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The French 2012 Presidential Election A Europeanised Contest

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The French 2012 Presidential Election A Europeanised Contest

Abstract:

While Europe could be characterized as “invisible but omnipresent” during the 2002 Presidential election, this was not the case in 2012. From Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande to Marine Le Pen and Jean Luc Mélenchon, several declinations of Europe characterised the French electoral campaign. Based on TNS Sofres survey data and on discourse analysis, this article documents the Europeanization of the 2012 French presidential campaign. Even though it is too soon to say if the transformation of the electoral rule is a specific phenomenon arising from the crisis context or from a profound change in party competition, the election of François Hollande has clearly contributed to a change of course.

Keywords : France, presidential election, europeanization, party competition

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In his analysis on the impact of European integration on national party systems, Peter Mair identifies a gap between the actual responsibilities of Europe and member states on the one hand, and the themes that are at the heart of electoral competition at both of these levels on the other. Major decisions on the direction and scope of the integration process continue to be central in European elections even though the European Parliament, despite its recurring demands, has little influence over these issues. Conversely, national elections continue to be dominated by confrontations on “national” political issues even though these issues are largely shaped by choices made at the European level. In other words, each arena tends to focus on issues that ought to be addressed at a different level. This mismatch yields a double deficit: public policy issues are largely ignored during European elections, while the debate over the future of Europe is generally eschewed at the national level, which chooses those who will take decisive action on these issues. As a result, voter choices only have a limited impact on the decisions that are made at these two levels.¹

One of the interesting aspects of the French presidential election of 2012 is precisely that it appears to deviate from Mair’s model in several respects. Some of the campaign’s major themes had obvious European ramifications that led the main candidates to define some key features of the policy they intended to pursue *at the European level* if they were elected, and to outline the alliances they intended to seek within the European Union. Moreover, other member states closely followed the campaign to the point where several heads of state indicated their preference for one of the candidates. Considerations related to European integration also seem to have influenced the choice of various groups of voters. This Europeanization of the debate and vote inevitably transformed the nature of the election, which became an important moment in *European* political life. While it is still too soon to assess the consequences of the election of François Hollande at the European level, it is clear the election has contributed to a change of course. It remains to be seen whether this transformation of rules of the electoral game is a special phenomenon arising from the context of crisis, or rather the harbinger of a profound change in party competition throughout Europe.

¹ “The Limited Impact of Europe on National Party Systems”, in Klaus H. Goetz and Simon Hix (eds.) *Europeanised Politics? European Integration and National Political Systems*, Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2000, 27-51.

What is a European debate?

In order to properly frame our argument, a semantic clarification is needed. What exactly do “European” issues signify? The most immediate response to this question includes a number of relatively abstract subjects: to speak of Europe is to indicate the importance one places on European integration, how one believes the European political system should be organized, the tasks that it should undertake, the relations it should maintain with national societies, etc. Using this relatively simple definition, one might note that Europe generally played a significant, but not primary role for the presidential candidates. Dominique Labbé and Denis Molière have published a series of lexicometric analyses of the presidential campaign² that measure the weight of each subject (by share of words) in the whole body of communiqués and speeches made by the main candidates. Table 1 shows the 5 principal subjects discussed by each candidate. In a crowded field – since many social groups must be addressed – Europe features prominently (for better or worse!).

Table 1. The principal themes of the presidential campaign		
Candidates	Subjects	%
François Bayrou	Economy	6,02
	Education	3,83
	Deficit	4,27
	Germany	4,33
	Europe	3,93
François Hollande	Economy	6,42
	Education	5,37
	Employment- Unemployment	4,44
	Europe	4,27
	Deficit	3,83
Marine Le Pen	Economy	6,47
	Europe	6,04
	Nation	4,27
	Immigration	3,89
	Money	3,84
Nicolas Sarkozy	Economy	7,9
	Business	6,59
	Crisis	6,53
	Unemployment	6,09
	Europe	5,72

Source: Dominique Labbé and Denis Monière, *Radioscopie 10, La dernière ligne droite [The home stretch]*, Annexes,

<https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=aWVwZy5mcnx0cmllbGVjfGd4OjFmYjNhY2MxNjQ1MTM4MmY>

² These analyses were published on the TriElec network's website, <https://sites.google.com/a/iepg.fr/trielec/>.

This table also shows that the relative importance of Europe to each candidate varies. For Marine Le Pen, whose hobbyhorse is to denounce the loss of national sovereignty even more so than the Front National's bread and butter issues – immigration and insecurity, Europe was one of the campaign's main subjects at 6%. However, Europe only ranked fifth in the first-round campaigns of the outgoing president, Nicolas Sarkozy, and of his principal rival, François Hollande. As is characteristic of European election campaigns, it is the opponents of European integration who most directly debated its purposes.

After more than half a century of integration, the very nature of the 'European' debate has evolved. While the European Union is still far from affecting 80% of national legislation, as is often claimed,³ it has become a key player in many areas. National political leaders know that the leeway they have can be reduced or eliminated by decisions made in Brussels. They generally tend to underplay this process, which can lessen the prestige of the office to which they aspire; they thereby largely contribute to a gap of understanding of public policy, be it national or European.⁴ In our case, however, this soft-peddling was made more difficult by the context of crisis surrounding the campaign. As a growing number of last-ditch meetings took place in an attempt to respond to the sovereign debt crisis and its threat to the future of the euro, François Hollande could hardly speak of a stimulus to the disadvantaged without taking into account the constraints on France. These included the new instruments of economic governance that EU legislation and the "fiscal pact" had created in the preceding months. Similarly, Nicolas Sarkozy chose to focus on borders in order to address what he perceived as the French people's need for protection. However, he could not pretend to be unaware of the fact that freedom of movement plays a key role in the construction of Europe as it currently stands. When candidates addressed these public policy issues they were invariably called upon to position themselves in relation to European action, whether it was to explain how they would respond to its orders or what choices they intended to defend in Brussels. The "European discourse" thus transformed. It was no longer just about offering general comments on the best way to organize the continent, but also indicating how one would manage the relationship with Europe in a range of areas.

From this perspective, the 2012 presidential campaign takes on a much more European aspect. Among François Bayrou's campaign speeches, for example, the 4% pertaining to Europe *stricto sensu*, as defined above, could be expanded to include

³Sylvain Brouard, Olivier Costa, Thomas König (eds.), *The Europeanization of Domestic Legislatures. The Empirical Implications of the Delors Myth in Nine Countries*, New York, Springer, 2012.

⁴Vivien Schmidt, *Democracy in Europe: The EU and National Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

references to Germany (4%), Greece (3%), and the public deficit (5%), bringing the share of European themes *lato sensu* to 16%. Similarly, it would not be incorrect to consider that subjects like the crisis (7%), finance (4%), and immigration (2%) for Nicolas Sarkozy, and the economy (7%) and deficit (4%) for François Hollande, contain a significant European dimension. If this kind of categorization is adopted then the subjects directly or indirectly linked to Europe rise to the top of campaign topics. Granted, the campaign covered many other topics, as was seen above, but this data suffices to challenge the notion that the discussion had completely sidestepped European issues.

The Europeanization of the campaign was also expressed in the more interventionist approach of political leaders from other EU member states. At the beginning of the campaign, during a Franco-German Council of Ministers in Paris, the German Chancellor publicly endorsed Nicolas Sarkozy, who had not even declared his candidacy yet. In a joint television interview she went as far as to criticise his socialist rival's desire to renegotiate the "fiscal pact". The idea of holding joint meetings was proposed at one point, but then abandoned after the Villepinte meeting, which marked a radicalisation of the outgoing president's campaign, with the mention of possibly "exiting the Schengen agreement" (see below). British Prime Minister David Cameron made a similar stand and the press reported the principal European conservative leaders were forging an alliance to spurn the socialist candidate.⁵ In the ensuing days François Hollande, who was often scoffed at for his lack of international experience and network, made a point of being seen in the company of the heads of European socialist parties during a meeting on the European aspect of his programme. The electoral significance of these expressions of solidarity is uncertain, but the willingness to symbolically display the European dimension of the choice before French voters shone clearly.

Shades of opposition

While there was much discussion of Europe throughout the campaign, this vague subject was often addressed in a way that underscored the candidates' opposition to what happens in Brussels. Different shades of opposition can be distinguished.⁶

⁵Veit Medick, "Merkel Forges Anti-Hollande Alliance in Europe", *Der Spiegel Online*, 5 March 2012; <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/meddling-in-france-merkel-forges-anti-hollande-alliance-in-europe-a-819297.html>

⁶Peter Mair, "Political Opposition and the European Union", *Government and Opposition*, 2007, 42 (1), 1-17.

The first is radical and complete: the very idea of Europe is rejected, along with its attendant sovereignty losses. During the campaign sovereignist candidate Nicolas Dupont-Aignan exhibited this attitude. The name he chose for his party encapsulates his agenda: Stand up, Republic! Front National candidate Marine Le Pen, establishing herself as a candidate of the French people – one of her favorite pitches⁷ – was especially successful in adopting this type of opposition. Denouncing Europe and globalization became one of the major themes of her campaign; she announced her intention to abandon the euro and leave the European Union if elected.⁸

A second, less direct line of opposition accepts the European project and focuses on the political choices of the European Union. This strand includes the radical Left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who did not speak of an exit but set a series of objectives he knew were unlikely to garner any support from France's European partners. He proposed to abrogate the Lisbon Treaty and place the central bank under supervision, and vowed he would not implement any European decisions that were incompatible with his programme. His position was not surprising for a radical candidate; the novelty in this campaign, however, was to see the representatives of governing parties talk along the same lines. Without going as far as his former party colleague,⁹ the main opposition candidate François Hollande spoke very critically of the management of the euro crisis. But the real surprise came from outgoing president Nicolas Sarkozy, who also adopted a very critical tone. It was an interesting twist for someone who had claimed to play a leading role in European policymaking throughout his five-year term.¹⁰

In March, within a few days of each other, both candidates chose to devote a substantial part of their discourse to their vision of Europe. Nicolas Sarkozy made the first move at a meeting in Villepinte that was meant to mark the launch of his campaign; François Hollande responded several days later at a meeting with several European socialist leaders. The substance of their comments was different, but the symmetry between their respective line of argumentation is remarkable. Both chose to express their ambitions for France and also for Europe. Nicolas Sarkozy went as far as to address European voters:

⁷ Dominique Labbé and Denis Monière, *La dernière ligne droite, La campagne électorale du 8 au 21 avril [The home stretch, The electoral campaign from April to 21]*, Radioscopie N° 10, 30 April 2012, <http://www.trilec2012.fr/>

⁸ Her programme called for “renegotiating the treaties to break off from a dogmatic European framework that is completely failing”; <http://www.marinelepen2012.fr/le-projet/politique-etrangere/europe/>

⁹ Jean-Luc Mélenchon served in the ranks of the socialist party until 2008.

¹⁰ For more on the ambiguities of Nicolas Sarkozy's European policy, see Renaud Dehousse, “Nicolas Sarkozy, l'Européen” [Nicolas Sarkozy, the European], in J. de Maillard and Yves Surel (eds.), *Les politiques publiques sous Sarkozy [Public policy under Sarkozy]*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2012, 153-166.

“I would like to tell this to all the French people. But I also want to tell it to all the Europeans. If we want to preserve our way of life and if we want to preserve our model of civilization (...) Then Europe cannot be a threat, but rather a protector.”¹¹

This theme of Europe-as-a-protector, which he held dear, led him to embrace borders as Europe’s bulwark against undesired immigration and against unfair international competition. However, the theme was cast in a strong opposition to Europe’s current course. The much remarked hew to the Right in the campaign revealed a Eurosceptic bent:

“Europe cannot be the only region of the world that finds it so difficult to enforce its borders, poorly defends its interests, and ignores the anxieties of its citizens. A Europe that fails to defend its borders, interests and citizens, that only thinks of the consumer rather than the producer, and that forgets the worker behind the consumer – this Europe would be doomed because it would create too much tension and suffering...”

For his part, François Hollande chose to focus his criticism on economic issues, clearly establishing a link between the national and European agendas:

“When I defend employment, growth, solidarity and tax equity in France, I am also serving the interests of a Europe seeking growth, employment, justice and solidarity.”

Here too the analysis began with a criticism of the current state of Europe:

“... deemed powerless in the face of market forces, obsessed with deregulation, and unable to resist liberal globalisation.

This is the Europe I no longer want. This is the Europe whose course I would like to change.”

While he recognized the need for budgetary discipline to deal with the sovereign debt crisis, François Hollande condemned the austerity plans envisaged in the “fiscal treaty” signed several weeks prior under pressure from Germany:

“there will be no return to equilibrium if the treaty (...) is but a treaty of disciplines, of sanctions that will quickly become austerity measures for everyone. (...) Nobody believes the objectives of this pact and treaty can be achieved without growth. Even the rating agencies and the markets know this and are worried about the threat of recession...”¹²

In short, each one seems to have focused on themes drawn from the concerns of his electoral base: immigration and security for the Right, and unemployment and purchasing power for the Left.¹³

¹¹ http://www.u-m-p.org/sites/default/files/fichiers_joints/articles/11_03_discours_villepinte.pdf

¹² http://www.jean-jaures.org/content/download/16559/161450/file/Discours_Hollande.pdf

¹³ Viviane Le Hay, Les thèmes importants dans le choix électoral au second tour de la présidentielle 2012 [Important themes in the electoral choices in the second round of the 2012 presidential elections, <https://sites.google.com/a/iepg.fr/trielec/resultats-analyses/enquetes-pre-electorales/vague-t2/lesthemesimportantsdanslechoixelectoralausecondtourdelapresidentielle2012>, 10 mai 2012

In both cases the criticism was coupled with indications as to what each candidate would undertake at the European level if elected. Nicolas Sarkozy called for a reform to strengthen the discipline of the “Schengen agreement”. To the shock of many European leaders, he also threatened a unilateral exit of France if negotiations failed. François Hollande reiterated his desire to renegotiate the fiscal treaty to include new objectives – growth and employment – for which additional funding would be mobilized. In other words, both candidates provided a governing agenda that was not limited to their action at the Elysée. The mandate they were seeking from their electors also aimed to affect the action of Europe,¹⁴ accompanied, for good measure, with some indications as to the method they would use in Brussels. Sarkozy clearly favoured an intergovernmental approach, while Hollande was more open to the Community method. Hollande moreover took a swipe at the “Merkozy” tandem for showing little concern for the views of their partners.¹⁵

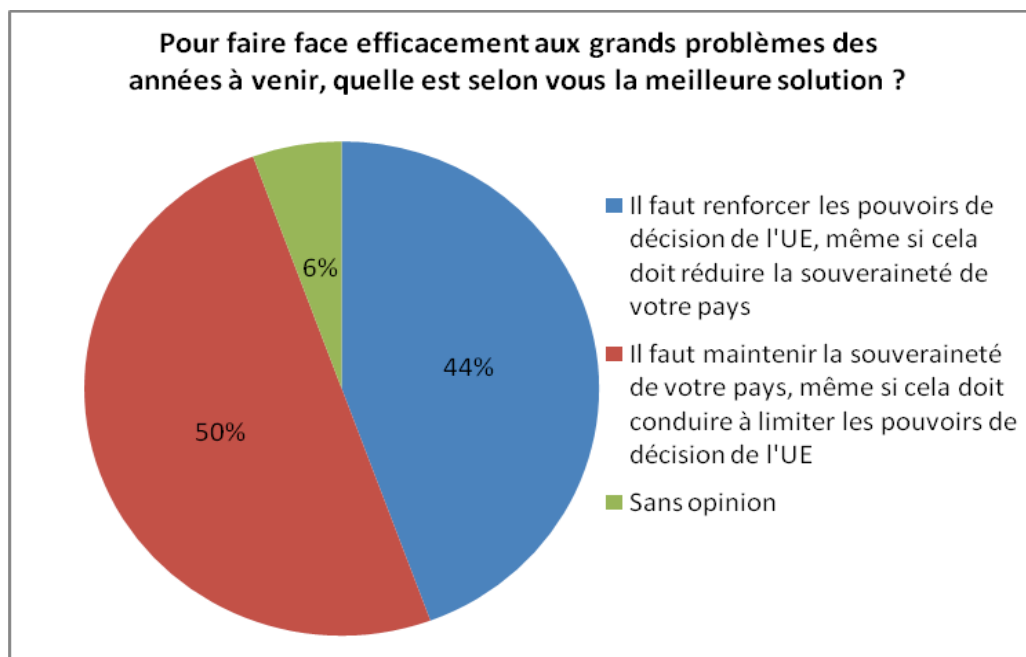
How to explain why all the candidates chose opposition to varying degrees? While the causes of dissatisfaction differed, all seem to have shared a common tenet: there are more votes to be gained from criticizing Europe than from supporting it. A possible explanation for this convergence is the state of public opinion during the campaign. The failure of the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty had made clear that Europe was above all a source of fears.¹⁶ Faced with an unprecedented economic and financial crisis the public was first and foremost concerned about preserving the gains they had achieved. As the European Council that was purportedly crucial to the future of the euro was taking place and a new “fiscal treaty” was being announced, the French were asked what should be done to meet the great challenges of the times. A majority indicated that they preferred to preserve national sovereignty rather than strengthen the European Union’s powers (Chart 1).

¹⁴ François Hollande’s request was explicit: “I have requested a mandate from the French people. If they choose to elect me to the presidency of the republic, I will have the duty and obligation to renegotiate this treaty because the French people will have sovereignly decided the matter.”

¹⁵ “France and Germany cannot think that they alone direct Europe. Europe is the joint responsibility of France and Germany. Europe is not the joint property of France and Germany.”

¹⁶ Renaud Dehousse, *La fin de l’Europe [The end of Europe]*, Paris, Flammarion, 2005 ; Sylvain Brouard, Emiliano Grossman and Nicolas Sauger, *Les Français contre l’Europe : les sens du référendum du 29 mai 2005 [The French against Europe : the meaning of the 29 May 2005 referendum]*.

Chart 1. Public attitudes towards Europe at the beginning of the campaign



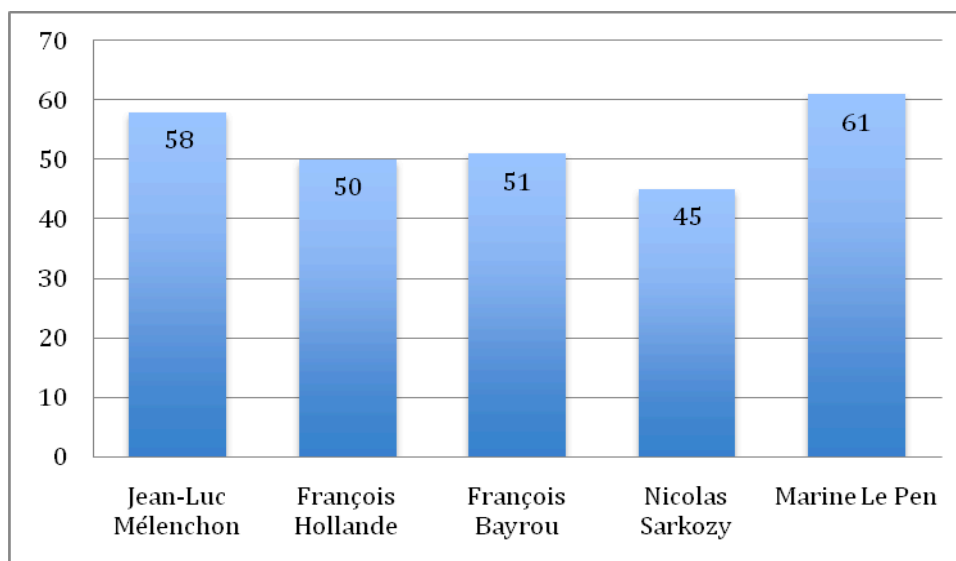
Source: TNS Sofres survey – TriElecwave 3, Political context 5 months before the presidential election, December 2011

[Chart translation: What do you think is the best way to effectively meet the great challenges of the years to come?

- The EU's decision-making powers should be strengthened, even if this limits your country's sovereignty.
- Your country's sovereignty should be maintained, even if this requires limiting the EU's decision-making powers.
- No opinion]

However, the dominant pro-sovereignty trend should not be interpreted as a rejection of Europe: in the same survey a majority of respondents (51%) claimed they would feel regret if the European Union dissolved, while only 21% would feel relieved.

The electoral system was no doubt conducive to a certain radicalisation of the candidates from the “government parties”. In a majority system like that of the presidential election, the candidates must generally cast a wider net than just their camp to win in the second round. One of the particular features of the 2012 elections is that the two sources of potential votes for the two principal candidates –Front National supporters for Nicolas Sarkozy and Left Front supporters for François Hollande – were much colder on new transfers of power to the European Union than the candidates’ own supporters.

Chart 2. Pro-sovereign sentiment in the electorates of the principal candidates

Source: TNS Sofres survey – TriElecwave 3, Political context 5 months before the presidential election, December 2011¹⁷

Chart 2 clearly illustrates this pincer effect: while the two main candidates' supporters were (slightly) more in favor of strengthening European powers than the average French person, pro-sovereign sentiment was close to 58% among supporters of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and reached 61% among those of Marine Le Pen. In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the principal candidates' campaigns adopted a tone of opposition to European policy.

Europe in voting rationales

How did this "Europeanization" of the campaign influence voters' choices? The answer is multi-faceted.

When asked what subjects were most important to them, few French people –less than 1% according our post-election survey – spontaneously mentioned European issues. However, when respondents were invited to choose from four subjects – nuclear, immigration, and reductions in the number of bureaucrats and in the powers of Europe – the latter accounted for the largest share of votes by far (43% versus 27% for immigration), especially among voters supporting François Hollande, where it reached 48%.¹⁸ The subjects that most influenced voters' choices were primarily economic and social ones, as table 2 shows.

¹⁷ The question was: "What do you think is the best way to effectively meet the great challenges in the years to come?" Two answers were proposed: maintain sovereignty, even if this requires limiting the EU's powers, or strengthening the EU's powers.

¹⁸ Source: Post-election EEC survey.

Table 2 – The subjects that influenced electoral choice in the first and second rounds of the 2012 presidential elections

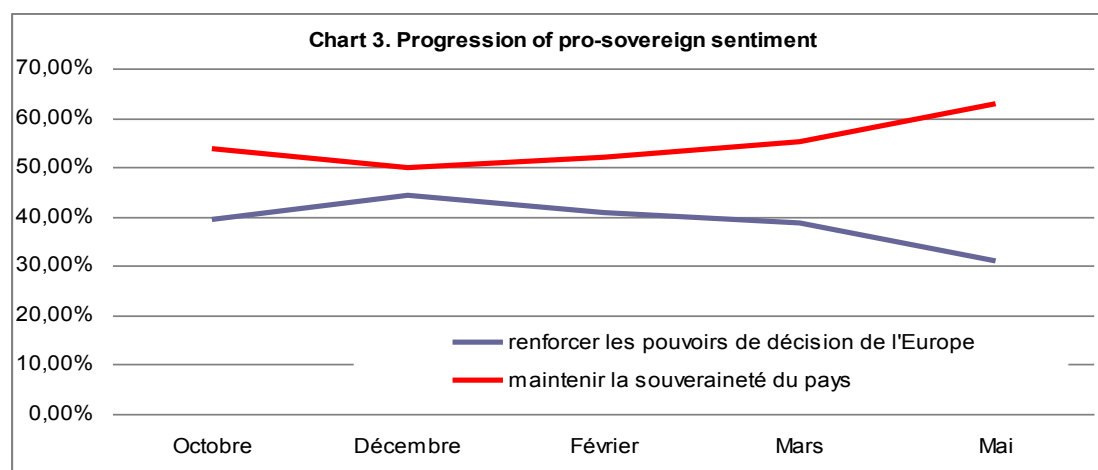
	22 April 2012 (R1)	6 May 2012 (R2)
Combating unemployment	49	49
Debt and deficit reduction	31	35
Improving schools and teaching	30	32
Improving purchasing power	26	30
Financing social welfare (retirement, health...)	25	28
Combating inequalities and injustices	24	23
Combating poverty	19	18
Fiscal policy and taxes	16	15
Combating insecurity	14	16
Combating illegal immigration	13	18
Protecting the environment	11	7
The international situation	9	9
Integrating minorities into French society	4	6

Source: TNS Sofres survey – TriElec Election Day R1 and R2

However, our previous observation is also valid here: Europe often underlies many other subjects. During the campaign the new president had explicitly linked the European Union's action to the two first subjects listed in the table: employment and debt reduction. Nicolas Sarkozy had done the same with immigration and insecurity. Such 'Europeanized' issues appear to have attracted the attention of a large number of voters.

To what extent did this influence the results? The picture that emerged from post-election surveys shows an anxious electorate that feels its identity is threatened (65% believe there are too many immigrants in France) and feels pessimistic about the future. In this context Europe is often associated with dreaded changes: 67% of respondents fear it might lead to cuts in social protection in France; 53% fear a negative impact on national identity and culture.¹⁹ The election campaign's predominantly negative tone did nothing to ease these fears. Chart 3 shows that as the campaign progressed the French became increasingly unlikely to accept transfers of sovereignty. The gap between supporters of a stronger Europe and those committed to sovereignty grew from 14 points in December 2011 to 32 points on election night, although it was not clear to what extent this result was attributable to the candidates' rhetoric versus the worsening Euro crisis.

¹⁹ Ibid.



Sources: TNS Sofres survey – TriElec waves 2 to 5 for the values from October to March; CEVIPOF's post-election survey for May

[Chart translation: October / December / February / March / May - purple: strengthen Europe's decision-making powers - red: maintain the country's sovereignty]

As explained above this development should not be interpreted as simply rejecting Europe, since a clear majority of respondents also claimed they would regret to see it disappear. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that close to a third of votes cast in the first round were for candidates who, to widely varying degrees, were highly critical of European integration (Marine Le Pen, Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, Philippe Poutou and Nathalie Arthaud). Although there was a general rise in pro-sovereign sentiment it did not equally affect the different candidates' electorates. Opposition to Europe appears to have been one of the principal motivations to vote for Le Pen.²⁰ Nicolas Sarkozy's Villepinte speech was also followed by a sharp increase in pro-sovereign sentiment among his supporters, with an increase from 47% in February to 60% in March.²¹ The hardening of his stance was evidently met by a radicalisation of his electorate.

François Hollande's electorate reflected much of the French Left's concerns about European integration. A majority (by a small margin: 52% versus 59% among Nicolas Sarkozy's supporters) still firmly believed that France benefited from its membership in the European Union, but also saw the EU as a source of threats to the French level of social protection (73% versus 59% among Nicolas Sarkozy's supporters). On the other hand, his electorate was less likely to be concerned about a loss of cultural identity (43%) and less critical of immigration than the supporters of the outgoing president: while 82% of the latter completely or mostly agreed that there are too many immigrants in France, the share was a much lower 45% among François Hollande's supporters. Also noteworthy is that the Left's

²⁰Nonna Mayer, "From Jean-Marie to Marine Le Pen. Electoral Change on the Far Right", to appear in *Parliamentary Affairs*, 2012.

²¹Source: TNS Sofres survey – TriElec waves 4 to 5.

supporters were almost as concerned about balancing the budget as supporters of the Right; only the intensity of their respective preferences varied. Referring to the divide caused by the 2005 vote on the Constitutional Treaty, Nicolas Sarkozy clearly stated his intention, in his Villepinte speech, to reconcile France's "no" and "yes" camps. François Hollande endeavoured to do the same with a greater emphasis on social issues.²² Neither candidate truly succeeded, with 56% of the yes-camp choosing to vote for the outgoing President on the evening of May 6, while over two thirds of the no-camp voted for François Hollande.²³

Conclusion

While Europe could be characterized as "invisible but omnipresent" during the 2002 Presidential election, this was not the case in 2012.²⁴ At a time of crisis, when there was no doubting the significance of European choices, it became difficult to disregard them. This unquestionable Europeanization of the election was accompanied by the development of varying shades of opposition. Against the election's gloomy backdrop all the candidates cloaked their discourse in more or less strong opposition to Europe, while trying to speak to their respective voters' main concerns. This discourse resonated. In addition to clearcut hostility to integration there are two other forms of resistance to Europe today: a Left one that is concerned with preserving social achievements and a Right one that emphasizes national identity considerations.

François Hollande's victory opened the door to a series of questions. He has little domestic policy leeway: swept to the Elysée by a majority that is conscious of Europe's impact on public policy but more concerned about preservation than change, Hollande will find it difficult to avoid causing disappointment. His task will be no easier at the European level, where Germany and other northern countries have tightened the rules of governance. During his campaign the new president had clearly framed his political struggle as being part of a European-wide alternative. In March, he declared that "if the movement takes off in France it will become irreversible throughout Europe and spread first to Germany and then Italy,"²⁵ referring to forthcoming elections in 2013. The European Council that followed his election was moreover marked by a reorientation of the European economic strategy, with the adoption of a growth plan to temper the effects of the crisis. Some have interpreted this

²² Post-election CEE survey.

²³ Source: TNS Sofres survey – TriElec Election Day R2.

²⁴ Céline Belotand Bruno Cautrès, "L'Europe, invisible mais omniprésente" [An invisible but omnipresent Europe], in Bruno Cautrès and Nonna Mayer (eds.), *Le Nouveau Désordre électoral: les leçons du 21 avril 2002* [The new electoral disorder: the lessons of 22 April 2002], Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2004, pp. 119-141.

²⁵ Speech in Paris, 17 March 2012.

as a replacement of the “Merkozy” axis with a “Latin alliance”.²⁶ This is probably too hasty an assessment, since decision-making at the European level is above all driven by consensus. Nevertheless, the idea has taken hold that there is a link between political competition, which primarily occurs at the national level, and policy options, which are often more or less directly determined at the European level. It remains to be seen whether the phenomenon that arose during the French presidential elections was primarily caused by the context of crisis in which they took place or whether it signals a structural change that might affect other countries. If the latter case is true, we should consider the effects of this Europeanization on the European Union’s political system. Openly addressing European issues during national elections could enhance the quality of democracy by clarifying campaign issues. However, if an inability to radically reorient political choices made at the European level leads candidates to stick to opposition towards Brussels, then the centrifugal forces thereby unleashed could make it even more challenging to govern Europe.

²⁶Massimo Franco, “Una nuova guerra di religione” [A new religious war], *Corriere della Sera*, 5 September 2012.