National and Partisan
Contexts of Europeanization:
The Case of the French Socialists*

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Abstract
This article affirms the usefulness of thinking of Europeanization and European policy change in terms of national, party and European contexts and their interrelationships. Through a case study of the French Socialists in office, the article seeks to establish that national, party and European policy contexts matter in different ways and in varying degrees. National context provides a set of institutions, interests and referential paradigms which help to make sense of a complex external environment. Party provides a distinctive partisan lens and an enduring political community. Europeanization poses a series of direct and indirect policy challenges and opportunities for nation-states and party governments. The article considers national and Europeanized pressures to be more significant than partisan processes.

Introduction
This article affirms the usefulness of thinking of Europeanization and European policy change in terms of national, party and European contexts and their interrelationships. European policy is formulated within precise national contexts. Governments operate according to norms, traditions, rules and codes of appropriate institutional behaviour. Each incoming government must adapt to an ongoing policy process and governments inherit a mesh of past and

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European policy is also elaborated within specific party or coalition contexts. Party traditions provide a frame of reference for interpreting European integration; coalitions can modify or strengthen party contexts. European policy-making occurs in an increasingly Europeanized policy space, where path-dependent processes can escape from the control of national or party actors.

Following from the above, the article seeks to elucidate three important research questions extrapolated from various literatures on European integration and comparative politics. Does national context pre-shape European action? Do parties (or coalitions) make a difference? Are national and party contexts subordinate to overarching Europeanized policy processes? In the main body of the article, I investigate the interplay between these national, party and European policy contexts, by means of a case study of the French Socialists in office. The argument developed throughout the article is that national, party and European policy contexts matter in different ways and in varying degrees. National context provides a set of institutions, interests and referential paradigms which help to make sense of a complex external environment. Party acts as a filter, in the sense of providing a distinctive partisan lens and an enduring political community. Europeanization poses a series of direct and indirect policy challenges and opportunities for nation-states and for party governments. The article considers national and Europeanized pressures to be more significant than partisan processes, with the relative explanatory power of each dependent on the issue-areas and institutional arenas concerned. As the EU moves closer towards being a quasi-polity, I predict that parties are likely to become more significant players.

These research questions are applied to the case of the French Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste – PS). The single case study can provide rich potential for theorizing more general phenomena, especially when the case is representative of more generic types. Studying the French Socialists is important for several reasons. France is a leading EU nation. The French Socialist Party is one of the most successful European parties, belonging to one of the major European party families.

The PS has a coherent partisan discourse on European integration. Jospin firmly believes that parties ought to make a difference, both domestically and at the European level. In office since 1997, the French Socialists have viewed the EU as an arena to proselytize the virtues of domestic political reforms, in an effort to influence the broader direction of European Union policy. The case study therefore provides highly relevant empirical terrain to test for the importance of national, partisan and Europeanized policy contexts. Section I develops the framework of reference; Sections II–IV evaluate how national,
party and Europeanized contexts mediate the European activity of the Jospin government (1997–2000). Preferred explanations are offered in the Conclusion.

I. The National Context of European Policy-Making

National context can best be understood as that particular combination of ideas, interests and institutional practices that – at any given time – frame the terms in which the domestic political debate over Europe takes place. National context generally highlights variations between countries. The integrationist terms of the European debate in Germany are not the same as the instrumental conceptions framing debates in the UK (Markovits and Reich, 1997; Wallace, 1997). The notion of national context is not devoid of ambiguity. As in other countries, in France there are ideational and institutional influences pulling in opposing directions, from the supranational idealism of the founding fathers, to the neorealism of de Gaulle. Realist and liberal intergovernmentalist scholars go further than national context to refer to national purpose. This presupposes a dominant referential paradigm and a nationally specific pattern of institutional structures and domestic interests that render coherent the policy stances adopted by nation-states (Moravcsik, 1993; Milward, 1992; Hoffmann, 1995). Most observers accord a fairly high degree of cohesion to French European policy formulation and execution (Lequesne, 1993; Wright, 1996; Guyomarch et al.; 1998, Cole and Drake, 2000). This results from an efficient combination of tight executive-led central coordination, weak parliamentary oversight, an underlying elite-level consensus on most European issues and a vertical closeness of fit between the French and European administrative models.

French approaches to European integration have combined an astute mix of visionary discourse and instrumental policy position-taking that has proved very effective in defending French national interests over time. Though its political discourse has been visionary, supranational and integrationist, the realist presupposition of Europe as an extension of French influence has been embraced more overtly than in any other European country. French policy towards the EU has always, since the early days, consisted of using the European level as a vehicle for French interests and as a level of governance which could suit France. This was most obviously the case of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and in the nature of the initial Franco–German bargain (sometimes expressed as French political ascendancy against German economic primacy). Through its privileged – and for long uneven – alliance with Germany, France used the European arena as a means of exporting ideas, policies and administrative styles.
French governments in the Fifth Republic for long accepted unquestioningly the canons of classical Gaullism. The Gaullist legacy can be summarized by six principal features: a cultural attachment to European values and civilization, notably as embodied by France; a Europe prepared to protect its industry and agriculture; the promotion of common European policies where these do not endanger French interests; a marked anti-Americanism and advocacy of a more independent security and defence identity; a tight Community based on a Franco-German directorate, rather than a looser, more nebulous grouping of nations; and a preference for intergovernmental over supranational institutions. There were many contradictions in this (Gaullist) French vision of Europe. France wanted a strong Europe with weak institutions (Le Gloannec and Hassner, 1996). There was a supranational discourse stressing the primacy of politics, but a fear of a genuinely supranational entity which might challenge the (self-appointed) role of French political leadership of the European integration project. In essence, France wanted to retain its role as a great power and to harness the resources of the Community to this effect. The EC was explicitly framed in national (and European) terms as a means whereby France could escape dependency and recover sovereignty.

There was an inherent tension between substantive and procedural views of Europe. In substantive terms, France wanted a strong Europe. A strong Europe embodied the six principal features of the Gaullist legacy listed above. For successive French governments, ‘widening’ the Community was felt to be incompatible with its ‘deepening’ and its construction as an entity capable of imposing common policies. Hence the Gaullist veto of British membership in the 1960s and the reluctant acquiescence of French governments to further enlargement thereafter. In procedural terms, there was a manifest gulf between the European policy ambition of French governments and the supranational institutional adaptation of the EC/EU called for by countries such as Germany (Cole, 2001). The dominant representation of European integration in France has been largely synonymous with a state-centric notion of a strong Europe, with power channelled through national institutions and delegated where appropriate to weak European institutions. This elucidates the intellectual tradition of the Fifth Republic which, applied to Europe, was based on the primacy of national sovereignty in opposition to doctrines of federalism. French politicians for long resisted any strengthening of the European Union’s supranational institutions – the European Commission and the European Parliament – and there remains deep unease with the ‘foreign’ concept of federalism which runs against the grain of French republican traditions.

Neither of de Gaulle’s two immediate successors (Pompidou, 1969–74; Giscard d’Estaing, 1974–81) ventured too far from the Gaullist heritage. In contrast, in symbolic and substantive terms, Mitterrand’s Europe was far more

Though the legacy of Gaullism remains highly influential, the debate has moved on since the paradigmatic shift of the mid-1980s. By the end of the century the mainstays of traditional French understandings in Europe had been challenged in several important respects. The most important of these were: German unification and its aftermath, which altered the internal equilibrium within the Franco-German alliance; the widening of the EU and the corresponding challenge to French policies such as the CAP; the activism of individual policy entrepreneurs in areas of sensitive domestic concern (such as competition policy and public services), an emerging referential paradigm which challenged many French conceptions about the role and nature of the European Union, and the diminished political and institutional capacity of the French Presidency in European Affairs (Cole and Drake, 2000).

This latter point requires brief explanation as it affects the governing environment of the French Socialists in office. The development of the European Union has challenged the policy style and political capacity of existing institutional actors. So pronounced was the French President’s pre-eminence in European affairs that Europe was traditionally considered to form part of a ‘reserved presidential sector’. French European policy has become less obviously the domain of the French Presidency. Always overstated, the hyper-presidentialist thesis has become less tenable with the changing political environment since the 1980s (the push to more supranational forms of decision-making and closer integration), the inherent fragmentation of the EU policy process, and repeated instances of cohabitation. In the French context, cohabitation refers to the institutional coexistence of a President of the Republic and a government from opposing political coalitions. Especially during periods of cohabitation (1986–88, 1993–95, 1997–) European Union issues are prepared through close collaboration between the two branches of the French executive. In the field of European policy, cohabitation imposes a form of co-management of EU affairs. The President retains an essential role on account of his treaty-signing power, his function as chair of the Council of Ministers and his status as elected head of state which guarantees his primacy in European and international summits. But, as most EU policy involves the great departments of state, and as the Prime Minister is charged with co-
ordinating overall policy, the government controls the essential levers of EU management. Specifically, the French Prime Minister controls the General Secretariat of the Interministerial Committee (SGCI), an agency charged with co-ordinating French governmental responses to the European Union. By comparison with most of its EU partners (especially Germany), France still provides a model of tight policy co-ordination on European issues, even during cohabitation.

Both branches of the French executive have accepted the rules of the ‘co-management’ game, in the overriding national interest. President Chirac and Prime Minister Jospin have converged in defence of vital French interests, as over CAP reform (1999), the Seattle World Trade Organization (1999) talks, or British beef (1999). The French Presidency of July–December 2000 was the object of sustained preliminary co-ordination between presidential and prime ministerial advisers (de Bresson, 2000). There is a joint national interest in core executive solidarity in the management of European Affairs, but this can be undermined by the effects of partisan dynamics. This was demonstrated in June 2000, when President Chirac’s official speech to the German Bundestag – where the French President called for a pioneer group of EU states to drive integration and advocated a European constitution – was immediately disowned by Jospin’s Minister for European Affairs, Moscovici (Bacqué et al., 2000). I will return to consider the significance of national context as an independent variable in the Conclusion.

II. The Party Context

Do parties matter? Recent interest notwithstanding (Gaffney, 1996; Hix and Lord, 1997; Marks and Wilson, 1999; Ladrech, 1999), political parties appear as the poor cousins of European integration theory. Depending on the perspective adopted, European integration theory emphasizes intergovernmental bargaining, unintended consequences, elite-level consensus, raising the common interest, policy entrepreneurs, politico-administrative hybrids, political leadership – but rarely parties as such. The bureaucratic nature of the European integration project appears to leave limited space for party actors. The development of the EU as a quasi-polity has added to the problem of party relevance in European democracies, especially in the economic and monetary sphere where party political actors appear invisible. In most accounts, EU policy is rarely mediated by party, and the party system literature itself is predicated upon the nation-state as the primary operating environment of European political parties.

Gauging party influence is highly problematical. In non-federal regimes with weak parliamentary oversight – such as the French Fifth Republic – there
is a virtual osmosis between political party and government, so much so that it is difficult to identify party as an independent variable separate from the government. Where does the Socialist Party cease and the Jospin government begin? Any attempt to make sense of party influence must acknowledge that parties operate across different dimensions. We can understand parties as diffuse domestic power networks (encompassing actors such as party leaders, national and European deputies, party officials, associated personalities and think-tanks); as party (or coalition) governments and as pan-European political networks. I use the term ‘partisan context’ to refer to these variable interpretations.

If the national visibility of party is blurred, it is even more difficult to identify party as an independent variable at the level of the European Union. Though there is a solid body of research on transnational European parties and European Parliament party groups, this provides only one dimension of party and offers a very incomplete gauge of party impact. The agenda-setting role of parties offers a rather different avenue for research. As the EU has become more open and more democratic – and as the European Parliament has assumed the role of a quasi-legislature – political parties have begun to perform at the European level their classic domestic role of framing democratic choices and offering competing societal visions. This is the argument of Marks and Wilson (1999), who identify the emergence of consistent left–right cleavages at the EU level. Their research is at an early stage, however, and it infers rather than demonstrates the importance of attitudes and values for specific policy outcomes.

The partisan context identified in this article combines elements of these approaches. I investigate claims that transnational partisan processes are growing in importance. In two policy case studies, I also consider claims that party families embody consistent approaches to the European policy process. My principal interest, however, is to understand how European integration influences (and is influenced by) national and partisan traditions, and I use the case of the French Socialists and the plural left government to elucidate these relationships. Insofar as party and government are inextricably interwoven, illuminating this party context in the case of the French Socialists is an essential preliminary to understanding the evolution of the Jospin government itself.

The French Socialist approach to Europe has been subject to cross-cutting pressures. The French Socialists were internationalists (rather than mere Europeanists) by tradition, proudly claiming the heritage of Jean Jaurès and the Second International. During the Fourth Republic (1946–58), the Socialist Party (SFIO) supported the principal moves to closer European integration. Guy Mollet’s Socialist-led government of 1956–57 performed a leading role in negotiating and ratifying the Treaty of Rome. But there was also a feeling
of unease at being affiliated with a liberal, capitalist association of nations and a determination to preserve the national political space as the party’s primary operating environment. While the SFIO stressed the economic advantages to be gained from a free market, Mollet was instrumental in writing safeguards into the Treaty to limit transfers of national sovereignty (Gerbet, 1975). The firmly pro-EC, pro-Atlantic stance of Mollet’s SFIO gave way in the early 1970s to a tougher anti-Americanism, and a more reserved attitude towards the European Community. This reflected both gradual Socialist acceptance of the Gaullist foreign policy legacy, and a tactical accommodation by the PS leader Mitterrand to reach an agreement with the French Communist Party (PCF).

During the long Mitterrand Presidency (1981–95), the European message, diffused by party and President, contrasted in important respects. The PS generally portrayed Europe in terms of a conflict between the forces of progress and the right, a conception which had arguably been transcended by Mitterrand’s espousal of the European cause in key speeches such as that to the German Bundestag in January 1983. The economic U-turn of 1983 created lasting tensions between party and President. The Single European Act of 1986 was accepted without any real public debate within the PS, through solidarity with President Mitterrand before the 1988 presidential election. In various policy documents, however, the French Socialists insisted upon the imperative of social, economic and industrial counterweights to a predominantly liberal and capitalist European Community. In its 1989 European manifesto, for instance, the party specifically criticized certain measures introduced by the Single European Act, such as the ending of exchange controls and the weakness of social counterweights to the single market (Parti Socialiste, 1989).

The party reference is undoubtedly more important for Jospin than for Mitterrand. As premier, Jospin has made great efforts to associate the Socialist Party elite (national and European PS deputies, party officials) with decisions over the orientation of European policy, a process facilitated by the presence of political heavyweights such as Jacques Delors on the party executive. The party leadership, the parliamentary group and the European parliamentary delegation were formally associated with preparing the EU French Presidency of July–December 2000 (Noblecourt, 2000). I can deduce from this brief comparison that Jospin values the party context and encourages the party to provide a specific filter for understanding European policy issues.

### III. ‘Europeanization’ and the Policy Inheritance

There is a burgeoning literature on Europeanization (Radaelli, 2000; Cole and Drake, 2000; Kassim and Menon, 1996). One of the earliest working defini-
tions of Europeanization was that offered by Ladrech (1994, p. 70): ‘Europe-
anization is an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of
politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of
the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making’. To the change
in logic represented by Europeanization, I would add pressures for administra-
tive reform, institutional adjustment, cognitive awareness and substantive
policy change. Rather than advocating any single-fit definition, elsewhere I
have proposed a sliding scale of Europeanization as it affects domestic French
politics (Cole and Drake, 2000). ‘Europeanization’ can be considered as an
independent variable of policy change, as a form of policy transfer and
learning, as a smokescreen for domestic reform and an imaginary constraint.
As an independent variable, the European Union has relentlessly expanded its
responsibilities into the domestic policy arena (Börzel, 1999) and has produced
policy change that goes against the grain of (French) national and partisan
traditions. I will illustrate this below in the case of monopoly public services.
As a form of emulative policy transfer and policy learning, on the other hand,
Europeanization refers to changed cognitive assumptions about national and
European models and stresses the importance of organizational adaptation to
European policy change (Radaelli, 2000). I also identified two misuses of
Europeanization: as a smokescreen for domestic reforms (a useful external
constraint to justify internal innovation), and as a purely imaginary constraint
utilized by Eurosceptical politicians (Cole and Drake, 2000).

The extent of France’s economic and institutional interdependence was
fully driven home by the integrationist agenda of the 1980s and early 1990s.
The economic U-turn of 1983 destroyed the French Socialists’ illusions of
economic independence and shook their faith in nationally distinctive paths to
socialism. The linkage operated by Mitterrand between domestic economic
retrenchment and the relaunch of European integration was one important
variable in explaining the closer policy convergence between leading EC states
that produced the Single European Act (Moravcsik, 1991). The SEA was
littered with unintended consequences (Pierson, 1996). The changes inspired
by the Single European Act of 1986 posed new challenges to domestic French
political traditions and policy-making practices, particularly to those of the
French left. This explained the fundamental ambivalence of the French
Socialist Party towards the SEA. The Maastricht Treaty of 1992, with its core
single currency decision, also posed new challenges to the traditional French
economic policy paradigms valued by many Socialists (such as the political
direction of economic policy and governmental control over monetary policy
instruments). That President Mitterrand had been a major player in both
decisions – the SEA and Maastricht – aggravated tensions within the Socialist
Party. In the 1995 presidential election campaign, the Socialist candidate
Jospin was ambivalent over the direction of European integration and claimed the ‘right to be selective’ in his appraisal of the Mitterrand Presidency.

Changes in EU laws and treaties have modified national traditions of policy-making, and the freedom of manoeuvre of national decision-makers. This is most obviously the case in two main policy areas brought into focus by the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty: EU competition policy in the former case; the implementation and management of the single currency in the latter. The Jospin administration’s management of the single currency issue is considered later in the article. The challenges posed by the evolving European policy process to the traditional policy paradigms of the French left can be demonstrated in a more direct sense in the sphere of monopoly public services, which I now consider.

The French notion of public service (service public) has traditionally gone well beyond that of universalistic welfare to include a high degree of interventionism in the industrial sphere, and the defence of monopoly utility providers. Public sector monopolies (in the gas, electricity, rail, postal and telecommunication services, and air transport sectors) benefitted from protection against domestic or foreign competition, and were attributed a public service mission in French administrative law (Gugliemi, 1994). As it evolved during the 1980s, the French model of delivering public services went against the grain of EU competition policy. The SEA was a critical juncture. Strengthened by the tough competition regulations of the SEA, the Commission developed several mechanisms to break up monopolies and to introduce industrial competition. Favoured measures included privatization, the strict regulation of state subsidies, the opening up of specific industrial sectors to competition, and the creation of independent competition agencies (Thatcher, 1997). There was a virtual consensus in France that this emerging EU regulatory model was incompatible with the French public service mission. Even determined French pressure was unable to prevent the liberalization of the telecommunications and air transport markets, traditionally the bastions of French state ‘national-champions’. At best, France was able to delay opening up the energy and postal sectors to competition. Though French governments could claim some negotiating successes in the details of implementation, the direction of change was clear. Neither the French Socialist Party, nor successive French governments (Juppé, then Jospin) were able to resist supranational regulatory pressures. European variables ultimately prevailed over national and party preferences.

This completes my general contextual presentation. I now investigate the interplay between national and partisan contexts and policy processes in the specific case of the Jospin government and its management of European policy.
On entering office in June 1997, the Jospin government was faced with the cross-cutting pressures of a specific national context, a partisan tradition and a European policy inheritance. I now investigate domestic party and coalition dynamics, and explore the activities of the French Socialists in transnational partisan and European policy processes. I conclude by offering an interpretation of how European policy is mediated by national, party and European contexts.

European Policy and the Plural Left Coalition

Alongside potentially conflicting relationships within the French executive, Jospin has had to manage the differing European sensitivities of the five coalition partners (Socialists, Communists, Radicals, Greens and Citizens). Jospin’s leadership is a key factor in containing divisions over Europe within the plural left government. The role of the French Communist Party (PCF) coalition partner exemplifies this. The PCF carries a heavy ideological baggage on Europe. It came out strongly against the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, against the single currency in 1998 and against the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999. While the PCF was unable to force a referendum on Amsterdam (governmental exit being its only option) its presence in government ensured policy consideration in other spheres. The desire to placate the Communist coalition partner strengthened Jospin’s determination to postpone liberalizing electricity markets in 1999 and to defend the state electricity conglomerate EDF-GDF. The domestic political incentives were high. Not only was EDF-GDF a symbol of the social-Colbertist conception of French public service, the CGT trade union, traditionally close to the Communist party, occupied a powerful position within the firm’s works council. Jospin’s consideration also extended to Interior Minister Chevènement and his small Citizens’ Movement (MDC). The Socialist manifesto for the 1999 European elections was modified in the light of agreement on a common platform reached with Chevènement’s MDC. These examples suggest that coalition politics do make some difference to the formulation of European policy positions.

The PS is the least divided of the main French parties on issues of European integration. Political success, and Jospin’s centre-of-gravity leadership style have dampened party factionalism over Europe. The Socialists were resolutely favourable to the Maastricht Treaty in 1992; party discipline in the 1999 vote on the Amsterdam Treaty ensured that only four PS deputies abstained or voted against the government. The existence of the plural left coalition has arguably strengthened cohesion within the Socialist Party itself. In the sphere of
European integration as elsewhere, Socialists have closed ranks against attacks from Communists, Greens and Citizens.

Jospin has encouraged the party to refine its conceptual tools and to provide a partisan filter for understanding European policy issues. Whether in government or in opposition, the party has provided a platform for diffusing new ideas. The commitment to a ‘European federation of nation-states’ was first made at the PS national convention on Europe in December 1996 and was restated in the party’s 1999 European manifesto (Noblecourt, 1999a). The espousal of the ‘federation of nation-states’ arguably demonstrated a willingness by the Jospin government (and by Foreign Minister Védrine in particular) to square concepts such as federalism – traditionally absent from French political discourse and referential frames – with a reaffirmation of the primacy of the nation-state. The ambivalence of the formula was illustrative of the ambiguities of the Jospin European project itself – to which I will return. Designed in part for purposes of domestic party and coalition management, the ‘federation of nation-states’ produced much confusion. The stony reaction of Jospin to Joschka Fischer’s May 2000 proposals for a European federation demonstrated an attachment to the national space as the ultimate arena where authoritative decisions are made.

Through the compromises it fosters and the vehicle it provides for the testing of new ideas, the party acts as a site for ideological innovation and for the legitimating of policy changes at governmental level. Most significantly, the absence of manifest and debilitating internal opposition on Europe leaves Jospin at an advantage by comparison with the leaders of other French parties.

French Socialists in Search of a (European) Role

The emergence of a nascent European party system logically assumes an increased interaction between parties at the pan-European level (Hix and Lord, 1997). Ladrech (1999) maps the existence of diffuse ‘networks of partisan activity’ within the pan-European political space, encompassing transnational party federations (such as the Party of European Socialists – PES), European Parliament (EP) party groups and committees, co-ordinating structures such as COSAG (committees bringing together members from the EP and the national parliaments) and party-to-party contacts. The network analogy is useful insofar as the number of contact points between Socialist politicians has increased exponentially over the past decade. In practice it is quite difficult to distinguish between partisan and (inter)governmental contacts, since many party leaders are also prime ministers in their own country. The party leaders occupy the central nodes within this Socialist pan-European network, meeting in biannual leadership summits, as well as on an ad hoc basis. Contacts are not limited to party leaders. In November 1998, for instance, the 11 Socialist
finance ministers adopted a common manifesto – the New European Way – in the name of the PES, rather than Ecofin or Euro-X1 (Delattre, 1998). The advantage of transnational structures such as the PES is not only that Commission actors are absent (unless specifically invited), but also that they provide an arena for confronting policy positions on the basis of an assumed ideological commonality.

The enhanced activity of the transnational federations – especially the PES and the EPP – has become apparent in the past decade. Since 1994, national opt-outs have no longer been possible from PES European manifestos, and observers such as Ladrech (1999) have argued strongly that more cohesive policies have resulted. This claim will be tested in the next section. It is unclear what weight should be given to commonly agreed party platforms for non-decisive European elections. Their contents are filtered through national and partisan lenses. The French PS claimed that the 1999 PES manifesto vindicated its policies in relation to the European employment pact, public services, public works, institutional reform and qualified majority voting (QMV) (Noblecourt, 1999b). But the adoption of the PES manifesto was followed shortly afterwards by the publication of the Blair-Schröder joint manifesto of June 1999 – before the European elections – which emphasized labour flexibility, support for business and declared the goal of the Third Way to be the pursuit of equality of opportunity, not of outcomes (Sergent, 1999). The PES is also the site for the advocacy of rival policy paradigms, and PES leadership summits – such as those of Malmo in June 1997, or Milan in March 1999 – can highlight public rivalry between Socialist Party leaders.

While these ‘networks of partisan influence’ have developed in the past decade, the national political space remains the primary operating environment of French political parties. National variables – finance, policy platforms, electoral competition – determine the life of parties as organizations. Career incentive structures also operate principally at the national level. The French Socialists have performed below their weight within the European Parliament on account of their weak numbers of European deputies and the preference of top-ranking Socialist politicians for other institutional venues. This is the logical consequence of the low esteem in which the European Parliament is (still) held amongst French elites and the attendant problems of absenteeism and low priority ranking. It is also a paradoxical side-effect of the Jospin modernization project. The Jospin government’s limitation of the traditional cumul des mandats (multiple office holding) forces politicians to choose between their Strasbourg seats and their other national responsibilities. The head of the Socialist list in 1999, François Hollande (who is also PS First Secretary) resigned his Strasbourg seat shortly after being elected in order to concentrate on the really important affairs of national politics. No significant
national political leader has chosen the European parliament over a national parliamentary delegation.

European Policy Preferences and Performance

In its European policy, the Jospin government laid claim to a coherent linkage between domestic and European politics. There is an institutional incentive for Jospin – the Prime Minister of a dual cohabitation – to lay claim to European Union affairs as part of the normal ambit of domestic politics, thereby contesting the legitimacy of presidential intervention in this sphere. There is also a belief that national problems require European solutions, and that certain public goods are most effectively provided at a European level (Clift, 2000). This belief has sustained the pan-European activism of the French plural left government, which has advocated a European-wide economic relaunch, a coordinated intergovernmental management of the euro, a concerted European effort against unemployment and the adoption of binding social and employment policies at the European and national state levels (Cole, 1998; Ross, 1998). I have chosen to investigate two of these policy areas – the management of the single currency and employment policy – as a means of calibrating the impact of Europeanized, national and partisan contexts.

Economic and monetary Union (EMU) is an issue of the highest domestic and European saliency. The EMU agenda-shaping decisions were taken long before the arrival of the Jospin government in June 1997. Since the EMU decision of the early 1990s, so much political capital had been expended by national governments and EU politico-institutional actors, and so much expectation had been raised in international financial markets that any delay in EMU, or any unpicking of the decision altogether would have had unforeseen consequences. As the Jospin government entered office on the basis of firm engagements to renegotiate the entire policy package, EMU is an obvious case to test for the relative importance of European, national and partisan contexts.

During the 1997 election campaign, the left insisted on several new conditions before agreeing to join the single currency, including the adoption of an employment chapter as a counterpart to the ‘stability pact’, and the creation of a European economic government to oversee the future European Central Bank (Parti Socialiste, 1997). The new French government failed to achieve these objectives at the Amsterdam summit (Parsons, 2000). It was easy to draw the brutal conclusion that the left coalition’s domestic electoral platform could not resist the combined pressures of path dependent Europeanized forces (the single currency decision) and countervailing national forces (President’s Chirac opposed his own government’s approach towards the Amsterdam summit). The left coalition was in no position either to renegotiate the single currency or to change the terms of engagement.
The political management of the euro could also be open to a more subtle reading. The French position of advocating tougher economic policy co-ordination in the Euro-zone was supported by many EU finance ministers, and opened a debate about the future political management of the Euro-zone and related issues such as fiscal policy and tax harmonization. The Jospin government secured the creation at the Amsterdam summit of a committee of Euro-zone finance ministers (later known as Euro-XI) to monitor the work of the European Central Bank. The Jospin government’s view of Euro-XI was not far removed from the traditional French preference for an economic government where politicians would determine economic priorities to be implemented by the system of central banks. This view was strongly contested by the Kohl administration in Germany, as it had been throughout the Maastricht negotiations (Dyson and Featherstone, 1999). But it was broadly supported by majority opinion within the PES, for whom EMU should be ‘accompanied by the increased co-ordination of economic, budgetary, fiscal, employment and social policies to ensure that the convergence criteria for sound economic performance are sustainable’ (PES summit, December 1995, cited in Ladrech, 1999, p. 105). The change of government in Germany in 1998 moved the Euro-XI closer to French conceptions. German Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine was convinced of the need for greater political direction to the single currency project. The formal launch of the euro in January 1999 coincided with a strong push from EU finance ministers for more political oversight over the Central Bank. French ministers have continued to advocate developing Euro-XI as an embryonic ‘economic government’, an idea (if not a terminology) that has gradually gained political credibility as the opaque practices of the ECB have become apparent. The transnational partisan context of the Socialist network provided a broadly supportive environment for the pursuit of French Socialist aims in this sphere.

Employment policy is also an area of the highest domestic saliency for Jospin, who has declared fighting unemployment to be his number one European and domestic priority. Since 1997, Jospin has deployed considerable energy in enhancing EU-level employment regulation, identifying employment as a public good appropriate for European action. But the policy solutions adopted by the plural left government (centred around the obligatory 35-hour working week) have been contested by powerful forces at both the national and European levels. The relative isolation of the Jospin government – domestically, within the EU institutions and within the ‘Socialist network’ – has limited its efficacy.

In a face-saving gesture at the Amsterdam summit of June 1997, the French secured the convening of a special employment conference, held in Luxembourg in November 1997. The French position paper to the Luxembourg
conference was very specific in its recommendations (Biffaud and de Bresson, 1997). It called for the creation of 12 million jobs throughout the Union in the next five years. It argued that national economic plans should include precise, quantifiable employment targets. It called for employment policy to be coordinated and regulated at the EU level. In a move redolent of past French dirigiste practices, France advocated that industrial layoffs and closures be approved by the Commission. But the Jospin government did not convince a majority of other EU capitals to adopt its advocacy of detailed regulation and enforced reductions in the working week. The European employment pact eventually adopted by the Cologne summit of June 1999 fell far short of French aspirations. There were to be no enforceable employment targets with penalties for non-compliance, and most countries rejected Jospin’s demand for an official EU growth target of 3 per cent to absorb unemployment (Sauron and Asseraf, 1999).

Though there was much cohesion and consistency across levels, there were also many ambiguities in the European preferences of the Jospin government. Though Jospin called for EU-level employment and economic policies, the French government was anxious that nation-states should guard the primary responsibility for budgetary and employment policies. The French were, after all, engaged in an original and untypical domestic policy experiment in the form of the 35-hour week and would resist external interference in this flagship government policy. As on other occasions, this highlighted the Janus-like characteristics of Europeanization: the European Union would be an unwelcome guest if it attempted to intervene too closely in tested patterns of domestic management. On the other hand, the European Union provided a political arena where European governments (those led by social-democratic parties in particular) could combine their governance capacity to create (or strengthen) a European political, social and economic model. Only Europe could reinvent new forms of political regulation faced with economic globalization.

How should we interpret these cases? In the case of EMU, Europeanized path-dependent pressures were especially strong, initially leaving little space for partisan or national factors to come into play. The key decisions had already been taken, and too much was at stake to change the rules of engagement. But the EMU case study also reveals the importance of political dynamics, as the case for greater political influence over monetary policy technocrats came to be appreciated. Europeanization (in the form of EMU) thus logically prevailed over national and partisan factors, though it was in turn influenced and partially reshaped by the latter.

In the case of employment policy, the interplay between Europeanization, national and partisan contexts was rather different. Path-dependent Europeanized pressures were much weaker, and the prospects for partisan agenda-
setting much stronger. The partisan context – the emergence in 1997–98 of a European centre-left majority – was highly propitious for placing the idea of an EU employment pact on the European agenda, an idea that had been circulating within the PES since at least the mid-1990s. But the manifest divisions between social-democratic parties in office – with Blair and Jospin proposing distinctive policy agendas and Schröder oscillating between the two – weakened the impact of any concerted pan-European social-democratic logic. With EU-level action limited and parties divided, national responses to employment policy were not seriously challenged. In this case, national factors logically prevailed over European and partisan variables. The advocacy of French socialist positions was more convincing when they had a broader national and pan-European appeal (political counterweights to EMU) than when they reflected domestically contested partisan positions (employment policy).

V. Conclusion

In the Introduction, I posed three specific research questions, each of which is implicitly associated with an accompanying theoretical literature. Does national context matter? Do parties matter? Does Europeanization matter? These three variables – national context, partisan context, European policy process – can be internally consistent, but they can also conflict with each other. I now offer my preferred explanations, based on the evidence presented in the article.

National context obviously matters. French policy-making on Europe follows established institutional procedures (characterized by tight co-ordination and a high measure of core executive control) and occurs within recognizable referential paradigms. European integration is an elite driven project, in France more than elsewhere. The stance adopted by the Jospin government on many (but not all) of the issues surveyed in this article formed part of a broader elite-level French consensus on European issues. There was a large measure of inner-executive consensus over economic policy traditions, over paradigms of public service and on the need for political counterweights to EMU. The broad national consensus on these issues of European policy was strengthened by the nature of the cohabitation and the co-management game it imposed. The real cleavage over European integration lies not between parties of the centre-left and centre-right, but between majority and opposition. Jacques Chirac fought a Euro-ambivalent campaign in the 1995 presidential election, but within five months had confirmed France’s commitment to EMU. In 1997, the Socialists’ ‘four conditions’ evaporated when faced with German steadfastness. Governmental practice has produced varying degrees of pressurized policy convergence. The centrality of the European integration project for the French
national interest establishes the parameters of French policy-making on Europe. France likes to be seen to be adopting European solutions, even when these threaten features of domestic political traditions. This is the price to pay for preserving its rank as a leading EU power and its identity as the driving force of a particular vision of European integration.

National context must not be confused with a static version of national purpose. Arguments based solely on national, institutional or cultural distinctiveness run against the overwhelming evidence of policy change. French responses are embedded in precise contexts, but they are not literally pre-shaped. There has been a considerable evolution of French policy towards European integration during the past two decades – only briefly touched on in this article – that has transcended the classical Gaullist model.

Do parties matter? The article has demonstrated the importance of the domestic and pan-European partisan context. I offered three understandings of party: as diffuse domestic power networks, as party (or coalition) governments and as pan-European political networks. Party matters across each of these dimensions – to some extent. Jospin has associated the Socialist Party power network (national and European deputies, party officials, associated personalities and think-tanks) with European policy formulation more closely than Mitterrand ever did. The PS has responded to political success by providing an overarching organizational and ideological support framework. The internal dynamics of the plural left coalition have also affected European policy outcomes.

If we understand party in the stronger definition of party government, the Jospin administration has staked much credibility on operating a coherent linkage between the domestic and European levels. In the areas of strongest partisan activity – such as employment policy – the evidence presented questions the ability of the French Socialists to achieve more than a symbolic linkage between domestic and European policy or to export their ideas to the EU-level. Rather paradoxically, for a government which emphasizes the importance of the European level, the most significant reforms of the Jospin government involved highly distinctive national/partisan solutions, such as the 35-hour week, which other countries have yet to emulate. The most effective French Socialist positions (such as over political counterweights to EMU) were those with a broader national and pan-European appeal.

At the level of the pan-European socialist network, I uncovered rather conflicting evidence. Divisions amongst social democrats – for example over employment policy – make it important not to overstate the coherence of the European social-democratic party family. Individual parties interpret common policy problems through nationally tinted lenses. The national party space remains the primary operating environment for European social-democratic
parties. But the pan-European socialist network facilitated the informal circulation of policy ideas and the attempted harmonization of policy positions by ideologically cognate parties in government. The influence of the pan-European partisan context thus lay in terms of future agenda-setting, institutional invention and political exchange.

Does Europeanization matter? I distinguished between Europeanization as an independent and as a dependent variable. As an independent variable, Europeanization is best understood in the top-down sense of being an exogenous constraint imposing policy change. In the policy areas surveyed, this use of Europeanization appeared quite convincing to explain public service reform, competition policy, and – at least in the details of its implementation – Economic and Monetary Union. It was far less convincing with respect to employment policy, where EU intervention was symbolic. When Europeanization is understood as an exogenous constraint, the European Union can appear as an obstacle for reform-minded social-democratic parties such as the French PS. The Jospin government has faced the consequences – unintended or otherwise – of the agenda-shaping decisions taken in the mid-1980s and early 1990s (driven in part by the French Socialist Mitterrand). In such cases (public service reform, competition policy, certain aspects of macroeconomic management), ‘Europeanization’ appears to go against the grain of a traditional French left model of politics and policies. On the other hand, Europeanization also involves policy learning and organizational adaptation. French public policy has become less self-sufficient since the early 1980s, far more embedded in interdependent structures, and French elites have been more willing to engage in policy learning and to experiment with new discursive forms (Cole, 1998; Cole and Drake, 2000). The Europeanization of important areas of domestic policy activity (and the desire to influence EU-level policy outcomes), as well as the increased incidence of transnational European party contacts, have all facilitated the political and organizational adaptation of the Socialist Party to European policy change.

When understood as a dependent variable, Europeanization is best conceptualized as an extension of the domestic political project. This is the bottom-up definition. The European level is valued as a site for the export of French Socialist ideas, policies and personnel. Strengthening the European arena as a level of concerted public policy action has been an important aspect of the Jospin government’s official policy, in part because it implies the coherence of the domestic political message and its propensity for export. Conceptually, there has been a close linkage between domestic and European levels. This has been demonstrated in the effort undertaken by France to refocus EU attention on issues of social and employment policy, macroeconomic policy co-ordination and economic growth. The results of this attempt to extrapolate the French
model have been rather timid, and policy diffusion has thus far been limited. Though Euro-XI has been driven by French activism, its role remains uncertain. In employment policy, French positions have not obtained enthusiastic approval from other EU states, even those led by social-democratic political majorities.

National, partisan and European policy contexts all matter in different ways. The national context provides sets of institutions, interests and ideas which help to make sense of a complex external environment. Europeanization poses a series of direct and indirect policy challenges and opportunities. Party provides a distinctive partisan lens through which to view European change and to interpret national context. These three variables are each important in understanding the complex alchemy of how ingrained national traditions change and adapt to change. Insofar as I can establish a hierarchy between these variables, on the basis of the evidence presented I consider national and Europeanized pressures to be more significant than partisan processes, with the relative explanatory power of each dependent upon the issue-areas and institutional arenas concerned. As the EU moves closer towards being a quasi-polity, parties are likely to become more significant players and I have presented some evidence suggesting that this process is gathering pace.

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