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The Historical and political sociology of the EU : what's new in France ?

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Summary

This article provides an overview of the hundred or so papers in historical and political sociology of the EU published in France over the last two years (particularly around the sociology of knowledge and sociology of trajectories and positions of the social agents and groups who make up the European political space), and analyses some of their contributions to the international debate, focusing notably on the central political and institutional space of the EU.

About the author

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Even if the vote on the constitutional treaty, and in general the supposedly complex attitude of French elites and citizens towards European integration has drawn attention to France, the massive upsurge in political science publications about European issues in the past few years should not be overlooked (Irondele, 2006). This development has occurred in many different fields, such as public policies (Palier, Surrel, 2007), institutions or electoral sociology (for an overview, see Costa and Magnette, 2007, Belot, Magnette, Saurruger, 2008). Among these recent studies, a new, more specific and original movement has developed within the international scope of *European studies* around what we will refer to here as the political and historical sociology of the EU. Without being specifically French, even though there are at the moment more productions *in* France than elsewhere, these studies have emerged in the late 90s¹ and differ from other political science research in that they integrate a strong historical and sociological dimension in order to tackle the analysis of the “European political space” as an ongoing field of power.

The authors and their approaches are not completely homogeneous, and even less so since their publications have become increasingly diverse in the past few years. But several elements, like a set of shared references and epistemological choices (to be studied further below), allow us to outline strong convergences. The hundred or so articles published these two last year² illustrate these convergences and give us a better idea of what these pluridisciplinary approaches bring to the current international debates in political science. We will not get into a theoretical analysis here – on a more modest level, and at the risk of providing a very incomplete inventory, we will proceed in four stages. First we will study two contributions from this movement to the international literature on the EU around the sociology of the knowledge of European institutions and the sociology of the positions and professional paths of the agents who gravitate around them. We will then outline a few specificities, and eventually discuss the relevance of these recent developments, i.e. their contribution to an objectivation of the central institutional space and the structural processes at play within that space.

Toward a reflexive political sociology of EU

The need for reflexive approaches has been expressed throughout the general debates in social sciences (Berger and Luckman, Bourdieu or Giddens). It has recently started to become an issue in European studies, at least as an avenue of research. Several authors, like Ben Rosamon, have stressed the possible usefulness in taking the forms of knowledge of Europe as an object. Among publications in France this year, three such approaches have been developed.

First, we have a series of studies about the politics of memory and historiography. In a socio-historical perspective, this research focuses on the social and political conditions that influence the production of a shared narrative, of its objectivation (or lack thereof) in a history and in memories. The special issue of *Politiques européennes*, directed by Yves Deloye

¹ Among others, Politix 1998, Guiraudon 2000, Smith 2004, Georgakakis 2002.

² Among the works discussed here, there are collective books: Baisnée and Pasquier (2007), Campana, Henry and Rowell (2007), Cohen and Vauchez (2007), Georgakakis (2007), Michel (2006), Mink and Neumayer (2007) – journal issues: *Regards sociologiques* (late 2005 but dated 2004), *Politique européenne's* special issue on the “socio-history of Europe” (2006), as well as some as of yet unpublished seminars such as: “Constructivisms and European Union, Strasbourg (June 2006), “L'Union européenne et le capital juridique”, Polilex, Paris I (sept 2006), the seminars of the ANR “Concorde” directed by Daniel Gaxie, Strasbourg, Paris I, Berlin, Amiens (2006-07), the “New trends on European studies” workshop, Copenhagen (April 2007), the debate on the issue of *Actes de la recherche en Sciences Sociales*, Paris, Collège de France (May 2007), the workshops on European Parliament members (dir. Godmer, Marrel) in Québec and Toulouse (2007). See bibliography at the end of this paper for a list of most of these contributions.

(2006), some papers in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* (the review founded by Bourdieu), and George Mink and Laure Neumayer's book are typical of this approach. In some cases, like the Charlemagne Prize awarded by the European institutions to reward "good Europeans" (Larat, 2006), the invention of the Museum of Europe (Charléty, 2004, 2006), the construction of landmark dates and founding fathers like Jean Monnet, R. Schuman and May 9 (Cohen 2007 b), the authors show that the existence of shared narratives is not organic, but rather a product of undertakings that often associate broad networks. However, their analyses do not presuppose the unilateral success of these undertakings. When he analyses the "new issues of memory that suddenly emerged into the EU's widened space" before and after membership, Georges Mink shows the tensions that can exist between different historiographic forms (Mink in Mink, Neumayer, 2007). The making of history in Europe, and of memory, is not simply about war, even though that was the option that the federalists chose and defended (Vayssières in Devaux et alii, 2008). It is also about – numerous, even if they did not always involve weapons - bilateral conflicts which have taken place since 1945, as well as the downfalls of authoritarian regimes and the way the transitions turned out for a number of social groups. Beyond cases that are often very instructive, this research shows the (at least) twofold reality of this history. There have been attempts to impose a unified history, but the interpretation of this history is a matter of "historicization strategies" (Mink, Neumayer, 2007), which result both from European relations, national partisan or political movements and their consequences in political cleavages within the European institutions.

In the same way, another series of studies strives to grasp the production processes of the categories of perception and understanding of the "European political system". The work of the Polilexes team (Vauchez, Sacriste, Cohen, Dulong) analyzes the historical and social processes which lead to the production of legal and constitutionalist schemes – this from the perspective of, on one hand, a long history of transformations in international law since the interwar period (Vauchez, Sacriste, 2005), federalist movements (Cohen 2006), circulation of European jurists between the 50s and the 70s (Vauchez 2006, 2007) and on the other hand more limited phenomena such as "the constituting moment" as analyzed in Cohen and Vauchez's collective book. These works question the premise of an autonomous European legal rationality in order to, among other things, look for the strength of its possible dynamics in construction processes that involve political and national movements or competitions with other sectors in law (Madsen 2005 and 2007, Scheeck 2008). In short, the authors unveil a capital dimension of European construction, by focusing on institutional instruments (treaties, etc.) and its political effects.

The "categories of analysis" of the "new European governance" (Georgakakis and de Lassalle, 2007) are also studied³. These are subject to both scholarly (which does not mean that the social and political conditions of the exercise are autonomous) and institutional problematizations (as Foucault said). Here the authors deal with the political uses of the concept, as they are displayed in the *White Paper on European governance* published by the European Commission in 2001. On the basis of specific limited cases, studied from multiple angles (uses in different political sectors, by federalist groups, in the academic field, within the European institutions or within interest groups and related NGOs, in Great Britain, Germany or France⁴), the authors reflect on the importation of this concept into the European institutional field, on its translation, its diffusion and the extent to which it materializes in the practices of European agents, practices which of course depend on their institutional and

³ Among others such as those of the "European civil society" (Weisbein, 2006, Michel, 2007 and 2007), of "public space" (Utard, Aldrin, in progress), "European agenda" (Campana, Henry, Rowell, 2007).

⁴ In the following order : Weisbein, Delcourt, Popa, Buchet de Neuilly, Georgakakis, Forêt, Michel, Lozach, de Lassalle, 2007.

social position. Here, again, the authors aim at leaving aside the use of a set of reified categories and focusing on the interactions between actors, the contexts that enable the emergence of categories of institutional readings, which they show as unequally and imperfectly monopolized by the most central actors.

The parallel - and therefore potentially comparative - reading of the "constituting moment" and of the *White Paper on European governance* can lead to new avenues of research. It confirms that the constructed categories are made all the more solid as they are the fruit of a long-term mobilization by mediators who circulate in different political spheres and that these processes, in favorable circumstances, are consonant with the (traditionally mainly legal) training of the political personnel. This does not necessarily entail the political success of the constituting moments or mechanisms which place these actors in the spotlight, but it reveals trends, as the constituting moments are both continuous and discontinuous, in the relative value of certain forms of capital in these arenas. This is notably the case of the devaluation of political economy-based capital and the rise of management-based expertise in technocratic circles (Georgakakis 2007 c); the decline of institutional legal capital and the rise of private law (Cohen 2007 a).

A third approach concerns the categories of ordinary perceptions of Europe. This approach is used, for instance, in a national research program headed by D. Gaxie, University Paris I-Sorbonne, with other CNRS centers in Amiens, Strasbourg and Berlin. It is too early to provide any results now, but not too early to point out the originality of the perspective and of the social science methods used for the survey. It aims at measuring the forms of popular expression about Europe as found in mail addressed to institutions or newspapers, blogs, etc. In-depth interviews aim at reconsidering the meaning of certain questions in the Eurobarometer. They bring very instructive results and allow a better grasp of the complex relations between European construction and the social processes manufacturing political competence. Additionally there is a body of research that pertains to the political sociology of elections but produce critical analyses which contrast strongly with prevailing interpretations, for example on citizenship (see the publications of Yves Deloye) or the analysis of the referendum for the constitutional treaty (Lehingue 2007 a and b).

On the whole, if these works entail the deconstruction of a set of constituted categories, and in particular a set of institutionalist schemes, they do not in the least limit themselves to this deconstruction. What is at stake is grasping representations of the European political time and space, i.e. of myths, beliefs, but also visions of the rules of the game, the strategic possibilities, the anticipations European agents embody – this, and we must insist on this point, without limiting them to “variable” status in order to perceive them in the movement of their formation, their activation and (to be discussed further below) their objectivation. It is not surprising, from this angle, that this sociology of knowledge should be supplemented by a sociology of the agents and collectives involved in this process.

Sociology of the agents and the social and political groups

The sociology of the agents and groups involved (at any level) in the European institutional space is undoubtedly the second remarkable dimension of this emerging body of scholarship. If the sociology of the elites or the political and administrative personnel is a traditional subject in international political science, the sociology of Community elites (European officials, lobbyists, permanent representatives, etc.) is largely absent in international literature. One could even say that it is a gap to be filled in European studies, as J. Joana and

A. Smith's remarkable book on European Commissioners shows. It would clearly be wrong to assume that identifying a central political personnel has proven sufficient, especially since the processes of its construction as a centre (see further below) have their share of grey areas. But doing completely without this analysis makes it very difficult to truly understand the relations between these arenas and others. The historical and political sociology of Europe is not only more attentive to this dimension, it turns it into a starting point from which three directions are developed.

Since the special issue of the *Politix* journal (1998) and the *European Careers* workshop in 1999, a series of surveys – whose results we have today (*Regards sociologiques* 2004, Michel 2006) – have emerged. These have however been very time-consuming and as of now, the results in terms of analysis of the social strategies of agents are not as conclusive as in other fields⁵. Everything has to start somewhere anyway! In this perspective, the authors have developed systematic studies on agents who occupy or have occupied certain types of positions: Commission Director General (Georgakakis, de Lassalle, 2004, 2007 b and c), director of the COE Secretary General (Mangenot, 2004), members of the European Parliament (Beauvallet 2004 and 2007, Michon 2004, 2006, Marrel and Payre, 2006, Marrel and Godmer, to be published), permanent representatives (Chatzistavrou, 2004), lobbyists (Michel, 2006, 2007), trade unionists (Wagner, 2005 and 2006, Verrier, 2006), journalists (Bastin, 2004, Baisnée 2007), scholars (Popa 2007), political collaborators (Michon 2006), experts and officials (Robert, 2007). They are not so much concerned with finding out who is in charge (although they do bring elements), but rather attempting to make out different types of careers and oppositions between the (social if possible, national or international, educational, professional) dispositions of the agents who follow these careers. In the case of Commission Director Generals, Marine de Lassalle and I show that, despite what the international literature has often stated the probability of obtaining these positions has less to do with national factors than with the possession of resources, awards, and also of a more specifically European recognition (or what Bourdieu calls symbolic capital) (Eymeri and Georgakakis, 2008). There are certainly important national variations which shed light on national investment strategies in Europe, but those are integrated in more specifically European parameters (like the unequal distribution of the capital) which determine the access to certain key positions and create splits between the Director Generals. This way of constructing the problem contrasts with the usual terms of the debate as an alternative between national and European allegiance. It enables us to point out processes of hybridization and to study both the effects of the frequentation of long-lasting transnational arenas on the political and social habitus and the competitions induced by the unequal distribution of these characteristics within those spaces.

Considering the importance of the relational aspect of these studies, they unsurprisingly lead to more transversal prosopographies. Some recent scholarly literature has been focusing on political sectors such as Didier Bigo's studies on security within the Challenge network or Marine Delassalle's research on regional politics. In the first case, the intent to "map the field of security" is embodied by the long-term accumulation and interconnection of data on agents and institutions as a whole and more monographic investigations e.g. the field of European legal cooperation (Megie 2006, Mangenot 2006, Paris 2006). But this research also aims to include arenas such as institutional reform policies. This is also the case of more limited (time-wise) arenas like the sociography of the Convention (Cohen 2007 a) and the sociography of the members of its Secretary General (Buchet de Neuilly 2007 b). These

⁵ Here we refer to Christophe Charle's works on French elites, and more recently the comparative study of the crisis of imperial societies in Europe (Paris, Seuil, 2001)

various cases converge with the treatment of the Commission Director General's space. The goal is to grasp the dominant social and educational properties of the agents and their structural oppositions in order to understand the foundations of the processes involved, such as the revenge of the constitutionalists, ordinarily dominated by private jurists in Europe in the case of the Convention (Cohen 2007 a) or the reproduction of intergovernmental processes in the "confidential" field (Buchet de Neuilly 2007 b).

Last but not least, numerous research papers have been dealing with agents and groups who circulate mostly in national spheres. With a few rare exceptions, the studies are less deliberately focused on prosographical analyses, even though those exist through the sociology of positions in the socialist party's debates on the referendum for the constitutional treaty (Juhem, Fertik, Hû, 2007). There is a body of research that proves very reliable in order to perceive agents or groups whose mobilizations have direct effects on European processes, e.g. the history and sociology of federalist groups (Weisbein 2006, 2007 a and b), alter-globalization groups (Agricolansky 2007), hunting lobbies and on a more general level middle and low-income groups in rural areas (Mischì 2007), socialist parties (Treille, 2007; Juhem, Fertik, Hû 2007) catholic groups, reformers (Lozac'h 2007, Hadjiiski 2007, Dakowska 2007)⁶.

These various studies lead to a different conception of the existing structures/agencies opposition. Striving to analyze positions, paths, properties, resources and forms of credit related to these positions and paths, the authors collectively contribute to the construction of rational structures (as opposed to organizational structures or others) in which the mental structures studied above take shape and meaning.

A few shared specificities

Different aspects of these studies might not be specifically French, but they do have specificities. Here we will attempt to point out a few of them.

A first specificity which complicates or might have complicated the dialogue with other trends is that most research pertaining to the historical and political sociology of the EU has not been undertaken within the sphere of *European studies*. It is uncertain whether these texts actually want to be associated with it and, at any rate, they are not included in a preconceived theory of Europe. This is not typically French, but it is a key aspect which relates, once again, to the socio-morphology of this trend. Most of the scholars have not written their thesis about European construction, except for the youngest scholars. It also relates to a more general position in political sociology on the delimitation between subject and object. From the beginning, most authors have treated European construction less as an object in itself than as a tool for the analysis of problems or broader political science issues. The strong degree of uncertainty, the underdevelopment, and the lack of complete objectivation and institutionalization of the phenomena observed have been seen as a fertile ground for the construction of other objects. This is for instance the case of the co-construction of interests and groups who represent them (Michel 2006, Georgakakis 2007 a, Offerlé 2007), the formation of transnational political capitals (Wagner 2005, Georgakakis, de Lassalle 2007 c), the denationalization of *habitus*, the processes of scandalization in transnational contexts, politicization (in the political sociology sense - Lacroix 1994, Lagroye 2003), and of course of

⁶ Only a few of them are mentioned here. See the contributions in Michel (2006) and Baisnée and Pasquier (2007).

a contribution to the understanding of construction and objectivation processes of political forms.

Part of the scientific production of the European Political Sociology Group (GSPE) in Strasbourg is focused on political specialization and falls within the debate on socio-historical structuring, and the objectivation of political spaces rather than in *European studies* in the strict sense. In this case, to a great extent, the researchers regard the institutionalization of Europe as a function of the political specialization process and the struggles involved in the division of political work – the same also applies to the research on the construction of European problems (Campana, Henri, Rowell, 2007) or now for European public communication (Kauppi 2007, Aldrin and Utard, in progress). Since these projects have not been associated with debates in *European studies*, it makes sense that the investments and publishing strategies have been less focused on the usual *European studies* journals than on others. In short, one of the specificities relates to the way the object is defined (the construction of political forms), and the distance with the subject or the field of study (Europe).

Another series of specificities has less to do with divergences in the construction of objects than with a more general epistemology and its methodological issues. What could be a lengthy debate might be simplified around a few principles that are shared by the authors but not necessarily self-evident on an international level. Using what may be called a critical perspective, these studies are first and foremost based on the principle of a break with the “institutional common sense”. What is at stake with this break is not only the conformity to a form of “axiological neutrality”. Considering the general context of European political construction, which corresponds to context of strong beliefs in which close ties established between *European studies* and the normative debate on the forms (or the future) of the EU, academics are particularly sensitive to the political *Zeitgeist*. There are indeed many articles on the links between political or institutional positions (on these aspects, see also Cohen and Weisbein, 2005). Within this context, research in historical and political sociology aims at distancing itself from politico-institutional interpretations in order to study their stakes, their occurrences or uses. Institutional categories are, at least ideally, not perceived as a given but rather as part of a longer process of construction. In this perspective, it becomes difficult to discuss hypotheses such as “the democratic deficit” or “the nature” of the EU’s regime, or its “governance”, etc. – political topics that are often found in the academic literature – at least under the form of a direct answer.

There is a second type of epistemological break – in particular the break with a number of positivist temptations, which might not hinder the understanding of the rules of the political game, but end up losing their grasp on the reality they observe. (We spare the reader the list of papers that has been written on the counting of votes at the Council or the European Parliament.) Without getting into the complex debate on “break or double break”, suffice to say that both the norms of presentation and the formal exercise presenting dependent and independent variables create such “curious” fragments of reality, to paraphrase Norbert Elias (1991: 136) that they are incompatible with a social science epistemology attentive to historical and human dynamics.

At the risk of adding to the apparent confusion, the authors also agree on the principle of a break with a set of “scholastic” oppositions, in Bourdieu’s words (1997), i.e. produced by and for the school system, the reproduction of the institutionally rooted division in the repartition of scientific tasks or the struggles between movements or institutions within the academic

field, making for a more realist observation of human and social practices. This is the case of the theory/empiricism opposition, which is typically derived from the reproduction of an institutional repartition of research tasks (doctorate students supposedly work in empiricism, experienced researchers in theory- even if only at a meso-level – and long-standing scholars have a choice between grand theory and epistemology). We should point out that it is not because studies overcome the temptation of the formal exposition of a model in order to test it in the very development of empirical restitution that they are necessarily “empiricist”. The authors place themselves in a tradition of analysis that strives to move beyond the main theoretic splits, between individualism/holism, constructivism/structuralism, or micro/macro, etc. The same applies to the choice of methods and theories. The opposition between quantitative and qualitative is less pronounced than in other academic spheres, as well as conflicts between different disciplines, in particular political science, sociology, history, anthropology – but less so for law, except for social sciences in law, philosophy or psychology.

These attempts to move beyond the traditional oppositions do not necessarily make for easier reading, as they ignore automatisms and usual forms of classification which, considering the morphological conditions in particular⁷, are still reference points in the English-language political science production. These approaches have advantages, although we have seen that there is a price to pay both in terms of readability and communicability and in terms of quantitative production. Humility is required for a realistic approach of research here. A theory, even partially alternative, does not come ready-made out of the brain of those who contribute to its elaboration – except if they have only applied existing models and refuse to engage in actual field work. If we put in perspective the – realistically heterogeneous – production of this trend and the concrete conditions of its elaboration, it does not come as a surprise that, focused on the conception process (this within the complex context of the teacher/researcher position) and marked by often ambitious epistemology and research protocols, these studies have not, at least in their early stages, considered international insertion as a priority, with the remarkable exception of Andy Smith, Virginie Guiraudon, Didier Bigo, or more recently Daniel Gaxie and Niilo Kauppi’s initiatives. The first steps some have been making should therefore be encouraged and followed by others, although it probably requires more pedagogy from those who produce these approaches, whereas others should accept that it is possible to construct objects through other means than the alternative between atheoretical description and the reproduction of institutional or scholastic distinctions and categories far removed from the reality of a historical and sociological process.

A sociology of the objectivation of the European political space

What, then, does this body of research add to the broader theory of European integration? The elements we have discussed lead us to think that they outline a partly original space – very simply put, both close to and different from neo-institutionalist and constructivist trends. From a macro-theoretical point of view, we can indeed say that these studies are close to the macrosociological theory developed by A. Stone and N. Fligstein in *The American Sociological Review* when they state, for instance, that “integration is a product of how activities in otherwise differentiated fields of action become linked to one another causally, to form more aggregated fields, that evolve dynamically” (Stone 2007). Like other neo-institutionalists, they are attentive to the bureaucratic (Egeberg 2004 and 2006) and institutional competitions (Christiansen) which divide the European political space. On other

⁷ They are of course an important factor – see the number of participants in the latest APSA workshop (same example as above).

levels, we can argue that these studies are also close to the constructivist trend's methods, in particular as far as the analysis of the by-products (categories, classifications, etc.) of the European political space are concerned – not that this is very surprising, given the existing links between these different trends (Trondal 2001).

But the body of work in historical and political sociology is also different from these two trends. Unlike the neo-institutionalists who tend to clearly separate the three angles, the authors do not choose between considerations on actor strategies, organizations, norms, or even discourses, nor do they share the very formal cleavage between historical and sociological neo-institutionalism; rather, they go for an approach which integrates these several elements. Like the constructivists, the authors tackle the construction of symbolic forms, but they relate it to the objective conditions of the political struggles whose stakes (or collateral effect) are the definition of Europe. The analysis of mental structures and the analysis of the structure of positions are very closely related, since they do not exist independently.

This simultaneous presence of convergences and differences is particularly visible in the analysis of the “central institutional space of the EU”. One of this movement's key contributions is the analysis of the dynamics of this space's objectivation as a relatively central space. The phrase “European political space” is being increasingly commonly used in the international literature. The problem is that we do not even know whether it actually exists⁸ or, if we put the question differently, *how* it exists. The question of the definition of this space is raised early on by Virginie Guiraudon in her introduction to *Cultures et conflits*'s issue on the sociology of Europe, in various contributions by Niilo Kauppi in *Les métiers*, and then by others. Drawing notably from elements of Bourdieu's sociology of fields, these studies are less concerned with the construction of this centre from macro-sociological or political indicators like in Bartolini's case (with whom other points of discussion are possible) than with defining the socio-political relations of the agents who inhabit it. Through both structural and relational hypotheses, they strive to grasp the structuring process of this space and analyze the modalities conferred by its reality, through which it materializes or achieves a degree of depth and sociopolitical substance.

On the basis of my own research (partly in progress), I would like to point out a few contributions of this perspective to the knowledge of this space. First, it enables us to have an overview, and a definition as a field at the intersection of fields, “*un champ à la croisée des champs*” according to the *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* (Cohen, Dezalay, Marchetti, 2007), whose historical evolution mirrors the construction of states, but stumbles, at least for now, on the monopoly over physical violence and centralization. A center is being constructed, but with little monopolization. The institutional space consists in a social space of competition where permanent professionals, moved by relatively limited stakes, and other not necessarily permanent agents, who extend their national or international mobilizations, clash and cooperate. This duality should be taken into account, first because it has effects on the (here partial) closure of this space, but also because it enables us to understand one of the dividing lines in the theoretical debate. Like in the case of the formation of social groups (Boltanski), the point of view chosen should also be analyzed, as the definition of this space is likely to be completely different depending on whether we work on permanent or occasional agents, whose structures of constraint are national or related to the economic field. In the case

⁸ This is a divergence between the institutionalists and other trends, from Moravcsik's intergovernmentalism to the sociology of transnational elites, which deny its singularity and its effects.

of the permanents, one has to distinguish between those who belong to the “central cores” (Georgakakis 2002, Beauvallet 2007) and those whose position revolves around the centre.

Once this (rather broad or provisional, in the Durkheimian sense) definition of this space exists, we can shed light on its structuring process. This is one of the possible benefits of the biographical and prosopographical analysis mentioned earlier. It allows a more precise characterization of the central space and its structures, especially in terms of structures of opposition between types of trajectories and positions, resources possessed, etc. Thus, the prosographical data shows that this space is structured by relatively stable polarities (which does not mean that they always have the same weight). We find oppositions that are similar in other institutional spaces, such as between agents who hold general political positions and others who hold sectoral and/or technical positions (see also Kauppi, 2005 on this), in public careers (public sector) or in business (or even forms of educational capitals between economists and jurists), for instance. This should be emphasized, as it shows that numerous competitions taking place inside the European space do not stem from the extraordinary situation of the European institutions (multilingualism, multicultural) but rather from struggles that are relatively commonplace for scholars of political sociology. This does not mean that national origin has no influence, but it counts as a resource among others, or more accurately integrated in others, and variable according to more or less nationalized temporal sequences (Georgakakis, de Lassalle). Similarly, this perspective invites us to extend the analysis beyond interinstitutional competitions (Commission/Council, Commission/European Parliament, Directorates General among themselves, etc.) and investigate phenomena of homologies and therefore their relative transversality.

Two other types of oppositions should also be mentioned. They are more remarkable than the political/technical and public/private oppositions, and they are the ones which confuse the issues and bring about the high degree of “uncertainty” and “fragmentation” perceived by the actors and a lot of analysts. The issue of the permanence of agents, which we have only mentioned in passing, is connected with a deeper cleavage. The first structural opposition is between permanents (the European public sector being their ideal type) and occasionals, part-timers – among which the interventions of some lobbies, but also “multi-level” actors or multi-position actors. All signs indicate that the resources possessed (knowledge of relevant actors, stakes, forms in which they can be expressed, precedents, perceptions of what is possible or even imaginable) differ. This does not mean that the first mentioned prevail systematically against the others – it is in fact almost the opposite if one is on the higher levels of the politically constituted hierarchy, but the relation is not the same in other positions or according to the sectors and their (variable) salience degree. The second opposition is structured around the difference in resources formed in member states and those deriving from international trajectories or a “cosmopolitan capital”. In that case, there is no determinism either. The “cosmopolitan capital” (Dezalay) is not necessarily superior to the other one, in so far as the central positions tend to belong to those who are in an intermediary position. It is rather the possession of these two kinds of capital which guarantees a strong position, and the opportunity to move and hold multiple positions. None of these oppositions is unique or original compared to other spheres, but so far, their combination appears unique.

From this point of view, this method helps to understand more accurately the singularity of this space and what happens in it. In Lacanian words, I would describe it as a structure with holes (or a whole with holes), i.e. a space with some very firmly structured areas, and some others that directly lead to other structures (the space of international relations, transnational economic relations, etc.). For some actors, this space exists and it is their life, their belief,

“what keeps them running” (Bourdieu), for others it means very little (for governmental elites it is probably somewhere in between) and more of an instrument (among others) in other struggles. Due to lack of time and space, we are not going to go into further developments here⁹, but this perspective allows to integrate often diverging points of view and eventually to posit a broader hypothesis: one of the basic properties of this space and, in the same way, one of the driving forces behind the collective behaviors displayed in it, is found in this “differential of objectivation”. The “great fractures” which shape the European political space might be less between those on the top and those on the bottom, north, south or east, old countries or new ones, small and big ones, etc. than between those who, according to the position they occupy, believe in its reality and in the stakes involved, and those who do not. This specific and overlapping structure of oppositions might allow us to get a better grip on actors’ uncertainties in a game which is always complex, but here perhaps more than elsewhere. We can also understand better the fragile foundations of the “illusion” of a politically constituted Europe and eventually the difficult realization of its existence as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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