive, in particular with regard to legislative initiative—although the French parliament, which found its traditionally highly limited powers even more limited, was arguably more affected than the British parliament, which managed to retain its traditionally greater powers of oversight and voice (Maurer and Wessels 2001; Kassim 2005). The loss of executive autonomy and parliamentary power has been less significant for more federal states like Germany, given that the executive has always had to share power and authority with other branches and units of government and that the regional governments in the second chamber of parliament managed to negotiate a rebalancing of power (Saalfeld 1996). Moreover, for a regionalized state like Italy, the executive has increased its concentration of power even as parliaments have gained in authority, national courts in independence, and regions in autonomy (Fabbrini 2003; Schmidt 2006a, Ch. 2).

Secondly, the EU's 'semi-pluralist' policy formulation processes and regulatory and legalistic implementation have been more disruptive to the statist policymaking patterns of simple

polities, which have traditionally limited interest access in policy formulation but accommodated interests through ‘flexible’ policy implementation—whether through administrative discretion (in France) or self-regulation (in Britain) (Schmidt 2006a, Ch. 3). Here again, however, France has had greater difficulties in adapting, in particular in policy formulation, because French interest groups have had a steeper learning curve than British interests, which have honed their lobbying skills in relations with Parliament and their negotiation skills with the bureaucracy (Schmidt 1996; Greenwood 2003). In policy implementation, both countries have had difficulties, but very different ones. In France, where EU requirements go against traditional patterns of administrative discretion, organized interests that have not gained access to EU policy formulation and are denied the accommodation of the past see no other alternative than to engage in confrontations with national authorities (Schmidt 1999b). In Britain, where the EU’s codification of the rules goes against traditional preferences for self-regulation and informal agreements, the problem has been in the increasing numbers of laws that deny organized interests the voluntary rules and self-governing arrangements of the past, leaving them to complain of the increasing rigidity of the public sphere. In compound polities such as Germany and Italy with corporatist or even clientelistic (Italy) policy formulation and implementation processes, the problems of adaptation are not as great. New interests have joined long-standing interests in policy formulation at both EU and national levels while in policy implementation, corporatist processes have mostly continued, legalistic patterns have been reinforced, while clientelism has been discouraged (Schmidt 2006a, Ch. 3).

Finally, the EU’s ‘*policy without politics*’—in which partisan politics is marginalized at the EU level in favor of the politics of interests, and which engenders ‘*politics without policy*’ at the national level, as more and more policies are removed from the national political arena—has tended to put more of a damper on the more highly polarized, majoritarian representation systems of simple polities (Schmidt 2006a, Ch. 4). In compound polities with proportional representation systems such as in Germany and to a lesser extent Italy, the complex negotiations and search for consensus and compromise that go on in the EU are not so different from their own politics, since compromise in negotiated settings has always been a *sine qua non* of proportional representation systems, however partisan the politics, given governments without the power to impose. In Britain and France, where majoritarian electoral systems generally provide for strong governments with little need to negotiate or to find consensus, the ambiguity of EU-related compromises is likely to cause more problems for politicians and greater disaffection in electorates used to more politically demarcated policies and positions.

But this historical institutionalist logic can only take us so far. An approach that emphasizes institutional ‘stickiness’ above all else makes for rather static accounts of countries’ experiences and can appear to be highly historically deterministic, since it seems to imply that whatever the significance of material events and human actions, ‘*plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*’ on the institutions. In brief, historical institutionalism is all about the dynamics of continuity rather than the dynamics of change.

Historical institutionalists have tended to assume that change occurs only in bursts, as ‘punctuated equilibrium’ (Krasner 1988), which is essentially a ‘big bang’ theory of progress in which change remains unexplained and unexplainable. This certainly reflects some of the processes of history, at least as regards big revolutionary shifts. But change can also be more evolutionary, as revisionist historical institutionalists have only recently begun to theorize (e.g., Thelen 2004; Streeck and Thelen 2005), with incremental change resulting from

processes of ‘layering, reinterpretation, and conversion.’ However, although the revisionists have managed to put much of the ‘history’ back into historical institutionalism, they largely *describe* how change happened, rather than *explain* why it happened. When asked for explanation, they tend to turn to rational choice institutionalist accounts of political actors’ interest-based logics of calculation. The problem with this is that because the revisionists are describing institutions which are not stable and preferences which are not fixed, rational choice institutionalism cannot really help them explain change. They are left with little more than empirical descriptions of actors’ seemingly interest-based political action.

Historical institutionalism, in short, enables us to describe how the EU has affected member-state democracies, but it does little explain why member-states responded the way they did. Rational choice institutionalism is equally unhelpful in explaining member-state responses. Those few rational choice institutionalists who have tried to explain political leaders’ promotion of European integration by way of an interest-based logic have not been very convincing. This is epitomized by Andrew Moravcsik’s (1998) argument that de Gaulle’s agreement on membership was due to agricultural side-payments—rather than any wider interpretation of national interests encompassing, say, ideas about national *grandeur*, concerns about national defense, and hopes for greater power through regional integration (see Parsons 2003). One might argue that it is easier to make a rationalist argument for Britain, since it was economic interest that made the case for European integration, despite resistance based on values related to sovereignty and identity. But even here, we must note that it was ideas and discourse about economic interest, that is, subjective interests, rather than the objective interests demanded by rational choice institutionalism, which provide for the explanation.

So what methodological approach could we use to explain why simple polities like France and Britain engaged so differently with European integration, given the EU’s similarly disruptive institutional impact on national democracy? And how do we explain their changing approaches to European integration over time? None of the three ‘new institutionalisms’ elaborated over the past decade—rational choice, historical, or sociological (see Hall and Taylor 1996; and Palier and Sural 2005 on the ‘*trois i’s*’)—do much for us here. This is why I turn to the newest of the ‘new institutionalisms,’ a fourth ‘new institutionalism,’ which I call ‘discursive institutionalism.’

The Discursive Institutional Perspective

Discursive institutionalism (DI) focuses on both the substantive content of ideas and the interactive processes of discourse by which ideas are conveyed (Schmidt 2002, 2006a, 2006b). Although others have used this same term (see Campbell and Pederson 2001) or similar ones, such as ideational institutionalism (Hay 2001), constructivist institutionalism (Hay 2006), or strategic constructivism (Jabko 2006), they have tended to focus much more on the substantive content of the ideas than on the interactive processes involved in discourse.

With or without a label, however, DI itself tends to divide between those who focus on ideas (e.g., Hall 1993; Blyth 2002; Parsons 2003) and those who are more interested in discursive interactions (e.g., Sabatier and Jenkins 1993; Haas 1992; Habermas 1996; Art 2006). Only a few scholars consider in equal measure both the substantive content of ideas and the interactive processes by which these are conveyed, most notably the *référentiel* school (see Jobert 1992; Muller 1995, 2005; Muller and Sural 1998), to which my own approach is closest.

Discursive institutionalism takes ideas and discourse seriously, by assuming that ideas have context-based meaning and that discourse follows a ‘logic’ of communication. This is as opposed to seeing ideas and discourse instead primarily as a function of an interest-based logic of calculation (as in rational choice institutionalism—RI), as another kind of historical regularity following a logic of path dependence (as in historical institutionalism—HI), or as a product of cultural norms following a logic of appropriateness (as in sociological institutionalism—SI).

Discursive institutionalism (DI), moreover, provides a more dynamic view of change, by showing how ideas and discourse serve to overcome obstacles which the more equilibrium-focused and static older three institutionalisms posit as insurmountable. Thus, it serves to elucidate how ideas and discourse may serve to (re)conceptualize interests, (re)shape historical rules, and (re)frame cultural norms—by conveying new ways of thinking about interests, rules, and norms that may affect action. By the same token, however, it can also show how ideas and discourse may serve to reinforce established interests, paths, and norms, since DI illuminates continuities as well as change. DI thus avoids the historical determinism of HI by showing how political agents may (or may not) reshape their historical rules and institutions by acting differently within them as a result of new ideas conveyed by new legitimating discourses (see Schmidt 2006b).

This said, DI is complementary to all three of the older new institutionalisms in the sense that the institutions these approaches describe—whether understood as incentive-based structures (in RI), historically established patterns (in HI), or socially constituted norms (in SI)—frame the discourse, serving to define the repertoires of more or less acceptable (and expectable) ideas and discursive interactions. As such, the older three new institutionalisms could be seen to provide background information for what one normally expects, as opposed to what one often gets, which may better be explained by DI. But importantly, the ability of DI to explain the unexpected is not just because it may better be able to account for unique events by reference to individuals’ ideas and discourse. It is also because the unexpected may actually be expectable when analyzed according to a particular set of ideational rules and discursive regularities in a given ‘meaning’ context according to a given logic of communication, as opposed to analysis based on rationalist interests, historical paths, or cultural norms.

Thus, within a purely HI analysis, we might have expected France and the UK, as simple polities with long histories as sovereign states with strong national (not to say nationalist) identities and interests, to have displayed similarly strong resistance to the EU’s institutional encroachments. What is more, given the often greater pressures for change on France, we might have expected France to resist even more than the UK. Only by adding a DI analysis can we explain why these countries have actually had very different historical trajectories with regard to European integration, and in particular why Britain has resisted European integration more than France. We can do this by examining these countries’ histories in terms of how very differently they (re)constructed their sense of national interests, whether related to questions of sovereignty or economic benefits, and (re)interpreted political values, whether related to questions of national identity or democracy.

DI itself has two dimensions: the ideas that form the substantive content of discourse and the interactive processes by which discourse serves to convey those ideas. The ideational dimension can be further broken down into types of ideas—the cognitive ideas that are constitutive of interests and the normative ideas that appeal to values (Schmidt 2002;

Campbell 2004; Muller 1995)—and levels of ideas—the specific policies and programs that are in the foreground of debate as well as the underlying philosophies that most often remain in the background as uncontested assumptions (Campbell 2004; Mehta n/a; see also Schmidt n/a). The interactive dimension can also be differentiated into two kinds of discourse, the coordinative discourse among policy actors in the construction of policy and programmatic ideas in the policy sphere and the communicative discourse between political actors and the public in the presentation, deliberation, and legitimation of those ideas in the political sphere, against a background of more overarching philosophical ideas (Schmidt 2000, 2002).

Formal institutional context also matters here. In simple polities like France and Britain, where a restricted policy elite tends to be engaged in policy construction, political leaders' communicative discourse to the general public tends to be much more elaborate than the coordinative discourse among policy actors. By contrast, in compound polities like Germany and Italy, where a wide range of policy actors tends to be engaged in policy construction, the coordinative discourse among policy actors tends to be much more elaborate than the communicative (see Schmidt 2000, 2002). In the highly compound EU, moreover, where an even wider range of policy actors are engaged in policy construction, the coordinative discourse among policy actors tends to be highly elaborate, the communicative almost non-existent. The EU, in fact, has to rely on national political leaders to speak for it, given the institutionally constructed limits to its communicative voice—not to mention the question of legitimacy with regard to who speaks to questions of national sovereignty, identity, and interest (Schmidt 2006a, Ch.1).

For France and Britain, in short, the most significant legitimizing discourse is the communicative discourse to the general public, even if the coordinative among policy actors cannot (and should not) be ignored. This is important, because it suggests that even though the institutional impact of the EU may have been more of a challenge to simple than compound polities, simple polities have greater capacity in principle to respond to that challenge than compound polities. In the communicative sphere, the political leaders of simple polities are better able to speak in a single voice with a clear message (assuming, of course, that they have a message), by contrast with compound polities where there is often a cacophony of voices and mixed messages, especially when there is disagreement in the coordinative sphere. For French and British public attitudes toward Europe, therefore, a lot depends on the quality of the ideas and the persuasiveness of the communicative discourse of political leaders—subject, of course, to what transpires in the public debates and deliberations involving 'informed publics' and the media. This is why in what follows I concentrate on the public debates at three critical junctures with regard to European integration: accession, the euro, and the Constitutional Treaty.

The focus on public debates in the communicative sphere at critical junctures is justifiable for two very specific reasons: First, although ideas may evolve slowly over time, in particular among experts within a coordinative discourse and in pronouncements of elected officials, they generally develop more rapidly with more significant consequences for public opinion at particular moments of intensified public debates with great media attention (see Art 2006). These often occur during election campaigns, but even more so in times of crisis or turning points, when new ideas emerge in rapid succession as a result of more open deliberation, and which may then produce a new set of understandings of the issue in question. These are often the understandings which, despite evolving incrementally across time, are nonetheless reviewed, renewed, or rejected in the subsequent critical juncture.

French Ideas and Discourse about the European Union

French responses to the impact of the EU have to be understood in terms of the country's long standing philosophical ideas about the organizing principles of democracy which have roots in the French Revolution and its Jacobin philosophical principles. Although the move toward a unitary state began in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, as the absolute monarchy sought to complete political unity with administrative unity, it was the French Revolution that consecrated the unitary state—centralizing political power while creating an efficient, centralized administrative system which was consolidated under Napoleon. With this came the Jacobin notion of the role of the 'Republican state' as the direct representative of the people, to do its bidding without obligation to any other authorities (which are to be subordinate to it, whether judiciary, legislature, or subnational units). Jacobin principles also served to legitimate this concentration of power and authority in the 'one and indivisible' Republican state, by situating representation of the State in the elected executive, charged to carry out the 'sovereign' will of the 'nation' and to act as the guarantor of national unity, the protector of citizens' universal 'rights of man,' and the carrier of universal revolutionary values (see Rosanvallon 2004). Although these ideas have evolved and been contested over time, their basic premises remain at the heart of the Fifth Republic (Hazareesingh 2002; Rosanvallon 2004).

Moreover, because republican citizenship is constituted by membership in the 'nation' and established not so much by birth as by socialization into a shared political community and commitment to French civic culture, French identity is all bound up in this civic nationality (Weil 1991, p. 472; Brubaker 1992, p. 10). The result is that ideas about French identity and citizenship tend to fuse, making any undermining of the French state an attack also on identity. Any form of supranational institution, and not just the EU, therefore, necessarily challenges these basic premises of French democracy, since it reduces state autonomy while undermining national identity constructions based on French civic nationality.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that over time French leaders have been wary of any increases in the power of EU institutions because of its clash with long-held philosophical ideas about French democracy, sovereignty and identity. France has nonetheless been one of the major players—with Germany—in the construction of Europe. French leaders recognized that only in building Europe could France enhance its own power and objectives, even if this entailed pooling a certain measure of national sovereignty and, thereby, executive autonomy. In their communicative discourse to the public, they have consistently sought to obscure this by presenting France as maintaining autonomy and extending sovereignty through its leadership of Europe. Their constant refrain has been that France's leadership has enabled it to protect its national interests while projecting its values onto the rest of Europe and, indeed, the world.

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

French leaders were constrained not only by the EU's institutional realities but also by the communicative discourses of legitimation that their predecessors had crafted to legitimize the EU, beginning with President Charles de Gaulle.

Membership

President de Gaulle's discourse could be seen as the foundational paradigm for French discourse about Europe, setting the path along which other leaders' discourse would build incrementally, whether by adding new layers of meaning or reinterpreting earlier ideas. De Gaulle's discourse on France in Europe claimed to maintain national sovereignty and state autonomy by exercising a strong French leadership in Europe. This, he maintained, would serve to promote not only French national interests but also French identity, by bringing back French *grandeur* as it projected France's universalist values onto the rest of Europe. European integration was to enable France to increase its own power in the world through Europe, since Europe was a '*multiplicateur de puissance*' (multiplier of power). But no need to worry about sovereignty or identity issues—and not just because de Gaulle was vigilant against supranational encroachments, as the 'Empty Chair Crisis' attests. The state could not be subsumed by Europe, de Gaulle insisted, because it was there to defend republican values, because it was sovereign "*pour la nation et par la nation*" (for the nation and by the nation), and because Europe, rather than federal, was '*une Europe des patries*' (a Europe of nations). In this Europe, France would have a leading role, as first among equals, Germany would be France's partner in the building of Europe, and Britain, with its alien "Anglo-Saxon" approach, would be kept out (see Cole 2001; Risse 2001; Larsen 1997, p. 97). This Europe, moreover, was to be much more than the vast free-trade zone that Britain had proposed and de Gaulle resisted in 1958 (Howorth 1996, p. 11). But it was to be much less than what the Commission—whom de Gaulle saw as 'stateless functionaries without faces'—seemed to be pushing for in 1965, which is what had precipitated the 'empty chair' crisis.

De Gaulle's communicative discourse about European integration set the outlines of the subsequent discourses of the right-wing governing coalition that remained in power between 1958 and 1981. It was only after François Mitterrand came to power that the discourse was updated.

Monetary Integration

When François Mitterrand was elected president of the French Republic in 1981, little changed in the discourse on Europe until after the Socialist government's great U-turn in economic policy in 1983, deemed necessary if France was to stay in the European Monetary System. Mitterrand justified this by claiming "to not isolate France within the EEC." It was following this that Mitterrand began to modify the Gaullist paradigm as he, together with Chancellor Kohl in Germany, helped construct the Single Market and European Monetary Union. In his discourse, Mitterrand sought to construct a new vision of France and Europe which conjoined the future of the French nation with that of European integration, since "*tout se rejoint, notre patrie, notre Europe, l'Europe notre patrie*" (everything comes together, our nation, our Europe, Europe our nation) (Mitterrand 1986, pp. 15, 104). This new vision was one in which France in a more federal Europe was to be the country's future, France's *grandeur* was to be that of Europe, and France's sovereignty was to be extended within the context of a larger European sovereignty (Risse 2001; Larsen 1997). As part of this, moreover, even more discursive value was placed on the role of the Franco-German partnership pushing further integration, whether with the Single Market or EMU. But Mitterrand promised that such European construction would not affect France's unitary

institutional structures because, as he consistently reiterated, he was the guarantor of *'l'unité nationale et la solidarité sociale'* (cited in Labbé 1990, pp. 157-158).

Mitterrand's renewed communicative discourse about France in Europe predominated, largely unchallenged politically, until the debates preceding the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. They had their most communicative moment in the televised debate between Mitterrand and Philippe Séguin. Séguin argued that to ratify the Maastricht Treaty was to give up national sovereignty and democracy, with a European Monetary Union (EMU) controlled by technocrats taking decisions without consideration of national interests, and leading thereby to an undesirable federal system in which French interests would be subordinated to those of foreign interests. Mitterrand responded that neither national sovereignty nor democracy would be jeopardized as the technocrats in charge of EMU were simply executing the will of elected officials; there was no necessary transition to a desired (for Mitterrand) federal system, given the reluctance of other member-states; and neither French interests nor French preferences were in any danger of foreign domination, even if certain competences had naturally and necessarily been transferred over the previous thirty-five years to the European level ("Dialogue" 1992). Mitterrand won the debate, and the referendum, but barely (50.8% to 49.2%). This nonetheless largely settled questions related to the political-institutional impact of EMU at least until 1997. The EMU's economic impact was another story, however, and came to a head with the strikes in 1995 over Juppé's reform initiatives with regard to public pensions (see Schmidt 2002, Ch. 6). Added to this were mounting fears that EU deregulatory policies related to the *services publics* utilities conflicted with French perceptions of identity and sovereignty with regard to the obligations of the 'Republican State.

Constitutional Treaty

It is not until the Constitutional Treaty initiative, launched by Joschka Fischer in 2000 when he called for a more federal Europe, however, that the EU's political-institutional impact returned to center stage as a matter for public debate. But even then, French leaders' discourses reflected only subtle changes. President Chirac largely continued to resist conceptualizing Europe as federal or in seeing France as anything other than unitary, insisting that the EU was always to be a 'federation of nation-states,' and that although a federal system was fine for Germany, it was not for France which "has succeeded in maintaining a unitary tradition which helps to preserve the cohesion of its national community" (speech to the Bundestag, June 27, 2000). At the same time, moreover, Chirac continued to reiterate Mitterrand's (and de Gaulle's) vision of France's leadership role in Europe. Illustrative is a later speech to the European Parliament in Strasbourg (March 6, 2002), in which he declared that: "To build and perfect Europe in the 21st century is to pursue France's great adventure...to make the great voice of France heard: it will spread afar these high standards and these republican values to which our compatriots are so deeply attached..."

Prime Minister Lionel Jospin maintained the same basic approach, noting in response to Fischer that he was "never partisan of a Europe of the regions" but rather of a "union of nations" because "Europe is not meant to replace the nations. It can, however, be their extension" (speech to the Socialist Party's Summer University, La Rochelle, Sept. 3, 2000). At the same time, however, the Socialists had more to say about the economic issues. On globalization, the refrain was: 'yes to the market economy but no to the market society.' On Europeanization, although they continued to present European economic integration as a shield against globalization, they qualified this by talking about the need to balance the commitment to EMU with the defense of the 'European social model' against the excesses of

‘Anglo-Saxon liberalism’ and United States-led globalization. This also meant seeking to limit the impact of Europe-led deregulation on the *services publics*.

The discussion of the Constitutional Treaty became a major focus of public debate mainly starting in the fall of 2004. It began as a result of contentious debates by the Socialists over the party position on the referendum and by the Parliament over Turkish membership in the EU—and then picked up again in the spring of 2005, building up from February through to the May referendum campaign (Piar and Gerstlé 2005, pp. 54-56).

In the year preceding the referendum, most thought that there would be little problem in getting a positive outcome. Opinion polls on the Constitutional Treaty itself showed that close to two-thirds of French respondents (62%) felt that the EU should have a constitution—lower than Germany’s 68% and Italy’s 78% but much much higher than Britain’s 42% (Eurobarometer 2004). But was it *this* constitution? By the time of the referendum, a more general mood of pessimism had taken over the country, with growing levels of dissatisfaction with the government—mostly focused on the President. There were also rising concerns about the economy, the problems of which were increasingly linked to Europeanization and no longer mostly just to globalization. When Europeans were asked what they feared most in a list of issues related to European integration (which also included such things as loss of language and identity, and of agricultural supports), the transfer of jobs to other member-states where production is cheaper came out on top, with close to two in three Europeans worried about this (73%), but nine in ten of the French (89%) (Eurobarometer 2005).

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

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

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

the forces of globalization, destroying French *services publics*, and undermining the welfare state.

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

With the failure of the referendum, the communicative discourse on Europe largely stopped. The speeches and debates during the presidential and legislative elections of spring 2007 did nothing to change this. The candidates focused primarily on national issues, addressing the EU only briefly in the one presidential debate, and making it a marginal issue in the campaign. But when it did come up, it tended to reinforce negative views of the EU’s economic policies while it did little to renew the vision of France’s role in the EU. In Sarkozy’s most detailed electoral campaign pamphlet, the EU appeared as only one of fifteen main initiatives, in which he stated that he had not supported Europe in order to have it become “a Trojan horse for a globalization reduced to the circulation of capital and goods” and insisted instead that it “must protect its peoples *in* [note that he did not use *against*] globalization”, by acting against the ‘*delocalisation*,’ or offshoring, of jobs (see www.sarkozy.fr). And of course, he also reiterated that he wanted a Europe with clear frontiers, in which Turkey had no place.

However, with Sarkozy’s speech in Strasbourg on July 2, following his successful intervention to save the Constitutional Treaty through the agreement on a ‘mini-treaty’—actually something of a ‘maxi’ mini-treaty—we have begun to see a renewal of French ideas about Europe. These emerged in Sarkozy’s communicative discourse in three important ways. First, he softened even as he reiterated the idea of French leadership in Europe by stating that: “France is not itself, France is not grand, France is not strong except when it places itself at the center of gravity of Europe.” Second, he went farther than previous reconstructions of French identity in Europe by melding together European and French identity when he stated that ‘we have a duty toward Europe because Europe is a part of ourselves without which we would not be who we are, because the European conscience is our conscience, because European culture is our culture, because the destiny of Europe is our destiny, because the identity of the European person is our identity.’ Third, he Europeanized

the earlier French idea of a ‘civilizing mission’ and de Gaulle’s idea of projecting France’s universalistic values on the rest of Europe by presenting Europe’s main objective or *finalité* as a ‘*project of civilization.*’ This he defined as safeguarding a certain idea of man and of civilization first threatened by “Europe’s civil wars,” then by the Cold War, and now today by the “flattening” processes of globalization and the clash of identities and cultures it has been provoking.

All of this together he presented as part of a new vision not just for France in Europe but also for Europe itself. Importantly, he opposed the ‘ends’ or *finalité* of Europe as a civilization *project* to the ‘means’ by which Europe gets there, that is, the *process* of European integration, arguing that this could not be an end in itself. The failure of the Constitutional Treaty, he insisted, was caused by the depoliticization of Europe which “wanted everywhere to replace political decision by rules, norms, and procedures, which wanted to substitute technical expertise for political will, which sought everywhere to put technical choice ahead of political choice.” And this in turn, he claimed, meant that Europe could not act in the world to defend its interests, in particular with regard to protecting citizens ‘in’ globalization.

For Europe to act, and for Europe to be accepted by its citizens, Sarkozy argued two further points: 1) that Europe needs more ‘politics,’ by which he meant political leadership to define the *finalité*, or projects; and 2) that Europe needs certain projects, including ones that deal with the problems of globalization, immigration, economic growth, and borders (as another kind of *finalité*), in particular by excluding Turkey—putting it instead in a privileged partnership and/or in a Mediterranean Union—to ensure Europe’s identity.

All of this provides the beginnings of a renewed vision of France in Europe. But it is one that only partially responds to the institutional problems noted above, involving the EU’s ‘*policy without politics.*’ This is because Sarkozy’s idea of ‘*politics*’ is a highly intergovernmental one, involving the grand politics of national leaders, and makes no mention of other kinds of politics, ones based in citizen representation via national and European parliaments or even in interest consultation through the joint-decision *process*. And because of this, Sarkozy’s strategy is a risky one. It places responsibility for making Europe work for France in the President alone, rather than in encouraging French citizens to engage with Europe through electoral as well as interest-based politics. This is fine so long as Europe follows Sarkozy’s lead and the French continue to be enamoured of their President. Both are uncertain in the long term.

British Ideas and Discourse about the European Union

British ideas and discourse about the EU have been much less well developed than in France. This is because rather than seeking to find a way to talk about the impact of the EU on national ideas of democracy, sovereignty and identity, as the French did, national leaders tended mainly to ignore these issues in order to emphasize instead the economic benefits.

British responses to the EU first of all have to be understood in terms of the country’s long-standing philosophical ideas about democracy, linked to its history as a unitary state, much as in the case of France. But Britain, rather than having had a centralizing monarchy followed by a centralizing revolution that concentrated power in a Republican state, has had a centralizing monarchy that ever since the Magna Carta has found its executive power tempered by the historically evolving legislative power of Parliament. This has meant that sovereignty, rather than being associated solely with the executive as the embodiment of the state, as in France, was vested in the duality of the ‘Crown in Parliament,’ constituting a

sovereignty shared between the executive and the legislature. This ensured that any increase in the power of EU institutions would therefore be seen as a threat not just to executive autonomy but also to parliamentary sovereignty (Pilkington 1995, p. 98).

British concerns about the encroachments of the EU, however, go beyond the question of sovereignty to tap into more deep-seated notions of political rights that also make European integration more difficult to countenance for the British than the French. Whereas French notions of political rights are justified philosophically, by reference to the universal rights of man as declared at the time of the French revolution, the British notion of political rights as embodied in parliamentary sovereignty is justified by reference to history and the traditional liberties of Englishmen (Gamble 1985, p. 73). In addition, whereas French Republican citizenship and identity are bound together in a civic nation-state identity, in Britain identity remains separate from citizenship—with identity containing a larger component of ethnicity and territoriality, given the strong sense of being Scottish, Welsh, Irish (of Northern Ireland), and even English, as opposed to ‘British,’ notwithstanding Gordon Brown’s recent discourse on ‘Britishness.’ Citizenship, instead, is bound up in a sense of rights, duties, and participation.

In consequence, while European integration for the French can represent an enhancement of their universally established rights, for the British it is more likely to be seen as a threat to their nationally, historically established rights. And because the defense of these rights has often also been perceived as a struggle against the continent and not only the crown, invocation of parliamentary sovereignty is imbued with deep, historical meaning that can be seen as fundamentally anti- (continental) European (Wallace 1986, p. 383).

The experience of war with the European continent, and in particular World War II, has also reinforced British identity and pride in citizenship in such a way as to make European integration more problematic for the British. At the end of World War II, while French, German, and Italian leaders in continental Europe, whether Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, or Alcide de Gasperi, saw European unity through supranationalism as the only response to the failures of the nation-state arising from the dangers of nationalism, the British saw only the successes of their own nation-state, and therefore no need to submerge it through supranationalism. European unity was fine for the ‘Europeans,’ as Churchill made clear, but not for the British, who had been saved by their patriotism, and defended their ‘island’ in their ‘finest hour’ (Bogdanor 2005, p. 691). Giving this up was difficult also because of the history of Empire, and the sense, as Anthony Eden put it, that “Britain’s story and her interests lie far beyond the continent of Europe” (cited in Bogdanor 2005, p. 692).

Membership

Complicating matters is the fact that, unlike France, which took a lead in Europe as one of the early members of the community, Britain has been a latecomer, having joined the EEC in 1973, and has been a ‘reluctant partner’ at that. And national leaders have always been much more divided on the very fact of EU membership than the French. Those opposed have focused on losses of national sovereignty and identity, seeing European integration not as an extension of national sovereignty, as do the French, but rather as a threat to it (Lynch 1999). Those in favor have instead concentrated on the gains in economic interest, and have largely remained silent on the polity issues.

During most of the postwar period, British leaders’ communicative discourse to the public about membership in the EU was cast in terms of gains and losses or problems and

opportunities, tended to be economic, typically expressed an overriding concern with the issue of sovereignty, and preferred intergovernmentalism to any talk of a move toward a federal system (Preston 1994, Ch. 7). The common view was reflected in Churchill's statement in 1953 that "we are with Europe but not of it. We are linked but not comprised. We are interested and associated but not absorbed" (quoted in Cash 1992, p. 15). And this attitude, rather than pushing the British toward Europe in the early postwar period, oriented them more toward the trans-Atlantic relationship with the United States. Reluctance with regard to European integration, however, focused not only on the transatlantic relationship but also on the Commonwealth, at least for a while (Gowland and Turner 2000). Moreover, most did not think European integration had much future. Notable in this regard was the British response at the Messina conference which led to the European Coal and Steel Community, when the British representative, Russell Bretherton, is alleged to have declared—in a statement some suggest was drafted by Anthony Eden—that "you are trying to negotiate something you will never be able to negotiate. But if negotiated, it will not be ratified. And if ratified, it will not work" (quoted in Young 1998, p. 93).

When the British finally did join the European Economic Community, the government gave reasons that were more pragmatic or instrumental than anything else while those opposed invoked national sovereignty and identity. In the first application for membership in 1961, Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan presented membership as necessary for commercial reasons, to protect national economic interest (George 1994, pp. 55, 59). Regarding the institutional structures, moreover, Macmillan argued that the kind of Europe he wanted to lead Britain into was not at all the "federalist solution" of those who "would like Europe to turn itself into a sort of United States" but rather, "a confederation, a commonwealth...what I think General de Gaulle has called *Europe des patries* – which would retain the great traditions and the pride of individual nations while working together in clearly defined spheres for their common interest" (cited in Smith 1992, p. 5). Macmillan even tried to sell de Gaulle on admitting Britain into the EEC on the strength of the French-British compatibility! The view of those opposed was perhaps best expressed by Labor leader Hugh Gaitskell, who rejected membership on the grounds that it would be the end of "a thousand years of history" and the end of the Commonwealth (quoted in Featherstone 1988, p. 54). But interest won out then, as it did in the later successful application.

Labor Prime Minister Harold Wilson's discourse in the renegotiations on entry—which was meant to maintain party unity in a situation in which the majority of party members was hostile but an influential minority of the party leadership was in favor—was one which presented membership as "defending the national interest against interfering foreigners" (Barker 1973—cited in George 1994 p. 55). Few at the time saw joining as a potential threat to national sovereignty or identity (Lord 1992), except for those on the right wing of the Tory Party such as Enoch Powell and the left wing of the Labor Party. But the difference between the anti-integrationists and the pragmatists (by contrast with the many fewer genuinely pro-integrationists) was less in their understanding of the relationship of Britain to Europe than in their gut-feelings that colored their assessment of the practical benefits and of the dangers to national sovereignty (Marquand 1979).

Monetary Integration

For Margaret Thatcher as well, the EU was primarily to be embraced for its economic value, and have little effect on national sovereignty. By sovereignty, Thatcher variously meant Parliament's constitutional supremacy, the executive's independent policymaking capacity, the expression of democratic consent, and nationhood and self-governance. She variously

invoked it to oppose EU-related policy (Lynch 1999, p. 80). But the language of interest was the focal point of government discourse, which consistently depicted its actions as ones focused on “standing up for our interests” and “safeguarding our interests” and to “fight tenaciously for British interests within” the European Community (*Conservative Manifesto* 1983). Instead of seeing Europe as part of a larger ‘grand design’ in which the country was to play a pivotal role, as did the Mitterrand government, the Thatcher government saw its role in Europe as one of a sobering influence, of off-setting the grand designs by not “letting ourselves be distracted by Utopian goals” (Bruges Speech, Sept. 20, 1988)). In her memoirs, Thatcher presented the Conservative Party’s ideal of Europe as a ‘free enterprise *Europe des patries*’ (Thatcher 1993, p. 536), and otherwise tirelessly warned of the dangers of an EU superstate, calling EU civil servants “federasts” (*New York Times*, Feb. 20, 1997).

Thatcher herself, moreover, actually moved between two different communicative discourses: one which presented integration as a zero-sum game with regard to indivisible, “crown-in-parliament” sovereignty, the other which saw a close and cooperative relationship as furthering British interests within a larger sovereignty (Larsen 1997, pp. 66-68). She used the first primarily in her early years (1979-1984), as epitomized by her speech declaring “I want my money back” with regard to the EC budget. The second came in the middle period (1984-1988) when she used a more ‘*communautaire*’ language as she sought to lead Europe toward greater market liberalism. At this time, she even accepted qualified majority voting because she saw it as serving to move Europe toward economic liberalization, and seemingly overlooked the fact that giving up the unanimity rule represented arguably the most significant loss of national sovereignty yet for Britain. But Thatcher moved back to the first discourse and concerns with national sovereignty in her last years (1988-1990), in particular because of her opposition to Economic and Monetary Union. In her Bruges speech of September 1988, although Thatcher insisted that Britain’s destiny was in Europe, she made much of the differences with regard to national identity and attachment to freedom, and insisted that: “We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain only to see them re-imposed at a European level, with a European super-State exercising a new dominance from Brussels.” In saying this, she was not just voicing her objections to EU initiatives on social policy and the single currency. She was also indicating more generally-held British concerns about any Brussels-generated rules that would result in a reduction in the space left open to the private sphere. This was perhaps best expressed by Lord Denning who, when protesting the sheer volume of EU law, described it as: “like a tidal wave bringing down our sea walls and flowing inland over our fields and houses” (Alter 1998, p. 135)

By the time “New Labor” came to power in 1997 under the leadership of Prime Minister Tony Blair, the Labor party had become much more convinced that British interests were compatible with those of Europe, and it was much more supportive of most EU initiatives than the Tories (Gamble and Kelly 2000). In the 1997 electoral discourse about the EU, however, the main difference was that “New Labor” did not raise any sovereignty or institutional issues with regard to further integration. Prime Minister Blair’s discourse on Europe was much more like Thatcher’s second, more moderate discourse, which argued for close cooperation to further British economic interests. The most noticeable difference is that whereas Thatcher’s primary discourse came down very hard on protecting sovereignty and identity, Blair largely remained silent on these issues when he addressed the question of Europe. But in fact, he publicly addressed the question of Europe comparatively little in his many years in office. Most notable is the fact that most of his most important speeches about Europe were delivered outside the UK, and that in his election campaigns Europe was largely

absent. What came out most clearly is that he saw the EU primarily as an intergovernmental, economic community, despite recognizing its growing political dimension in areas of foreign and security policy.

On EMU in particular, Blair's argument was much like that of his predecessors, presenting entry as a purely economic issue, promising a referendum if a Labor cabinet recommended it and Parliament agreed (Daniels 1998, pp. 72-96). Subsequently, while the Tories ruled out British membership in the single currency for at least two parliamentary terms, Blair's government committed itself in principle to join "if the economic conditions are met" because "it is the national interest that will always come first" (Statement to the House of Commons, February 23, 1999). But as the 2001 election approached, national interest seemed to be replaced by more narrow political interest, with the commitment of the Blair government to a decision on EMU further delayed. The new defense initiative with regard to Europe appeared to be Blair's way of counter-balancing the back-peddling on EMU, to demonstrate that Britain could still play a central role in Europe. But even here, the minute the media questioned the potential impact of a European army on national sovereignty and the trans-Atlantic relationship, Blair backed off to the point of denying the Europeanness of the project, insisting it was instead all about NATO revival (Howorth 2002). And once the Iraq war kicked off, Blair focused more on the trans-Atlantic relationship; and had in any event expended all his political capital on the Iraq war (Garton Ash 2004, Ch. 1).

Constitutional Treaty

By 2004, the referendum on the euro had become moot because Blair promised to hold a referendum on the Constitutional Treaty instead. When Blair fully and directly addressed the institutional issues in his response to Fischer's initial proposal for a more federal Europe, he was even more equivocal than the French. Blair rejected the notion of federation, which he equated with a "superstate," but insisted that the EU was already a "superpower" through the economic and political strength that resulted from the pooling of sovereignty of "free independent sovereign nations" (Speech to the Polish Stock Exchange, Warsaw, Oct. 6, 2000).

The pledge of a Constitutional referendum was driven by the desire to keep the euro off the agenda of the 2004 European Parliament elections as well as to keep it out of the 2005 general election. It was also assumed that it would be easier to sell the Constitutional Treaty, where Eurobarometer polls showed the UK hovered around 50% in support at the time Blair decided to go for a referendum, than the euro, where support fluctuated between 20% and 30%. Blair's expected strategy, to cast it as Britain in or out of Europe, fit well with opinion polls that found across time that a majority tended to favor staying in Europe but out of the euro. According to Mori polls, 53% of British favored staying in Europe in 1977, 55% in 1987, 58% in November 1997, a high of 62% in June 2000, and down to 54% in June 2003 (Mori polls, 1977-2003). A Flash Eurobarometer poll of January 2005 shows that this level of support continued, with six in ten (60%) respondents agreeing that UK membership of the EU is a good thing while only 35% disagreed. By contrast, Mori showed even larger majorities than Eurobarometer polls in favor of staying out of the euro—62% in 1991, 74% in November 1996, 71% in June 2000, 64% in May 2003 (Mori polls, 1991-2003).

The referendum on the Constitutional Treaty would have been very hard to win, however, even were Blair to have been able to frame it as a question of Britain in or out of Europe, and successfully pitch it as pitting current economic interests against out-dated political values. This is because the pro-European Labor leaders, just as the pro-European Tory leaders (of

which there are now in any case very few), had not prepared the public. Public opinion was on its way down, and the press was extremely negative, with erroneous claims—as Minister for Europe, Dennis MacShane, complained in a speech to the Birmingham business community—such as: “the Queen would be replaced, we would be forced to join the euro, Germany would take control of our nuclear weapons, and Brussels would take charge of our North Sea Oil. We would even be forced to drive on the right” (Speech to the Joint business Breakfast, Birmingham and Coventry & Warwickshire Chambers of Commerce, West Midlands, 13/08/04). The press also expressed concerns that the Constitutional Treaty would increase social regulation coming from Brussels, stifling British capitalism, while the right to strike in the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights would bring back the bad old days. Thus, as Timothy Garton Ash has remarked, we have the paradox of the British voting ‘no’ for the very reasons that the French might have voted ‘yes,’ and vice-versa, since what the French saw as Anglo-Saxon economic neo-liberalism, the British saw as French (and German) social over-protectionism (*Le Monde* 29-30, May 2005).

Once the Constitutional Treaty was put in moth-balls following the negative votes in referenda in France and the Netherlands, Blair was off the hook. And certainly, there was no way Blair could have held a referendum in the UK after the French ‘no’. A Mori poll on June 1, 2005, a day after the vote, showed a ‘no’ vote winning by a margin of 72% to 28%, with 67% wanting a referendum to be held so that they would have the chance to vote ‘no’. Blair’s speech on June 23 to the European Parliament at the inception of the British presidency—which interpreted the negative votes on the Constitutional Treaty as a “vehicle for the people to register a wider and deeper discontent with the state of affairs of Europe” that constitutes “not a crisis of political institutions” but “a crisis of political leadership,” and then suggested policy directions in which to ‘modernize,’ including rethinking the budget which spent 40% on the CAP—was well-received, and raised expectations about British leadership in rethinking the EU. These expectations were disappointed by the end of the British presidency, which was seen as having done little positive, and descended, once again, into budgetary wrangling to keep its rebate.

Why such a potent degree of euroskepticism in Britain? Beyond issues of history and identity constructions are two other highly salient factors: party politics and discourse. First, the way in which the political parties have divided on Europe has made for much greater EU-related cleavage in Britain than in France. Although the number of Euroskeptics as a share of the vote in parliamentary elections is actually quite close (30.4% in France, 34.5% in the UK, as opposed to the EU average of 15.37%), they manifest themselves quite differently. In the UK, they dominate the right of the left/right cleavage in a two-party majoritarian system, and are largely ‘soft sceptics’, with 32.4% in the Conservative party vs. the ‘hard skeptics’ of the tiny UK Independence Party. In France, by contrast, they are marginalized on the right and left extremes of a multi-party majoritarian system, and are predominantly the ‘hard sceptics’ of the National Front and related groups, at 26.7% vs. 3.7% of ‘soft sceptics’ including break-away parties on the right (around de Villiers and Pasqua) and left (around Chevènement) (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002; Stratham and Guiraudon 2003). This makes for much stronger effects in the UK, where the euroskeptics have been able to take over an entire party, than in France, where they are effectively kept out of regular politics.

But the second, even more significant factor has to do with the close to twenty years of negative discourse on the EU that created the euroskeptics in the first place. As Chris Patten describes it, although the *de jure* view of sovereignty which saw the country giving itself away piece by piece, “drifting ever closer to its own destruction” in the words of a

Conservative Party pamphlet of 2000, had been going on for years, it is Margaret Thatcher who “gave this drift to destruction its greatest momentum.” With her speech in Bruges in 1988, she “destroyed at a stroke the traditional British relationship with Europe... Suddenly, the Conservative Party was dominated by a nightmare vision of Europe—the imminent arrival of the superstate—that still prevails in the party today” (Patten 2005, pp. 87, 93). The emphasis on sovereignty and identity, a *leitmotif* throughout her tenure in office, became a rallying cry against Europe. But Blair can also be blamed for his failure to even try to make a sustained case for Europe and the euro, despite large majorities in Parliament. His claim early on that he could turn public opinion around within three months of deciding to go for the euro, and therefore need not address the topic before then, was a bit of hubris that he was lucky enough not to have had tested. Public opinion can be changed, but this generally takes time, and requires good arguments.

Blair’s silence on the EU left Fleet street and the Eurosceptics largely unchallenged with regard to their discourse about the deleterious impact of the EU on national sovereignty and identity. Although Blair and his ministers occasionally inaugurated information campaigns on Europe to dispel the falsehoods, they were few and far between, and were not sustained. By contrast, the newspapers waged a non-stop anti-Europe campaign, when they spoke of Europe at all. And Blair didn’t even attempt to counter this through a positive discourse about Europe. In fact, when recently asked why he did not make the case for Europe, Blair responded that he could do nothing because of the media’s hostility—so he did not even try. But this has effectively ensured that public hostility to the EU continues unabated in Britain with Eurobarometer polls showing large majorities of British over time to be opposed to EU level control of most policy areas and feeling that too many decisions concerning the UK are taken at the European level (69% vs. 27% in a 2005 Flash Eurobarometer poll).

Conclusion

The problems for France with regard to ideas and discourse about Europe have to do with the fact that national leaders and publics have not come to terms with the Europe that they themselves have played a central role in building. De Gaulle’s vision of French leadership in a Europe that enhances French identity while having little negative impact on sovereignty, combined with Mitterrand’s assurance that the French economy gains from Europeanization acting as a shield against globalization, have remained at the core of the political leaders’ communicative discourse about the EU and its relationship to France fifty years on. But the French public clearly sees that France now no longer leads Europe at the same time that French identity has been in crisis, French sovereignty has been in question, and the French economy has not been doing well when judged by the high levels of unemployment and the crisis of the welfare state. The result has been a French crisis in confidence which affected not just France but also the EU in the two years between the French ‘no’ on the Constitutional Treaty and the French presidential elections. The question for the new president, Nicolas Sarkozy, is how to renew ideas about Europe with a communicative discourse that addresses the issues not just of leadership in Europe—already apparent in his intervention to clinch the ‘mini-treaty’—but also questions of identity and sovereignty. His most recent speech represents a beginning in this, but will need to be reinforced by more words and, of course, actions.

The problems for Britain, by contrast, come from ideas and discourse that effectively exaggerate the negative aspects of the impact of EU policies, that seek to justify European integration in terms of economic interests alone, and which don’t come to terms with questions of sovereignty and identity. The emphasis on economic interest, whether by

Macmillan, Wilson, Thatcher, or Blair, along with the failure to confront the euroskeptics on issues of sovereignty and identity, let alone to seek to counterbalance the negative media spin, has left the public as whole largely anti-European. The main question for the new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, therefore, remains the same as for his predecessors: will he continue to use an economic discourse or will he articulate a discourse that seeks to reconcile Britain's continuing integration in European Union with its centuries-old sense of going it alone.

In short, while France needs a new vision of Europe, Britain needs a vision. And whereas France seems to be embarked on that mission, as Sarkozy seeks to redefine the project of Europe as he redefines France in Europe, it remains unclear as to whether the new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, will do anything more than his predecessor, thereby leaving Britain in its time-old awkwardness.

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