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Gilles Ivaldi

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Beyond France's 2005 referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty

Second-order model, anti-Establishment attitudes and the end of the alternative European utopia

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Gilles Ivaldiⁱ
URMIS, University of Nice-Sophia Antipolis

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview and characterisation of the rejection of the European Constitutional Treaty by a majority of voters in France's referendum held on 29 May 2005. Whilst pointing to the salience of political discontent with the incumbent right-wing government and some elements of the longstanding crisis in French national party politics, the analysis places the emphasis on the central role played by social issues in the referendum, the transposition at the European level of the mechanism of the evaluation by voters of traditional parties' performances and responsiveness to the country's social malaise and the unilateral termination by a majority of left-wing voters of the social welfare and economic growth confidence pact that they had made with their national political elites on the occasion of the Maastricht referendum in 1992;

Introduction

On 29 May 2005, French voters decisively rejected the European Constitutional Treaty by a large majority of 54.7 per cent of the votes in the third referendum on Europe since 1972 and the Yes vote on enlargement and the accession of the United Kingdom to the European community. Not only did this outcome come in sharp contrast with the result of the 1992 referendum on the Maastricht Treaty won with a narrow 51.05 per cent of the vote and the pro-EU majority that still exists in the French public ¹, but it did also plunge both the country and the EU in a deep and unprecedented institutional and political crisis while raising the issue of the constitution's demise and paving the way for other member states to vote against the constitution or avoid, as in the British case for instance, a potentially politically damaging referendum in countries marked with Euroscepticism. Indeed, the Dutch referendum which was held on 1st June 2005 led to a resounding and even more emphatic rejection of the European charter with 61.6 per cent of the vote possibly delivering a final blow to the Treaty.

The announcement by President Jacques Chirac in July 2004 of the forthcoming referendum led to the opening of a bitter public debate nationwide and fierce opposition between those favouring the ECT and those rejecting it. The 69.3 per cent turn-out in the May referendum bore testimony to the exceptionally high level of public interest in the campaign and brought increased significance to the final decision by France's voters. The outcome itself came as no surprise as most voting intention polls had forecast a No vote as early as mid-March 2005 despite a short period of optimism in the beginning of May rekindling hope of a last-minute swing in public opinion. All companies taken together, surveys published in the last fortnight

¹ While rejecting the European charter at the polls, nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) of the voters said they were in favour of the process European integration (IPSOS). Eurobarometer data regularly point to the high level of support to the European Union in the general population in France and the public perception of the benefits of France's EU membership.

before voting day were still giving a picture broadly in line with the final result with figures between 51 and 55 per cent against the Treaty in a remarkably consistent series of polls. Despite the many efforts and calls by EU-officials, national and European leaders of the Yes, the contribution by the ‘undecideds’ did not significantly alter the balance of forces between the two camps. Nor did the personal interventions by President Chirac on three occasions during the campaign suffice to curb the rising tide of opposition to the European Constitution².

Political dissatisfaction with the incumbent right-wing Government and President Chirac was regarded by many commentators as a key explanation to the vote on the ECT, particularly in the light of the high level of mobilisation on the left side of the political spectrum and the clear indication that a majority of the traditional left-wing electorate had voted against the Treaty. The public debate on the need for a ‘fresh impetus’ in national politics, which immediately followed the speech by President Chirac on the night of the vote, and the consequent appointment of Dominique de Villepin as Prime Minister, resulted in the outcome being considered as no more than yet another expression of public discontent with the ever more unpopular policies implemented by Jean-Pierre Raffarin’s Government, and somehow reduced the impact of the French vote on the overall process of ratification throughout the EU to being mere collateral damage. Following this assumption, the referendum would fit into the same logics of a ‘second-order’ election as did, for instance, the five sets of European elections that have taken place in France since 1984 which were all fought over national ‘first-order’ issues.

Although hardly questionable, the strong domestic element in the May 2005 political vote in France must be first complemented with the analysis of the development of anti-Establishment attitudes in the public and the rise of anti-system parties on the margins of the political system since the late 80’s. The April 2002 political earthquake whereby extreme right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen reached the second round of the presidential ballot and mainstream parties of both the Left and the Right obtained strict minimum electoral support, was a clear indication of the widening gap between ruling political leaders and the citizens.

Yet, the sole ‘protest’ or ‘dissent’ vote hypothesis would undoubtedly fail to satisfactorily account for the profound nature and exceptional magnitude of this new tremor in French politics, as would also the analysis of the outcome in terms of a simple xenophobic cautious retreat in national sovereignty and isolationism. In many respects, the rejection of the ECT in 2005 was first and foremost a retrospective vote on the process of European integration itself, and the unilateral termination by a majority of voters of the social welfare and economic growth confidence pact that they had made with their national political elites on the occasion of the Maastricht Treaty referendum in 1992. Whilst the latter clearly opposed anti-system Euro-sceptics to mainstream Euro-enthusiasts (and pragmatic converts) of the Left and the Right, the novelty of the 2005 contest was the critical view of the EU model of social and economic governance in a wide segment of those, and more particularly left-wing voters of the middle class, who had subscribed to the alternative utopian European project defended by President François Mitterrand thirteen years earlier.

² Unlike President François Mitterrand in 1992, President Chirac never took the risk of debating with a leader of the No. His first appearance on television on 14 April 2005 took the form of a debate with a panel of about 80 young voters aged under 30, which was highly criticised on both content and form, as was the interview given by the President to professional journalists on 2 May. The last and solemn speech on 26 May 2005 was the final attempt at convincing last-minute voters of the need for supporting the European Charter at the polls.

I. 'Second-order' model and tactical party manoeuvring

The particular salience of domestic issues and a number of key elements of national concern help assess the relevance of the conceptual framework of the second-order model offered by Reif and Schmitt in the early 80's (Reif & Schmitt, 1980) for European election results to the analysis of the outcome of the 2005 referendum in France. The timing of the latter within the national election cycle was that of a mid-term election three years after the last general election and two years ahead of the next presidential ballot in 2007. The impact of the national political agenda and the many concerns about the socioeconomic situation on the people's choice was manifest from the referendum campaign and final results.

Without any doubt, the election was greatly influenced by the exceptionally high levels of unpopularity of both the Prime Minister and President following a steady downward trend that started in early 2003. A week before polling day, government popularity reached its lowest point ever since 2002 with only 39 and 21 per cent of positive ratings for Jacques Chirac and Jean-Pierre Raffarin respectively (BVA-*L'Express* survey, 20 May 2005) as opposed to 60 per cent for both of them in January 2003. Discontent with the incumbent government had been already strongly expressed in the 2004 regional and European elections where right-wing UMP suffered great electoral losses. In March 2004, the lists put forward by the socialist party and its allies received 50.3 per cent of the vote in the second round of the regional election and gained presidency over 21 out of the 22 regional councils in metropolitan France (compared with 8 in 1998). Center-left parties won a total of 1,126 seats of regional councilors as opposed to only 522 in the moderate right (36.8 per cent of the vote). The April 2004 cabinet reshuffle and the strong emphasis put by the renewed government on social justice issues proved to be highly ineffective and was hardly regarded by voters as an appropriate response to their concerns by President Chirac. The UMP faced another electoral debacle in the June European elections by winning a mere 16.6 per cent of the valid vote cast against 28.9 per cent for the lists put forward by the socialist party which on that occasion achieved its best score ever in European ballots. The whole period of the referendum campaign was also characterised by the high level of pessimism in French public opinion and the many concerns expressed by voters with regard to an anticipated deterioration of the national economy.

The traditional plebiscitary nature of referenda in France since De Gaulle's stepping down from Presidency in the wake of his defeat in the 1969 ballot, as well as the personal involvement by President Chirac in negotiating the ECT and proposing its ratification to popular vote, were clear incentives for voters to seize the opportunity to send yet another message of discontent to the current head of State. This potential instrumental counter-plebiscitary effect was reinforced by the profound trauma caused in a vast majority of left-wing voters by the very specific set-up in the second round of the 2002 presidential ballot that opposed President Chirac to populist far right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen: on that occasion, the socialist and communist electorates were invited by party leaders to "save the French Republic" and resign themselves to voting 'against nature' in favour of the moderate right-wing candidate who consequently polled a spectacular 82.2 per cent of the vote. To a certain extent, the post-21 April 2002 syndrome might have contributed to a number of left-wing voters rejecting the European Treaty on the ground that the referendum was closely identified with the personality of Jacques Chirac himself –if not his brainchild– and that a positive outcome would inevitably lead to the President's personal situation being reinforced within the national political game and his reputation restored at international level.

The strategic dimension and interference by individual agendas and personal rivalries were clearly not absent from the campaign as was demonstrated by all the tactical manoeuvring that took place on both sides of the political spectrum, in most cases with the 2007 presidential contest in mind. The fierce antagonism and personality-based competition between President Jacques Chirac and popular UMP leader Nicolas Sarkozy over the right camp at least partially clouded the European issue and limited the amount of public support brought by the latter to the former. The ‘challenger’ undoubtedly benefited from the political weakening of the incumbent President after the Treaty was rejected by the whole electorate whilst accepted simultaneously by a vast majority of UMP voters under his leadership. Sarkozy who was keen on supporting the European project would also ostensibly promote a radical shift in government policies in order to meet the growing expectations of the public. Similarly, it was obvious to all that the anticipated victory of the No camp would definitely sound the death knell for the Prime Minister whose mandate had been prolonged by President Chirac in spite of severe electoral setbacks and an abyssal decline in popularity.

Similar features were noticeable on the left side of French politics, particularly within the PS which went into a phase of increased intra-party factionalism and discord during the campaign. Socialist MP and former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius managed to establish himself as a key leader of the left-wing No campaign in overt opposition to the official stance taken by the PS following the December 2004 vote by party members which gave a substantial majority of 58.8 per cent in favour of supporting the European constitutional Treaty. In opposing party leader François Hollande as well as all national spokesmen, historical figures (Jacques Delors, Robert Badinter, Michel Rocard, Pierre Mauroy) and fellow members of pro-Yes Rasmussen’s Party of European Socialists (PES), Fabius’ aim was to outline the need for re-thinking the party’s social-liberal approach to the economy and social issues at both national and European levels. It was also clear that such a strategy was in part meant to assert his personal influence within the party national leadership as potential runner for 2007 in spite of bitter internal party strife, the many *ad hominem* attacks against him and fierce hostility by socialist leaders of the Yes, more particularly the front row anti-Fabius troika made up of Martine Aubry, Jack Lang and Dominique Strauss-Kahn. Despite his formal retirement from national politics, former socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin –a long-standing rival of Fabius– took part in the PS official campaign on a couple of occasions by making influential speeches in the national media in favour of supporting the European constitution, which most certainly spread rumours about a possible return to politics as post-election surveys revealed that a majority of PS voters would support his candidacy to the 2007 presidential election.

Alongside this, the referendum momentum re-activated some of the internal fights between rival groups among top-level party elites that had taken place over the definition of PS ideology and the need for tactical alliances with its left wing at the Dijon party congress in May 2003. The No campaign by a number of prominent national socialist leaders built upon the existing factions united under the banner of the ‘Local Committees for a socialist No to the European Constitution’, which fought to promote a more leftist project as a response to the electoral earthquake of 21 April 2002 and the desertion from the socialist electorate of a growing proportion of working class voters disillusioned with the five-year experience of Jospin’s ‘plural left’ in office between 1997 and 2002. Key proactive figures of the ‘socialist no’ to the European constitution, Senator and leader of the “Social Republic” think-tank Jean-Luc Mélenchon or MP Henri Emmanuelli had significantly failed to dislodge the tactical alliance built around Hollande’s personality and leadership back in 2003. In Dijon, the radical

wing of the PS embodied notably by Emmanuelli and Mélenchon's 'New World' and Vincent Peillon, Arnaud Montebourg, Benoît Hamon and Julien Dray's 'New Socialist Party (NPS)' groups won a respective 16.3 and 16.9 per cent of the national congress vote whilst François Hollande had his motion passed with a comfortable majority of 61.4 per cent. In 2005, the joint campaign organised by the socialist defectors together with leaders of the LCR Trotskyites, the Communist Party, dissident members of the Green party and the many representatives of various radical anti-globalisation organisations, was clearly an attempt by the representatives of the archaic wing of the socialist party at altering the existing balance of power within the PS national apparatus and a call for the unification of the whole of the French left without debarment.

II. The political crisis in France

It is difficult to assess the extent to which all the above elements –most of which would be appropriate to the first-order arena of French politics– did effectively affect electoral behaviour and the people's choice in the May 2005 referendum. Arguably, the concept of 'expressive' or 'insincere' voting as defined by the traditional 'second-order' model as voters choosing to vote with their hearts rather than their heads would fail to account entirely for the electoral processes that took place on that occasion. In particular, the very high level of popular participation in the referendum would invalidate the general hypothesis that turnout is expected to be lower in second-order elections (Mattila, 2003): the participation rate of 69.3 per cent in the referendum on the European constitution was very similar to that of the 1992 referendum on the Maastricht Treaty (69.7 per cent) and just below that of the first round of the 2002 presidential election (71.6 per cent), the first-order election of reference in the French political system. In contrast, turn-out in the June 2004 election in France was only 42.8 per cent (in sharp decline since the first European ballot in 1979 where turn-out reached 60.7 per cent) (Lodge, 2005)³.

The above data on political participation wouldn't support the classic 'salience' argument that somehow there was less at stake in the referendum as compared, for instance, to the 2002 general election. Nor would the actual results support the assumption that the incumbent party should suffer important electoral losses due to voters' retrospective judgements of the government's record (Kousser, 2004): according to pollsters, UMP and UDF supporters voted massively in favour of the European constitution with 80 and 76 per cent of Yes votes respectively (IPSOS Exit-poll survey, 29 May 2005). When prompted to state their motives for voting against the Treaty in an open-ended question, only 18 per cent of the naysayers did quote their "opposition to the incumbent government and President Chirac", such motive ranking fourth in the list of most frequently cited reasons for rejection by all supporters of the No, as well as amongst left-wing voters (Flash Eurobarometer 171, 30/31 May 2005).

From a systemic perspective, a relevant explanation of the French vote in the 2005 referendum lies with the profound crisis of legitimacy faced by all governing parties of the left and the right, the development of deeply rooted anti-Establishment attitudes in the electorate as well as the rise and subsequent institutionalisation of new opposition actors on the extreme fringes of the political spectrum. The vote on the European constitution can be considered an aftershock of the April 2002 political earthquake and the centrifugal electoral dynamics of French politics. The constituent elements of such a disaffection towards politics,

³ Interestingly, the outcome of the Dutch referendum on the European charter showed a similar pattern with an overall turnout rate of 62.8 per cent far above that of the last European elections in June 2004 (39 per cent).

the decline in traditional partisanship and increase in party fragmentation, and the weakening of representative democracy in France have been well documented by research (Cole, 2003; Elgie, 2000; Grunberg, Mayer & Sniderman, 2002; Hanley, 1999; Perrineau, 2003). Diminishing legitimacy of party politics and mistrust of the electorate for their political elites were patent in the 2002 presidential ballot which confirmed the sharp decline in support for all mainstream parties and the widening gap between ruling political leaders and the citizens: while the parties of the traditional “bipolar quadrille” secured about 90 per cent of the vote in the late 70s, their share was down to only 46.3 per cent of the total vote on 21 April 2002 (Jaffré, 2004). Over the past decade, this fundamental inadequacy of political supply has also been revealed in the form of growing rates of abstention in first-order elections (Bréchon, 2003), increased levels of electoral volatility, the ‘proportionalisation’ of electoral choice under the majoritarian ballot system (Parodi, 1997) and the development of parties outside the mainstream (Cautrès & Mayer, 2004; Lewis-Beck, 2000 & 2004; Perrineau & Ysmal, 2003).

In 2005, the space for electoral competition was deeply structured by the anti-system dimension which overlapped almost entirely on that particular occasion with the cleavage that developed over the acceptance or rejection of the European constitutional Treaty. Within the Yes camp, the referendum campaign clearly showed that, despite bitter party disputes over Europe in the 1992 referendum on the Maastricht Treaty, the parties of moderate left and right had completed their long process of conversion to the European integration project and ideological shift towards a predominantly Europhile position.

This was particularly true in the UMP which showed a very high level of party discipline and loyalty to President Chirac’s posture on the ratification issue that contrasted with the Eurosceptic stance of the RPR in the early years (Haegel, 2002). In the Gaullist movement, the most significant split over Europe took place in 1992 with the ‘internal’ dissidence from national leaders Charles Pasqua and Philippe Seguin in the *Rassemblement pour le non au référendum* following their aborted coup at the national congress of the party in Le Bourget in January 1990. In October 1998, the party’s Convention on Europe completed the ideological ‘normalisation’ of the Gaullist movement in support of the personal involvement of President Chirac. The vote in March 1999 by an overwhelming majority of 81.9 per cent of the RPR parliamentary party (113 out of 138 members) in favour of ratifying the Amsterdam Treaty led to the departure of Charles Pasqua who subsequently combined forces with Philippe De Villiers’ *Mouvement pour les Valeurs* in the June European elections where their joint list for “*Rassemblement pour la France et l’Indépendance de l’Europe* (RPFIE) came ahead of that put forward by the RPR by polling 13 per cent of the vote and winning 13 seats in the European Parliament. In June 2001, no less than 87 per cent (121) of the 139 Gaullist MPs approved the ratification of the Nice Treaty, a very similar proportion to that of 90.9 per cent achieved among the 362 members of the UMP group in February 2005 for the revision of the French constitution preliminary to the ratification of the new European charter. This was followed by the passing by the national council of the UMP in March of Nicolas Sarkozy’s motion with 90.8 per cent of the vote in support of the European constitutional Treaty while simultaneously refusing the accession of Turkey to the EU-membership against Chirac’s personal view. This strong commitment by the vast majority of the UMP parliamentary group members and the involvement of most Ministers placed the President’s party in a leading position in the public debate over the ratification. Within the party, the opposition to the Treaty was supported by a minority faction of Eurosceptics under the banner of the “New Gaullists” led by Deputy and President of think-tank “Stand up Republic!” Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, Senator Philippe Marini or Deputy Jacques Myard, President of the “Nation and

Republic” (CNR) political club with the support of Georges Pompidou’s former Prime Minister Pierre Messmer, leader of the “Presence and Gaullist action” association.

Rid of the anti-Maastricht contestation by Philippe De Villiers in 1992, the traditionally pro-EU and federalist UDF came as much needed reinforcement of the UMP in the Yes campaign⁴ despite recurrent criticism by François Bayrou of Government national policies since 2002. Whilst highly critical of the Nice Treaty in 2001, the UDF parliamentary group voted massively in favour of the constitutional revision (28 out of 31 members, that is 90.3 per cent) and, through force of circumstance, found itself a major ally of rival UMP joining forces with the *Chiraquiens* on a couple of occasions in national meetings. Paradoxically, neither the UDF historical profound attachment to European ideals nor the crucial contribution by former President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing in drafting the European Treaty helped the party assert itself as a leader in the campaign for the constitution. Despite the gathering of a special “Convention on Europe” on 21 May 2005 and an impressive record of public meetings in the two months that preceded polling day, the impact of François Bayrou as promoter of the Yes was largely undermined by public opinion with polls placing the UDF president behind UMP leader Nicolas Sarkozy or President Jacques Chirac as perceived ‘best spokesman’ for the Constitutional Treaty.

On the left side of the political spectrum, the official position adopted by the Socialist Party in the 2005 campaign remained broadly in line with the pro-EU stance by the PS inherited from the Mitterrand’s era. In 1992, the campaign for the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty led to the dissidence of Jacobin Eurosceptic Jean-Pierre Chevènement who subsequently formed the *Mouvement des Citoyens* and left the party in 1993. Despite the ambivalence of some Socialist leaders –among which Lionel Jospin himself– towards the monetary union, the PS maintained a fairly clear position on Europe in the wake of the narrow victory of the Yes in 1992 (Bell, 1998). Under the auspices of the Jospin Government, the PS parliamentary party voted massively in favour of both the Amsterdam (213 out of 250, 85.2 per cent) and Nice Treaty (232 out of 254 votes, 91.3 per cent) in 1999 and 2001. In contrast, the vote over the constitutional revision prior to the ratification of the European charter in February 2005 showed a manifest decline in the PS support for the project with 90 out 149 votes (60.4 per cent) in favour of the revision and a total of 56 abstentions among which were found future leaders of the No vote such as Henri Emmanuelli or Laurent Fabius.

The No constituency brought together a fairly heterogeneous collection of minor fringe and/or radical anti-system parties placed disparately on the traditional left-right axis, providing further illustration of the heterogeneity of the ideological space for Euroscepticism in the French electorate (Evans, 2000). Indisputably, conservative MPF leader Philippe De Villiers played a prominent part in leading the ‘national sovereignty’ camp into combat, getting a new lease of life after the electoral setbacks that his party had suffered in the 2002 legislative elections and, to a certain extent, in the 2004 European ballot. De Villiers proved particularly successful in cunningly –and improperly– articulating the European constitution issue with those of immigration and the accession of Turkey to the Union. Simultaneously, the anti-Establishment component of the message sent to voters was evident in the public speeches by the MPF leader. In comparison, controversial RPF leader, and President of the UEN (Union for Europe of the Nations) group in the Strasbourg Parliament, Charles Pasqua, weakened by previous allegations of political corruption and recent accusation of receiving favours from Saddam Hussein’s regime under the UN’s oil-for-food programme for Iraq, made a distant

⁴ In the 2005 campaign, the only contestation from within the UDF was that of conservative deputy Christine Boutin’s *Forum des Républicains Sociaux* and UDF representative Jean-Christophe Lagarde.

contribution to the campaign for the No vote by stressing the Gaullist heritage in the right-wing position against the Treaty. Similarly, the FN opted for a discreet campaign although some of the key issues discussed in the public debate over Europe were clearly proprietary issues of the extreme-right on which Le Pen's party could potentially capitalise electorally. Partly a consequence of continuing party factionalism and the internal dispute over the issue of Le Pen's succession, this strategic choice by the FN leadership was also prompted by their analysis that, given the strong rejection of the party by a majority of the French public, to associate the party too closely with the No vote would be very likely to lessen the electoral appeal of the vote against the European constitutional Treaty. It was assumed on the other hand that the FN would in any case benefit *a posteriori* more or less directly from the victory of the No camp. The campaign themes proved to be very consistent with those developed in the 1992 Maastricht referendum and the long-standing Europhobic nationalist component of the FN's ideological corpus (Evans & Ivaldi, 2005). Not surprisingly, these themes were echoed by rival yet politically marginalised Bruno Mégret's MNR which remained however largely absent from the media during the whole campaign period. As did also Jean Saint-Josse's single-issue party *Chasse, Pêche, Nature, Traditions* (CPNT) whose timid call for rejecting the Treaty was hardly audible, mainly as a consequence of the party's decline following its mediocre performance in the 2004 European election with 1.7 per cent of the votes (as opposed to 6.8 per cent in 1999).

Although an important architect of the leftist No vote in 1992, Jean-Pierre Chevènement's *Mouvement Républicain et Citoyen* (MRC) has since failed to enter the arena of national politics and establish itself as a serious contender to the other players of both the left and the right. In 2005, the party had serious difficulties in making itself heard within the left camp and was almost inexistent in the public debate where the task of promoting the vote against the Treaty was taken over by the more or less formal alliance between the LCR, the PCF and rebel Socialist leaders. In particular, popular young spokesman and former presidential candidate for the LCR Olivier Besancenot played a prominent part in the No campaign of the left with the backing of a number of radical organisations and representatives of trade unions under the banner of the Copernicus Foundation and the *Appel des 200*. Other parties of the extreme left such as the Worker's Party (*Parti des travailleurs*) or Arlette Laguiller's *Lutte ouvrière* (LO) largely stayed in the background in spite of their fierce opposition to the European Treaty. Enthroned the new 'Madonna' of the No vote by the press and the media, communist leader Marie-George Buffet was given the opportunity to play a central role in the campaign along the lines of the 'Euroconstructive' yet critical stance initiated back in 1994 by the *Bouge l'Europe* list put forward in the European election. Faced with endemic electoral decline and in constant search for ideological identity between protest and incumbency (Courtois & Lazar, 1995; Lavabre & Platone, 2003), the PC found itself a linchpin of the broad tactical alliance of the left. Once a member of the governing coalition with the socialists (Szarka, 1999), the PC clearly distinguished itself from its former dominant partner and seemed to move further away from the pro-system posture to regain some political strength through supporting the No vote in the 2005 referendum.

Overall, the opposition between governing parties and minor peripheral forces was central to the vote. A glance at the structure of electoral choice according to party preference reveals the significance and polarisation of attitudes along that particular line of cleavage: of the extreme left and PC supporters, 94 and 98 per cent voted against the European constitution respectively; similarly 75 per cent of the MPF voters and 93 per cent of the FN supporters rejected the Treaty, as did 79 per cent of those who had cast their vote in favour of CPNT leader Jean Saint-Josse in the first round of the 2002 presidential election (IPSOS). This

underlying anti-Establishment dimension of the public expression in the referendum is of crucial importance as it reflects the lack of public legitimacy of the European project itself in France, which from the start has been regarded essentially as an ‘elite-driven’ project with little popular knowledge of European issues and overall a trend for the European integration process to be mediated in most cases by political parties. The rich literature on democracy, legitimacy and European integration has long pointed to the need for better informing European citizens in order to persuade them of the value of supranational governance and to increase the overall political legitimacy of European integration (Blondel et al., 1998; Banchoff & Smith, 1999; Schmitt & Thomassen, 1999; Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996). To some extent, the 2005 referendum campaign opened a space for public expression and information about the Constitutional Treaty, of which French citizens had been noticeably deprived since the 1992 debate on the Maastricht Treaty despite major forward moves such as the change over to the Euro or the accession to the EU by a significant number of Eastern European countries.

In sociological terms, there was strong empirical evidence of the impact of the occupational element on the propensity for voters to reject the European Treaty at the polls with a clear-cut class cleavage opposing the haves and the have-nots in contemporary French society. This pattern of class voting on European issues had already been emphasised in the 1992 referendum on Maastricht, yet the gap between upper and lower status citizens seemed to further widen in the 2005 ballot. On the latter occasion, nearly two thirds (65 per cent) of the professionals, executives, businessmen and managers supported the European charter whereas 67 and 79 per cent of the less skilled routine non-manual and working class voters respectively cast a decisive No vote in the referendum. In comparison, 53 per cent of the former and 61 per cent of the latter had voted against the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. The appeal of the No vote was particularly striking in the economically disadvantaged and those at the lower end of the economic ladder as demonstrated by the 71 per cent score achieved in the unemployed in 2005 compared with 59 per cent in the 1992 referendum (IPSOS). The opposition between those in the lower social strata and better-off voters was further revealed in the geographical spread of the No and Yes votes. The rejection of the Treaty reached peaks of over 60 per cent in the depressed post-industrial areas of northern France: 69.5 per cent in Pas-de-Calais, 66.8 per cent in Somme, 66.7 per cent in Aisne or 61.9 per cent in Nord. In the blue-collar city of Calais, the No received up to 74.4 per cent of the votes. In contrast, urban upper class voters in Paris provided a strong support to the European Charter with a total 66.5 per cent of Yes votes. Interestingly, in spite of the overall majority support to the Treaty in the capital city, there were significant differences across districts, with approximately 80 per cent in favour of the Yes in the predominantly bourgeois and upper class areas (6, 7, 8 and 16th) as opposed to less than 60 per cent in the working class –and relatively more socially deprived– *arrondissements* of East-Paris (18, 19 and 20th).

III. Voting on Europe: the end of an alternative utopia?

A clear message to the unpopular incumbent right-wing government as well as the expression of mistrust of discredited political and intellectual elites by those once referred to as “*la France d’en-bas*” by Former Primer Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, yet the vote in the May referendum in France cannot be restricted to just being another expression of popular discontent, be it of an even greater magnitude and international impact than the electoral landslide of April 2002. The people’s choice to reject the European charter was also based on the European dimension *per se* and, within that particular dimension, a twofold phenomenon.

First, one shouldn't undermine the contribution to the overall total of the No vote by the Eurosceptic xenophobic withdrawal embodied by right-wing conservative MPF or the extreme-right. Undoubtedly, the national sovereignty camp regained momentum during the whole time of the campaign and eventually took a significant part in delivering the fatal sword thrust to the European constitutional Treaty. From available exit-poll surveys results, one can estimate that the right-wing Eurosceptic vote accounted for approximately 45 per cent of all the nearly 15-and-a-half million No votes in the referendum (CSA Exit-poll survey, 29 May 2005), the FN supporters representing about a third of all those who chose to reject the European charter (Louis-Harris Exit-poll survey, *Libération*, 30 May 2005). As mentioned above, the publicisation and rather crude manipulation by MPF leader Philippe de Villiers of the highly controversial issues surrounding possible future accession by Turkey to the Union –which the vast majority of French voters systematically oppose in opinion polls– acted as a powerful tool for electoral mobilisation and appeal to the xenophobic segment of the national electorate. Indeed, the issue was not totally absent from the voters' mind on polling day: according to the various surveys published after the referendum, Turkey's candidacy to the EU was quoted as a salient issue and a key motive for rejecting the Treaty by 14 to 35 per cent of all voters: in the IPSOS exit-poll, the accession of Turkey to the Union came as the first reason for voting against the European constitution in both the UMP and FN/MNR supporters (quoted by 56 per cent of both electorates, with no specific account of MPF voters) (IPSOS).

In that, the vote in the 2005 election did partly resemble that of the 1992 referendum on Maastricht which had been fought over the issue of France's sovereignty, further European pillar integration and the heterogeneous fears of loss of national identity (McLaren, 2004) to which the acceleration in the move towards supra-nationalism gave rise⁵. Like in 1992, the traditional petty-bourgeois clientele of the national sovereignty right strongly opposed the European Treaty: 58 per cent of the self-employed cast a No vote in May 2005 (compared with 56 per cent in the Maastricht referendum) (IPSOS). Particularly striking was the rejection of the European charter in the rural areas and amongst France's 650,000 farmers – 70 per cent of the latter voted against the ECT whereas 62 per cent had rejected the Maastricht Treaty (IPSOS)– despite the European CAP being notably disproportionately favourable to French agriculture. This apparent paradox ties up with preceding remarks concerning the salience of a class-based structure of electoral choice in the 2005 referendum: anti-EU feelings have become widespread in small-scale units against the perceived urge for increasing productivity and growth in intensive farming at supranational level, and what is described as an unequal share of the CAP subsidies favouring intensive farming in the largest units over smaller ones. The embarrassment of the most prominent farmers' union (FNSEA) was evident in Jean-Michel Lemétayer's decision not to give any indication to members as how to vote in the referendum (national congress of 23 March 2005). Grassroots peasant militancy embodied by the *Confédération paysanne* and its former spokesman, popular leader José Bové, took an anti-ECT stance consistent with the general anti-globalisation line defended by the organisation, which brought the CP closer to the anti-liberal free-market positions of the leftist opposition to the Treaty.

In 2005, indeed, the most significant element in the rejection of the European constitution was the retrospective performance evaluation vote on the EU model of social and economic governance and the re-interpretation at the European level of salient domestic issues based on

⁵ Linear bivariate correlation between the No vote in 1992 and 2005 was 0.747 at $p < .001$ in the 96 departments of metropolitan France.

the traditional left-right axis of competition. Macroeconomic and social issues – such as unemployment, the risk of social dumping, public services, competition with the new member States and more generally fears about globalisation– were clearly central to the referendum campaign. The high level of pessimism in French public opinion, the general public perception of a prolonged economic recession and the widespread lack of faith in the government’s ability to resolve the intractable problem of unemployment were fuelled by the country’s actual economic circumstance. After a period of stabilisation during 2004, unemployment had risen again in 2005 to reach 10.2 per cent in March, approaching the 2.5 million symbolic threshold. In April, the European Commission released a forecast for a slowdown in France’s GDP growth to 2 per cent in 2005 against the more optimistic anticipation of 2.5 per cent by the French Government. In February, industrial production fell 0.5 percentage point after a period of stagnation in January.

The social and economic malaise was palpable since 2003 and was eventually revealed in the massive strikes and walkouts taking place across the country, with tens of thousands gathering in Paris for protest marches in March 2005. Jean-Pierre Raffarin’s government had to face one of the largest trade union mobilisation since his appointment in Matignon, which brought together a wide range of corporatist interests –rail workers, post-offices, gas and electricity workers, civil servants, school teachers, hospital emergency unit staff, public scientific research, fishermen, technicians in public radio broadcasting– over the defence of the public sector, the claim for higher wages and a fierce opposition against the government’s move to amend Martine Aubry’s Bill on the 35-hour working week. The many opinion polls published during the time of the referendum public debate pointed to pessimism and boiling social discontent. The Eurobarometer survey that was conducted in the Fall of 2004 showed a gloomy perception of the general economic conditions by a significant proportion of the French population with 47 per cent anticipating an increase in the national unemployment rate and another 43 per cent feeling that France’s economic situation would get worse over the next 12 months (Eub. 62.0, TNS Opinion & Social, Oct.-Nov.2004). In March 2005, more than a half (56 per cent) of the French felt that “their purchase power had decreased over the past three years” (CSA-*L’Humanité-La Nouvelle Vie ouvrière*, 30/31 March 2005). The National Statistics Institute (INSEE) reported that the Household Confidence Indicator (CVS) had slumped in May giving a reading of minus 29 points on the adjusted basis (as opposed to minus 24 a month earlier) after a long period of deterioration from September 2004 associated with persisting doubts about the government policies’ efficiency to address the issue of unemployment.

Social and economic issues clearly dominated the referendum campaign by political actors in both the Yes and No camps, with particular emphasis on the perceived neo-liberal, pro-market nature of the text itself and endless debates over the ‘best’ social system applicable to Europe. The ideological polarisation over the European Commission’s Directive on Services in the Internal Market referred to as the ‘Bolkestein Directive’, or discussion over necessary amendments to the Stability and Growth Pact were symptomatic of how the actual debate over the social European model took shape during the referendum campaign in France. The space for political and electoral competition was structured by the traditional left-right axis of conflict (Bartolini, 1984; Evans 2003) thereby demonstrating the increasing overlap between domestic and European areas. Indeed, the reference made by most competitors to the opposition between the so-called ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and ‘French’ social models during the whole period of the referendum campaign did reappear in the controversy over the ‘new impulsion’ in government policies following rejection of the Treaty by voters. Such defence of the French social system against the alleged economic liberal ideology embodied by the European

constitutional Treaty was a key element in the electoral propaganda by parties of the extreme left or the PC with expressly working- and lower-class appeals, opposing Europe as a pure capitalist construct that would open French workers to the perils of free-market liberalism and globalisation, and demanding treaty renegotiation. Absent from public meetings, PS rebel leader Laurent Fabius clearly lent his support –and brought mainstream credibility– in the media to such campaigning themes with a strong emphasis on social rather than economic factors.

The salience of social issues was further demonstrated in the attempt by the rightist nationalist camp to grab hold of the many concerns expressed by voters in the 2004 regional and European elections. Although not new to the extreme right ideology (Ivaldi 2003 & 2005), the FN's referendum campaign aimed to increase the party's seductiveness to working-class voters by stressing the destructive impact of the neo-liberal ideology underlying the whole European integration process. For instance, Le Pen's party denounced the "extreme liberal and free-trade dogma of the European Constitution which would aggravate the economic and social catastrophe that is affecting the majority of French people" (FN national convention, Strasbourg, 9 April 2005). More surprising was the allegiance by the once neo-liberal harbinger MPF conservative leader Philippe de Villiers to rejecting "free-trade globalisation": "if the Yes wins, said de Villiers, we will have the D-plan: relocation of industry (*délocalisation*), deregulation (*dérégulation*) and a breaking wave of immigrants (*déferlante migratoire*)" (Meeting in Palais des Sports, Paris, 21 May 2005). In contrast, the referendum outcome demonstrated the incapacity by left-wing leaders of the Yes to convince their electorate that the European Constitution was, to quote PS Euro-enthusiast Jack Lang, "a rampart and a shield to protect us from US and Chinese economic mammoths" and the best "weapon against the destructive and hostile ultra-liberal capitalist ideology" (PS meeting, Marseille, 31 March 2005).

On the electoral 'demand' side, the salience of social and economic issues was revealed in all post-referendum opinion polls. Over half (52 per cent) of French voters said they had expressed their "discontent with the current economic and social situation in France" whilst another 40 per cent had voted against the Treaty on the grounds that "the constitution was too economically liberal" (IPSOS). For 46 per cent of the voters, "the Treaty would aggravate unemployment in France" and was "too liberal" for another 34 per cent (SOFRES). Fifty-three per cent of those interviewed by CSA expressed their "worries" about the social impact of European integration. Looking at the specific reasons given by the naysayers to account for their vote, the "negative effects of the European Constitution on the employment situation in France", the "level of unemployment and weakness of the economy" and the "too liberal free-market nature of the draft" were cited as the first three motives for rejection the Treaty (Flash Eurobarometer 171, 30/31 May 2005). The age structure of the No vote was clearly one opposing those in the working categories of age to the elderly or those in retirement: all age groups under 60 rejected the Treaty whereas support to the European charter was only found in those aged 60 and over.

The left-wing electorate's contribution to France's refusal of the European charter emerged as a key feature, accounting for an estimated 57 per cent of the total No vote including 8 and 49 per cent for the extreme and mainstream left respectively (CSA). Unlike PS party members who had massively supported François Hollande's stance in favour of the Constitution in December 2004, the majority of PS supporters followed Laurent Fabius' line of argumentation and rejected the Treaty in the polls: in 2005, 56 per cent of the socialist electorate cast a No vote whilst no less than 78 per cent had voted in favour of the Maastricht

Treaty in 1992 (IPSOS). A similar pattern was observable in the Green party's supporters with over 60 per cent of the ecologists voting against the Treaty as shown in the various exit-poll surveys. At party level, these results reflected the ambivalence of the national leadership of the Green movement and their timid support of the European Constitution: whilst most top-level party elites called for a Yes vote (including national secretary Yann Wehring, MEP Alain Lipietz and Jean-Luc Bennahmias, Deputy Noël Mamère, Senator and former Environment Minister Dominique Voynet and Paris deputy-Mayor Denis Baupin) with the help of MEP Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a mere 52.9 per cent of the 8,800 members of the traditionally Europhile Green party had voted in favour of supporting the Treaty in February 2005⁶.

Similarly, a breakdown of the vote by trade union identification revealed that 78 and 75 of the CGT and FO supporters respectively had cast a No vote in the referendum whereas the majority of CFDT, CFTC and CGC-CFE voters had supported the European Treaty (57, 65 and 85 per cent respectively) (IPSOS). Overall, the unions came highly divided to the referendum campaign. In the CGT, national leader Bernard Thibault was disowned by the motion against the ECT passed by the majority of the National Co-federal Committee (CCN) in February 2005 (74 against out of 166 members). Although fairly critical of the 'economic logics' behind the European constitution, *Forces ouvrière* secretary-general Jean-Claude Mailly distanced himself from the pro-Treaty position of John Monks' European Trade Union Confederation (TUC) whilst simultaneously refusing to call for the No vote. In the Yes camp, François Chérèque's CFDT did on the contrary join with the TUC in supporting the European constitution following the national bureau of 24 September 2005, yet did not instruct members how to vote in the referendum. As did the CFTC or the CFE-CGC. The former had passed a motion in favour of the economic and social chapter of the European Constitution in December 2004. CFE-CGC President Jean-Luc Cazettes had expressed his personal doubts about the constitution and fears about the risk of social dumping with the foreseeable return of the Bolkestein directive in the case of a Yes victory. Only the French business organisation (MEDEF) supported unambiguously the vote in favour of the Treaty thereby expressing the traditionally pro-EU element in French corporate culture.

The majority rejection of the Treaty by the left-wing electorate corresponded also to a significant shift in the sociological support for Europe: whilst they had massively voted in favour of the Maastricht Treaty, middle-class voters did –for a noteworthy proportion of them– swing over towards opposing the European constitution. In 1992, 62 per cent of the mid-level management white collars had voted the ratification of Maastricht; in 2005, over half (53 per cent) rejected the European Treaty (IPSOS). According to other surveys, the proportion of routine non-manual in middle-management positions casting a No vote was between 56 and 66 per cent (SOFRES and LHF exit-polls respectively). In the 'employees' (junior white-collar positions), the CSA institute reported a 66 per cent No vote in the referendum.

As discussed earlier, political discontent with the incumbent right-wing government is a possible –although a reductionist– characterisation of the electoral swing in the traditionally pro-EU left-wing voters of the middle-class in the 2005 referendum. Arguably the referendum outcome needs also to be assessed in terms of the performance evaluation vote on the process

⁶ The ambivalence of the Green party towards the European integration process was evident in their opposition to ratifying the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999 and call for a dramatic change in the rules of the game at the European level. In 2005, like their socialist allies, the Greens had to face internal dissidence from regional Councillor Francine Bavay and Paris Deputy Martine Billard over social issues in the European Constitution.

of European integration itself and the reappraisal by voters of the alternative utopian project that was originally defended by pro-Maastricht elites –and more particularly former President François Mitterrand– in 1992. In order to understand the motive for such disenchantment with Europe, one needs to introduce here some elements pertaining to the peculiar relationship that was established between French voters and the European project. We would suggest that, in some respect, the ideal of supranational integration was resorted to by most political elites in France as an alternative utopian project for mass-mobilisation in view of the ruling parties' perceived inefficiency to counter the devastating social effects of economic recession. In March 1983, the ideological shift by Pierre Mauroy's socialist government towards drastic austerity policies together with the decision to keep France inside the EMS led not only to the PS abandoning its utopian vision of the world, with all the well-known political and electoral consequences at national level (Bergougnieux & Grunberg, 1992), but also to the European project being identified for the first time in France with a system of supranational constraints weighting on the country's control over its own future rather than a political locus for international co-operation where France's national interests would flourish.

In 1992, the campaign over the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty was an attempt to alter such a widespread public perception of Europe as an iron collar, and a clear invitation to pass a vote of confidence in the future benefits of France's membership. More fundamentally, it was the opportunity for French citizens to seal a confidence pact on social welfare and economic growth with their national elites whereby the European integration project was regarded as a credible alternative political utopia to discredited and inadequate domestic socio-economic policies of both the left and the right following successive alternations in power in 1981, 1986 and 1988. Europe was then conceived as a means of compensating for the lack of responsiveness by dominant parties and, somehow, a solution to France's economic recession and intractable problem of unemployment. The notion of 'European social model' was a key element in President François Mitterrand's conception of Europe and was central to his commitment to obtaining the inclusion of a social chapter to the Maastricht Treaty. The official speech by then Prime Minister Pierre Bérégovoy before the French Deputies on the opening day of the parliamentary session on constitutional amendments prior to the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty on 5 May 1992 contained all the elements of the proposed alternative pact on Europe: the project for further European integration was described as a driving force behind 'social progress', 'an advanced social model' and "a space for the protection of workers' social rights and the insertion of those excluded from economic growth". A rampart against economic and social 'laissez-faire', Bérégovoy's conception of Europe was also raising 'hopes of economic growth, more jobs and an increase in purchasing power'.

In May 2005, the majority of voters –among whom figured a significant proportion of the left-wing electorate– put a decisive and abrupt end to such an utopian European project. They seized the opportunity of the referendum on the ECT to express their grievances and terminate unilaterally the confidence pact they had made with their national leaders thirteen years earlier. The critical assessment of the European model of social and economic governance was a key element in the referendum: unlike the public debate over the Maastricht Treaty which was mostly about the 'EU to be' and therefore prospective in essence, the ECT campaign proved more complex in that the retrospective evaluation of the post-Maastricht European social system did interfere with the projective dimension inherent in the Constitutional Treaty, notably with regard to the most necessary institutional changes within the enlarged Union. As Europe became more present in people's everyday life –particularly since the tangible change over to the Euro in 2002– so did the overlap between the domestic

and European arenas become more apparent and, as a consequence, the propensity for voters to transpose at the European level the mechanism of voting on the assessment of national parties' socioeconomic performances, which has been evident at the national level from all major elections and subsequent alternations in power, each election since 1981 going against the incumbent government. What was at stake in the 2005 referendum in France was the popular perception of the apparent European Union's inability to secure and deliver the so long promised public goods at supranational level, and satisfy the citizens' fundamental need for protection against the many threats posed to the stability and permanence of the French social model by economic globalisation. The general perception of Europe was again one of a specific system of constraints imposed on France through the Stability and Growth Pact, the monetary union or directives issued by the Brussels Commission, if not simply one of Europe as the benevolent ally of the evil forces of free-market liberalism, contested and considered responsible for the economic and social crisis in France.

IV. Conclusion

At party level, the referendum proved particularly damaging to President Chirac and the socialist party. The personal failure of the former over the European issue clearly undermined his credibility at both national and international levels. Together with the perception of President Chirac by other EU leaders as the unwitting 'burier' of the European Treaty, the electoral setback of May 2005 will indisputably cast a shadow over his ability to enter the 2007 presidential competition and solicit a third mandate from French voters. On the left, the PS is now facing the perspective of a difficult party congress in Le Mans in November 2005 after the ousting of Laurent Fabius and a number of his followers (including Claude Bartolone, Henri Weber or Alain Claeys) from the PS national leadership on 4 June 2005, and the growing pressure put on the party's top-level instances by the minority groups that successfully advocated for the rejection of the European charter. Strategic issues concerning the opportunity for building a left-wing pole were under discussion since the failure of Jospin's candidacy in the 2002 presidential election (Boy, 2003). Despite however internal party dispute and the temporary tactical co-operation of all anti-ECT forces of the left, a broad alliance that would embrace all supporters of the leftist No vote in the referendum remains very unlikely. The real issue for the PS is now clearly one of leadership together with the preparation of a credible alternative to the incumbent right in anticipation of the 2007 presidential election in order to successfully appeal to socialist voters in both the No and Yes camps.

Undoubtedly, one major issue will be whether or not the reshuffling of the party system that took place over the referendum issue will subsist and significantly impact on the domestic political arena in the 2007 national elections. Although constantly present in voters' mind and a structuring dimension of the attitudinal and ideological space in French politics, Europe never really emerged as a salient issue *per se* in first-order elections in France (Belot & Cautrès, 2004). The Maastricht naysayers of both the left and the right never managed to occupy the realm of national electoral competition and have so far remained largely marginal to the core party system, as was demonstrated for instance by the failure of Villiers' MPF or Chevènement's MDC to weigh significantly on the outcome of the 1995, 1997 and 2002 elections in spite of notable performances in the 1994 or 1999 European contests. Given their intrinsic anti-Establishment element and because they encompass a wider range of social issues beside the sole European dimension, parties located at the extreme ends of the political spectrum are more likely to benefit electorally from the dynamics of the No vote in the

referendum. This is particularly true of the Front national whose electorate's anti-EU feelings form part of a specific attitudinal syndrome that differentiate Le Pen's voters from those of both the mainstream left and right (Andersen & Evans, 2003; Grunberg & Schweisguth, 2003). In the 2002 presidential election, the European cleavage already resurfaced in an extreme right guise, with the Le Pen vote reaching peaks among those who had vigorously opposed the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (Ivaldi, 2002). In 2005, the far right supporters were the only ones to clearly reject not only the ECT but also the whole process of European integration, with 54 per cent of Le Pen's voters considering France's EU membership to be a 'bad thing' (Flash Eurobarometer 171, 30/31 May 2005). The long-standing and indeed problematic question of ageing Le Pen's succession aside, the French far right will probably be in the best position to capitalise on the rejection of the ECT in forthcoming national ballots.

Notwithstanding the strong polarisation of attitudes towards Europe at both party and electoral levels, European issues tend generally to be absorbed and incorporated into the political parties' national agenda if not simply carefully avoided by mainstream actors when the time comes to appeal to voters in first-order ballots. To a large extent, this was due in the past to the very nature of the European issue and its dramatic impact in terms of increasing party factionalism, but most of all to the verticality of the pro / anti-EU cleavage which was essentially organised along the lines of national sovereignty *versus* supranationalism. In 2005, the opposition over Europe was more closely articulated with the classic left-right axis of electoral competition over traditional social and economic issues and should therefore be more easily transposable *a priori* into the domestic arena. Given the outcome of the referendum, however, the pro-EU position taken by mainstream actors of the left and right might prove untenable if not simply politically suicidal and only the competitors of the No camp will benefit from re-activating the issue in the 2007 national campaign.

At international level, the decisive French vote on the European Constitution –immediately followed by that of the Dutch– did put a serious halt to the process of reforming European institutions. Britain's subsequent decision to shelve plans to hold a national referendum together with the acknowledgment by Prime Minister Tony Blair of the Treaty's demise further cast the fate of the moribund European Charter's into doubts while opening a period of profound uncertainty within the Union. Obituaries might be premature but the decision by the Brussels EU summit on 16-17 June 2005 to have a pause in the ratification process was a clear indication of its deceleration and increasing fears of 'contamination' to other member states who have yet to pronounce their decision on the constitutional Treaty. The feeling that the outcome of the French and Dutch referenda had pushed the Union into paralysis was reinforced by the strong Franco-British disagreement about the 2007-2013 EU budget, controversy over the British rebate and growing uncertainty concerning the future of farm subsidies long secured by French farmers through CAP measures. On 29 May 2005, the majority of French voters sacrificed *real-Europa* on the altar of a new utopian project for a more social protectionist EU: the opening of rather difficult negotiations with other member States over contradictory national self-interests under increasing pressure from Europe's trade competitors might soon lead to this most cherished social dimension being overshadowed by those very economic logics that formed the core of France's decision to reject the European constitutional Treaty.

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ⁱ Gilles Ivaldi is a researcher in comparative politics with URMIS (CNRS-University of Nice-Sophia Antipolis). He is also convenor of the European research network on 'Extreme Right Electorates and Party Success' (EREPS). E-mail: gilles.ivaldi@unice.fr.