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Panel Title: The Europeanisation of women’s paths to equality: An East-West perspective: Institutional transfers and changing patterns of collective action

Party leaders’ and women's NGOs’ discourse on parity: rhetoric and political agenda between Europeanization and French exceptionalism

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1 http://www.ecpr.visionnd.co.uk/panel_info.asp?panelNumber=PN140
OUTLINE

From late 1980's onwards, debates on the various strategies to be adopted to fight against female under-presentation in politics allow us to question interactions between the European impulse and domestic contexts regarding the gender dimension of politics. As a translation into the French debate of an international and European demand, laws regarding parity constitute a founding principle, as well as an ambivalent institutional tool. Although considered as exemplary regarding the equal sharing of power, they paradoxically enabled France ranking only 21st in terms of female representation in the EU. Almost a decade after the advent of an union of female politicians reflecting both sides of the political spectrum, the qualitative inquiry I have conduced with local & national party leaders, and representatives of women's NGOs gives evidence of a pragmatic consensus on the necessity to legislate on the issue of women’s representation. At the same time, very little has been written to put French laws on parity into a European perspective. Therefore, my paper intends to examine the rhetorical strategies used by party officials and NGOs’ leadership in order to integrate this legal constraint as the expression of an ideological syncretism, an exception to the French exemplary nature and an attempt to comply with European incentives.

INTRODUCTION

Focus: Europeanization of Gender equality and French Domestic Partisans Norms

In order to avoid confusion bound to a polemical term such as Europeanization (Sartori, 1970), Claudio M. Radaelli drawing up Ladrech definition (1994: 69) argues that the concept of Europeanization refers to: “Processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse identities, political structures, and public policies” (Radaelli, 2003: 30).

This definition, which has been widely commented upon (Palier, Surel, 2006; Saurruger, Surel, 2006), clarifies the distinction between EU policy and Europeanization, asserting that the latter takes place when the EU becomes a cognitive and a normative frame, and provides orientation to the logics of meaning and action. Indeed it underlines the importance of interactions between EU and national levels in the process of change in policy and politic behaviour. So, it removes the confusion of up-loading and down-loading, presenting europeanization both as ‘pressure’ and ‘usage’ (Radaelli, 2004: 11). As Sabine Saurruger and Yves Surel develop (2006: 180-181), “the processes of changes attributable to the EU are now classified under the generic naming Europeanization and are not supposed any more to be confined to public policies, but they also affect the other aspects of the political systems which are so many classic objects of the political science, such as the political parties and the modes of collective action.”

The purpose of this presentation is to question a French policy, the so-called “parité” laws, in the light of europeanization understood in its cognitive dimension. Whereas papers on parity concentrate on the genesis of these laws (Mossuz-Lavau, 1998; Lépinard, 2007) or on their applications, few have tried to integrate this legal constraint as the expression of an ideological syncretism, an exception to the French exemplary nature and an attempt to comply with European incentives.

evaluation (Mossuz-Lavau, 2002; Sineau, 2004a), this paper embraces an innovative perspective based on the analysis of normative frame expressed by the actors of this policy. Therefore, my paper intends to examine the rhetorical strategies used by party officials and NGO leadership in order to integrate this legal constraint as the expression of an ideological syncretism, an exception to the French exemplary nature and an attempt to comply with European incentives.

Almost a decade after the advent of a group of female politicians reflecting both ends of the political spectrum, the qualitative inquiry I have conducted with 83 local & national party leaders, and representatives of women’s NGOs gives evidence of a pragmatic consensus on the necessity to legislate on the issue of women’s representation. This inquiry was made during the period of preparation of legislative and presidential elections, from October, 2005 till May, 2006. I interviewed 83 persons, 23 leaders of women's NGOs, 33 leaders of the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) and 27 leaders of the socialist party (PS), both on the national or local levels with a zoom on an urban federation, Paris, and on a rural federation, the Hautes-Pyrénées department.

It can seem paradoxical that these two conflicting political forces, the UMP and the PS, are both on the same position as regards the parity defined as an idea in action (Faure, Pollet, Warin, 1995; Palier, Surel, 2006). Our focus is to examine the link between the rhetorical strategies placed by these actors to register this legal constraint in coherence with the partisan ideology and the European frame of equal opportunity. The aim is to analyze if and how parity is part of EU public policies and politics and is incorporated into the logic of domestic political and associative discourse (Caporaso, Jupille, 2001).

PARTISANS PARADIGMS: EXPRESSIONS OF THE EU GENDER EQUALITY POLICY INTO THE NATIONAL PRISM

“France generated great interest amongst scholars specialising in women and politics when the ‘parity’ law was ratified in 2000. This law, which stipulates that fifty percent of candidates to all elections must be female, generated high hopes for the feminisation of France’s political institutions, which had thus far resisted the trend across Europe for rising levels of female politicians (...) However, despite the apparent success of parity in the 2001 local elections, closer scrutiny of the composition of local assemblies cast the first shadows of doubt over whether parties were really observing the spirit of parity (Bird 2003; Troupel 2002). It was the 2002 elections to France’s National Assembly, however, which provided the most visible example of parity’s failure, and it is on these elections that this paper shall concentrate.” (Rainbow, 2004: 347-348)

From late 1980s onwards, debates over the various strategies to be adopted to fight female under-presentation in politics allow us to question interactions between the European impulse and domestic contexts regarding the gender dimension of politics. As a translation into the French debate of an international and European demand, laws regarding parity constitute a founding principle, as well as an ambivalent institutional tool (Lépinard, 2007, Sénac-Slawinski, 2008). Although considered as exemplary regarding the equal sharing of power, they paradoxically enabled France ranking only 18th in terms of female representation in the EU.

Laure Bereni and Eléonore Lépinard (2004) analyzed the strategies of legitimization of the parity by examining a corpus of the rhetorics of pro-and anti-parity to light the constitutional modification of 1999 and the promulgation of the law of June 6, 2000. Our comment is to pursue this reflection by concentrating on policy paradigms expressed by party officials and NGOs five
years after the first implementation of this law in the municipal elections of March, 2001. So, our purpose is to examine the meanings and the attitudes towards parity, a French translation of EU-equality paradigm, in the light of norms expressed by the actors likely to be mobilized by potential institutional transfers or the legislative recentring of the “policies of gender”, namely the political actors and the non-governmental actors (Forest, 2006). Following Ulrike Liebert (2003: 277), I argue that “the meaning of and attitudes towards EU-equality norms will vary, depending on domestic gender regimes, the framing of gender issues, and the gender sensitivity of policy advocacy coalitions.” I shall concentrate on the latter.

According to the typology of Börzel (2002), Risse, Caporaso and Green Cowles (2001), I shall not approach the first stage of Europeanization, namely “the European process” (Bereni, 2004), but the phasis considered as “pressure adaptative” attached to the identification of elements which can block the European process. “In Risse’s initial pattern these elements are regrouped under the term of national prisms (PN), which collect so well institutional elements, that the actors and/or the cultural factors which are likely to determine the reception of European norms and policies.”(Saurruger, Surel, 2006: 189)

Parity was on the European agenda (Bereni, 2004; Sineau, 2004). As early as November 1989, a seminar was held in Strasbourg on “parity-based democracy”, under the aegis of the Council of Europe. The full representation of each sex is presented at the heart of the functioning of pluralist democracy. Following the Council of Europe, the European Commission introduced in April 1992 a network of experts around the notion of ‘women and decision-making.’ The Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, adopted by the Council of European Ministers in 1990, was to play an important role in popularizing the idea of a parity democracy, by starting to mobilize activists and intellectuals in France. Since 1992, parity has been a public issue in France. I shall approach later the role played by activists such as Françoise Gaspard, Monique Dental, Yvette Roudy and Roselyne Bachelot in the emergence of this EU gender policy framework into the French context.

I shall neither linger on the quantitative evaluation of the application of these laws, already widely treated in institutional and academic works (Territoires, 2006; Pouvoirs locaux, 2005; Sineau, 2004a; Mossuz-Lavau, 2002 ; Politix, 2002), but on its cognitive dimension, as it is internalized by the actors.

Reception and appropriation of parity by the French political actors: an attempt of typology

Members States established electoral positive actions, either through the law, or through political parties, to promote a balanced participation of women and men into political and public decision-making (Sénac-Slawinski, 2004, 2008). In a case studies carried out in Transforming Europe, Lisa Conant (2001) shows that the impact of European parity-related norms was wide and premature in Great Britain because there already existed in that country a series of organizations or administrative agencies capable of seizing the opportunity offered by the European decision to promote reforms into internal law.

3 Cf. The six reports of the « Observatoire de la parité entre les femmes et les hommes », Service of Prime Minister, since 2001 and in particular the last one, (Zimmermann, 2005).
On the contrary, with its law of 6 June 2000, known as the law on parity, France was considered (Rainbow, 2004; Sineau, 2004) as the same moment as illustrating good practices to achieve gender-balanced representation in political decision-making and as a case of resistance of political entrepreneurs. I suggest testing this hypothesis by analyzing the position of party officials and NGOs' leadership with regard to the law “parity” 5 years after its first application.

“France is a country that appears paradoxical. It is one of the countries that took the longest to grant women voting rights and eligibility to hold office. France is a country that has been characterized -- and still is -- as will be shown, by a strong resistance of the political system to elect women to the legislature. Despite this past, it turns out that France has also enacted one of the world’s strictest election laws regarding the equality of men and women in political office. As a result, France provides an interesting case from which to study the lessons to be learnt from the first elections when these laws were applied, using these elections as a basis to assess the limitations of this legislation.” (Gaspard, 2003: 1)

The study of the systems of argumentation advanced by leaders for the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), for the Socialist Party (PS) and for the feminine and/or feminist associations to explain, even prove, the way of which they retranscribed the legal imperative of parity of candidatures, gives evidence, six years after the promulgation in the JO, of a pragmatic consensus of the actors on the necessity to legislate. However, if the French paritarian movement is characterized by a narrowing of the right-left cleavage (Scott, 2005; Jenson, Valiente, 2003), the system of justification, a priori (Bereni, Lepinard, 2004) or a posteriori, is ideologically split.

So, if the leaders of the two major parties (UMP-PS) join to stress a form of dialectic between the principle of competition inherent to the electoral competition and the law of the parity of candidatures, do they differ in their way of resolving it? To shed light on that topic, I examined the rhetorical strategies used by party officials and NGO leaders to register this legal constraint in coherence with the partisan ideology by making a qualitative inquiry involving 83 associative and political actors.

**Two partisans paradigms: expressions of the EU gender equality policy into the national prism**

The analysis of these interviews highlights three sources of cleavages: the position toward one claimed social demand of parity, debates over the use of quotas and the reservations concerning this law. From this thematic frame, two partisan paradigms (Faure, Pollet, Warin, 1995) are outlined. In the frame of this inquiry led in a pre-electoral period (2005-2006), two allegiances are opposed: the allegiance to the vision of a fair liberalism embodied by the president - candidate and the passer-by through the measures of positive action for the UMP, and the allegiance to a conception opened by the republican equality for the PS.

These two partisan paradigms can be interpreted as two expressions of the EU gender equality policy into the national prism. Indeed, our inquiry permits to emphasise the incorporation of the paritarian norm into different domestic republican patterns.

On the one hand, the defence of the principle of equity translated into affirmative action policy. The UMP's leaders and the female rightist associations or apolitical interviewed, recognize that ‘parity’ laws establish a ‘a necessary evil’ (« mal nécessaire »). The very actors who dismissed them as contrary to the republican spirit, today deem them consistent with liberal ideology (Jobert, 1994) justifying appeal to temporary corrective measures in the name of equal opportunity. So, after a recoding, parity is defined by some thirty UMP leaders interviewed as one of the first applications of
what established an ideological differentiation of the UMP president, namely the promotion of universalism in diversity through affirmative discrimination “à la française” (Koubi, Gugliemi, 2000) or “republican quotas” (« quota républicain ») to quote a UMP deputy.

On the other hand, the PS leaders and women’s leftist NGOs interviewed do not confine the paritarian principle to its legal translation, but inscribe it in a society project consisting in modifying mentalities through the law in order to implement the principle of substantial equality by replacing differentiation between genders by the dualisation of universalism. It is all about carrying out a transformation of the political and social order, a “cultural revolution”.

They claim a recognition of the paritarian principle beyond its legal translation, by justifying this laws in the name of a society project. So, they illustrate one of the characteristics of the paritarian movement according to Joan W. Scott, that to assert that "only a law which implemented a new principle of equality could throw the process of structural and ideological change necessary for the reconceptualisation of women as individuals." (2005: 126) It is all about claiming a transformation of the political and social order (Sénac-Slawinski, 2007), a “cultural revolution” based on the thought of differences in equality.

Françoise Laurant, president of the French Movement for Family planning (MFPF), sheds light on this declaration by qualifying the avant-garde role played by the PS. Indeed she asserts that this law was not initiated by the socialist activists or their leaders, but by "those whose job was to make a decision which hurt because it answered the expectations of society, the young in particular. " For her, the parity was "a political duty which was necessary for them". Josy Poeyto, a national PS official in charge of women’s rights, confirms this position by speaking about a "world plebiscite", "an ascent to women’s power in politics throughout the world". Moreover, she underlines “awareness of citizens regarding politics”.

ACTRESSSES OF THE EUROPEANIZATION’S PROCESSES

It is interesting, even embarrassing, to notice that among the 83 interviewed persons, the influence of Europe on gender policies was mentioned only by the agents of the paritarian movement. According to Radaelli, they participated in institutional and cognitive transfers in the field of gender equality policies in the three Europeanization processes: (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization. I shall retain four French figures actresses of the European normative and legal frame of "paritarian democracy" who illustrate these three Europeanization hillsides.

Monique Dental, president-founder of “the feminist collective Ruptures” (Collectif féministe Ruptures), explains that parity came naturally by joining on the one hand, the dynamics of international conferences and on the other hand, by building on the example of the German Greens, die Grüne. She plays a key role in the emergence of paritarian exigence into the French context. For her, the EU gender policy framework allowed the demand for equality to come out of the militant sphere to become visible and justifiable into the French context. The "Rainbow" Movement (Arc-en-Ciel) impulsed by Monique Dental was one of the first to take paritarian steps by publishing in 1987 in Ruptures, the movement’s journal : "feminists are convinced by the necessity of conceiving a mode of collective functioning, based on parity in organizational structures". The first network dedicated to parity, "Women for Parity", was created on the initiative of “the feminist collective Ruptures” on returning from the conference of Athens in early 1993. This network is at the origin of the "Manifesto of the 577 for an equal democracy" published in Le Monde of November 19, 1993. Signed by numerous intellectuals (288 men and 289 women), this manifesto asked for the adoption of an organic law stipulating that "the assemblies elected at the local as well as at the national levels should be made up of as many women as men".
Françoise Gaspard, currently a representative of France to the UNO for the CEDAW agreement indeed reminds us the role of go-between she played between the EU level and the national prism, at the academic, associative and political levels. The idea of parity was “launched” in 1992 by the publication of the book by Françoise Gaspard, Claude Servan-Schreiber and Anne Le Gall, *Au pouvoir citoyennes: liberté, égalité, parité* (*Women citizens to power: liberty, equality, parity*), which thus advocates that parity should be written into the law: "Elected bodies, at both local and national levels, shall be composed of equal numbers of women and men". She participated in November 1992, at the first European summit on women in government was held in Athens at the request of the Commission of the European Communities. Attended by women ministers and former ministers, the meeting adopted a Charter which proclaimed that democracy requires parity in the representation and administration of nations. So, at their first meeting, parity was established as the main objective. On 3rd November 1992, “the summit (of Athens) concluded with the adoption of a declaration, in which the following language was included: “Women represent more than half the population. Equality requires parity in the representation and administration of nations.” The text of the “Athens Declaration” has been disseminated throughout the European countries by nongovernmental organizations, especially in France (Hubert, 1998).” (Gaspard, 2003: 1)

And at the associative level, further to a split of the network "Women for the Parity " at the end of 1993, Françoise Gaspard, Claude Servan-Schreiber and Colette Kreder, the ancient manageress of the feminine Polytechnique School, are for initiative of the network " Tomorrow the parity " at the beginning of 1994.

Yvette Roudy, former Minister of the rights of the women (1981-1986 ) and socialist European deputy (1979-1981), melts and chairs the committe of Women's Rights and Gender Equality in the European Parliament. She is also the president-founder of the women’s assembly “L'Assemblée des femmes”. This NGO, launched in 1992, seeks to register the parity in the constitution and the institutions, at the political, social and economic levels. She explains that she was obliged to act at different levels: associative, politics (legislative and executive), European and national. Moreover, she underlines that the importance of associations, such as “L’Assemblée des femmes” is conversely proportional to the democratic weakness of the political parties.

She supported the initiative of the " Manifesto for the Parity " published in *L'Express* on June 6, 1996, which made visible the commitment of pre-eminent national political figures by gathering the signatures of ten former right-of-centre and left-of-centre Ministers, such as Michèle Barzach (Minister of Health and family in the Chirac government 1986-1988), Edith Cresson (a PS deputy the first woman Prime Minister in 1991), Catherine Lalumière (general secretary of the Council of Europe in 1989), Simone Veil (Minister of Health and of the family).

Roselyne Bachelot, European deputy and UMP's general secretary when the interview took place, was the first general reporter of the “Observatoire de la parité entre les femmes et les hommes” in 1995. She interprets the resistance of the political parties as the mirror of the resistances which remain in French society. She justifies the recourse to the law in the name of the mission of justice of the right. She defended it within her party and in front of the government. She asserts that: “it is the law which makes customs? To quote a priest, Lacordaire, when the strong oppresses the weak, it is the law which protects freedom and freedom which oppresses”. She is aware that “parity is an abstract and intellectual transformation which strikes our collective unconscious, and in particular our participation in republican universalism.” Following the example of Christiane Papon, honorary president of the movement of Gaullist women, Women the Future, a group she presided over for 13 years (1975-1988), she tells us about
the conversion of Jacques Chirac to the necessity of legislating. Roselyne Bachelot is delighted to have contributed to fighting against “the phenomenon of blindness” consisting for the politicians, among whom her father, not to consider the women who surround them as politicians. So, even if she regrets it, Roselyne Bachelot recognizes that the conversion of the right’s party to parity-laws seen as temporary measures occurred without upsetting the social and political order based on gender differences. Discriminations continue because they are not decoded.

Let us conclude with Monique Halpern, president of the French Coordination for European Women’s Lobby (CLEF). She recognizes that parity is not any more her group’s top priority. For her, it reflects that paradoxically, parity is not one of the priorities of France, is no longer on the top of his political agenda.

**CONCLUSION**

As a conclusion, our inquiry on Party leaders’ and women’s NGOs’ discourse on parity reveals a weak awareness of the weight of Europe in gender policy and a feeling of French exceptionalism. The rhetorical strategies are to integrate this legal constraint as the expression of an ideological syncretism. They claim proudly that it is an exception to the French exemplary nature. The actresses of the movement are the only ones to present this gender policy as a process which complies with European incentives.

**REFERENCES:**


