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Was it really poor communication ? A socio-political reading of the Santer Commission's resignation.

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This contribution wishes to analyse the political processes which led to the European Commission resignation in March 1999. Everybody remembers the chronological development of the crisis: the scandals originated from a number of embezzlements printed in the Belgian Press in August 1998. Following the disclosure of the affairs, the scandal gradually took shape in the press and in Parliament. The Parliament took a vote of no-confidence, which was finally rejected in mid-January, but at the same time a committee of independent experts was appointed to shed new light on the subject. Returned on mid-March, the Committee's report called into question Edith Cressons' credibility in personal matters, and accused the College of Commissioners of mismanagement. In the night, the Santer Commission resignated.

One interpretation of the resignation was that the Commission was unable to deal with the crisis, and especially because of its "poor communication" skills. On the one hand, one would like to show that this interpretation is wrong. The problem in this crisis is not a communication problem, but a legitimisation problem. And this legitimisation problem is due to a more general transformation of the European political game, which led to a dynamic of disintegration of the usual allies of the Commission. But on the other hand, one could say that the poor communication thesis is nevertheless interesting in a very particular way. Considering these changes, one can think that the European Commission communication has been wrong-footed by the politicisation of the European Institutions which was going on in this crisis. In other words, this crisis led us to think about the link between legitimisation and construction of a political order of practices. That is why, after a few words about the frame analysis of this article, Of would like to study more particularly the dynamic of multisectorial mobilisations which led to the Commission's resignation.

The sociology of political crisis as frame analysis

The resignation of the Commission in March 1999 is often treated on anecdotic manners in the scientific field. However, some articles involving more precisely European administration studies are concerned with the origins of the resignation (Stevens 2001 Mayer 2000). Despite their respective qualities, these works suffer from a number of problems according to a reading grid inspired by political sociology. Thus, the discussion of these articles could help us to specify the contribution of the sociology of political crisis to the understanding of the European polity.

The first remark that one can make of the existing literature applies to the adopted research prospect. Most interpretations have in common the search for causes and, even more, for the "factors" which led to the resignation. Although the step has all the appearances of scientificity, it presents the disadvantage to seek reasons for this resignation "afterwards", to the detriment of what was played at the time of the resignation. In this sense, this step comprises the typical defects of what history and political sociology call a “retrospective illusion”. The hypothesis of those works thus rests on the idea that the resignation of the Santer Commission is the product of an *a priori* deficit of legitimacy. On a general level, this proposal is not false. It’s known that Jacques Santer was designated rather by default and was invested with a narrow majority in the European Parliament. It remains that this interpretation neglects the fact that the Commission was in rather good form a short time before the resignation. On the one hand, the results of the intergovernmental conference were judged disappointing, which tended to strengthen the Commission in the definition of its leadership role. On the other hand, the Commission was successful with two important files of the time, enlargement and the Euro. From this point of view, the launching of the Euro in January 1999 was greeted as a success. That is to say that the legitimacy deficit of the Commission was not taken for granted but was rather built in the course of the crisis.

The second remark could rest on the fact that those works focus on the "problem" of the Commission organisation, as if it was done. For Ann Stevens for instance (Stevens 2001), the crisis is thus the product of the incapacity of the Commission to conform to the procedural rules that it was promoting. As a proof, the author frequently quotes the report of the experts independent Committee which stresses the defects of political direction or of management

within the Commission. However, one can think that it is more the publication of this report and its strategic interpretations which had effects rather than the revealed problems. More generally, while focusing on analysing the "non management of the Commission", to take up again the title of her former article, the author is led to neglect the conditions which made that this problem of non-management was built as an issue in this political situation. It also is the case for communication which is envisaged outside this context of political crisis. Those arguments can be sustained from the point of view of the author as administration specialist — its work is probably one of the best informed on the administrative realities of the European Commission. But at the same time, it leads to neglect the *political* construction of problems (Edelman, XXXX) — and on the basis of reproducing the sirens of the "good management" which are heard within the Commission.

Christoph Meyer's article (Meyer 1999) presents a different, and to a certain extent more political point of view on the affairs and the development of the crisis. It follows the hypothesis that the crisis stemmed from an insufficiency of public communication and of know-how within the Commission. The fragmented political authority, a technocratic vision and a lack of know-how in terms of political communication would have opened an opportunity for the Member States to externalise public dissatisfaction on the European Commission. According to him, this absence of policy and correlatively, the absence usually of political communication in the Commission are at the root of the crisis. This prospect has the merit of bringing us back to overall problems, the historical unpoliticisation of the Commission and its consequences in terms of political communication. But it has nevertheless two defects. In this interpretation, the organisation of public communication and its malfunctioning are, once again, at the source of the crisis. This reading is not false, but it neglects the relational context into which public communication fits. If communication is not good, it is not only owing to what it emits or of its organization: perhaps is it also because those which are its usual recipients or relays are not, or no longer, willing to be satisfied. This reading also presupposes a definition of what are political communication “good” practices in the European context, and even more, in a European context of politicisation process. However, everything indicates that this context is relatively new, which partly explains the difficulty of finding the tone and of engaging a fully tested response. The crises that Europe had previously undergone were more the fact of blockings by the states (to the image of the empty chair, for example) than political dynamics such as the one which led to the resignation.

Despite numerous comments lead us to the same conclusions, one would like to advocate a different prospect. Indeed, from our analysis, the resignation is the result of a politicisation process whose result was to take off balance the sectors which normally characterised the European political play and, consequently, led to create returned the not easily readable and controllable situation by the actors. In other words, this analysis does not want to evaluate at a normative level what charisma, political know-how, or the administration problems which have courses in the Commission are, but to stress the multisector dynamics which allowed the crisis and its consequence on the political judgements pronounced in the game.

This prospect supposes to say a few words on the sociology of political crises, which was in particular initiated by Michel Dobry (Dobry 1986). It would be too long to summarise the principal contributions of the sociology of crises, but one can however submit some of its main points. This prospect, first of all, invites to be wary of causalist interpretation, in order to observe what occurs in a crisis and how it occurs. This posture applies particularly here. Indeed nothing was played in the resignation of the Santer Commission and one can, moreover, think it was highly improbable to witness its resignation a few months only before its renewal. If this resignation was permitted, it is therefore that the protagonists' calculations changed abruptly and that the college of commissioners' resources had been deeply devalued in this situation.

This posture invites to observe the change of political alliances which characterise routine situations. It is there a second main point of the sociology of crises. It results in analysing the effects of the political knocks on the structure of the political game, and particularly the relation system between the various sectors which usually contribute to its stability. Here, the relations between the Commission and the press, the subcommittee and Parliament, the college and the administration of the Commission were strongly transformed. It is so much so that one can talk about a process of desectorisation of the European political space. Where, usually, the European political game seems to be fragmented, the revelation of the affairs have represented a focal point which contributed, for a time and in a very new way, to realise a permanent political space, endowed with issues shared by the majority of those involved, or even of single temporality.

It is in this context that the Commission was recognised as corrupted or marked by bad management and that the resignation could represent a way out. That invites — and it is the

third aspect of the sociology of crises — us to be attentive to what interactionnist sociology calls the definition of the situation and labelling effects. If the Commission has been labelled as corrupted, it is at the end of a number of political mobilizations which were played in several sectors and involved the process of setting in the crisis. Thus these are these mobilizations that I would like to study, before observing their effects of the Commission political communication "problems".

Internal "policies" and management of the affairs

For something to exist and to turn into a scandal, a fact must be qualified or labelled as extra-ordinary and then this definition shared about to create a mobilisation (Dobry 1986, Garrigou 1992). Also the question of why these affairs were let out pinpoints a number of frustrations within the administration of the Commission. These frustrations do not relate to the redistribution of material resources, but more directly to the coinciding of the Commissioners' acquired powers and the pressures which the reform of the organisation of the Commission brings about for the civil servant. Under the effect of these changes the solidarity between the College of Commissioners and the euro-civil servants was ruptured, up to create the climate in which the "affair" came about and was then defined as a "scandal" (on those kind of steps, Lascoumes 1997).

The origins of the affairs are of political nature. Before the scandal, cases of fraud are heavily represented in the Commission's technical arrangements and secrets. This secret and technical arrangement is guaranteed by the existence of the group of specialists from the UCLAF (unit for the co-operation of fraud prevention), which is made up of about 150 agents, most of whom are in some way attached to the national administrations (customs agents, magistrates). The UCLAF is above all conceived as a control organ for the European subsidies, in and by the Member States. By looking at it in this way, it is not purely by chance if we know very little of the affairs 'previous' to those of 1998-99. To be more specific these affairs never became "affairs" of any great concern. On the one hand UCLAF monopolised the investigation into the fraud, and on the other hand the circulation of information was quite directly linked with the College of Commissioners. In the way that things were structured, the economy of relations was also aided by the civil servants' duty to preserve secrecy. Independent of their statuary obligation, euro-civil-servants usually had a particularly strong attachment to the Commission.

However, under Santer's Commission modifications were applied, which were a determining feature in the creation of the very special "climate" in which the scandal took form. For many, Jacques Santer's arrival signified a re-balancing of the Commission in Nordic and managerial matters. This idea was held by two Commissioners in particular, who came from Nordic countries when they entered the European Union in 1995 and acted as Jacques Santer's "guardian angels". The first of them, Erkki Likkanen, a Finnish socialist Commissioner and above all Minister for the economy who prepared the Finnish entry, whilst in charge of the budget and the personnel and who is at the source of many projects for the reform of the internal organisation of the European Commission. Having received the post of Commissioner responsible for curbing fraud, Anita Gradin, a Swedish socialist, received the task of dealing with the "southern" practices of Delor's Commission and to bring things back into line, mainly by accentuating the pressure of the UCLAF.

From their nomination onwards, the intention to "change the regime", meaning namely to accelerate a number of internal reforms, became obvious. Their presence was marked throughout the following endeavours to reform the structures. E. Liikanen is also the driving force behind many reform projects, including the reform of staff regulation, the official and increased appeal to external companies or even the possibility of giving "under performing" civil servant the sack. These reform projects were also displayed with an intentionally "modernist" attitude ("high-tech" event to preview the reform, appeals to consultants, etc.) and were interpreted as a questioning of the Commission's internal social dialogue and of the status of the functionaries - both very important symbolically. However, above all - and this is where the climate comes into play - these reform projects caused a mobilisation without precedent. The day of action in April 1998 was particularly followed up and represented more or less a break through in the process of division that was happening between the College and the administration of the Commission. For the first time ever, the directorates-general, a reputable political status close to the College expressed itself against the Commission. As the readers' letters of the Commission's internal review show, the day of action was followed by several "internal debates", putting the "modernists" and the "northerners" up against the "former" parts of "southern" Europe.

That is, however, not the only change that came along with the new Commission. The internal reform driven by the new College is equally to be seen in the definition of the policy of moralisation of the practices of the functionaries. The two aspects are equally related as the reform of the statute is also connected to the fraud. This policy of moralisation is more directly linked to Anita Gradin. Having come up against these debates concerning the necessity of a growing transparency of European affairs, initiated by Finland and Sweden during the intergovernmental conference, this policy concerns a number of symbolic measures such as the project to bring back reputable privileges like the right to alcohol and tax-free tobacco which are often evoked during the strike against the project to reform the statute. Above all it is apparent in the reinforcement of the UCLAF that the will to initiate more of an internal enquiry and an amendment of the fraud is present, which disqualifies "Delor's management" or a combination of "southern" practices, which then gives way to the "Nordic" practices.

The strengthening of the anti-fraud policy allowed a whole series of 'problems' to transform into 'affairs' (Lascoumes 1997). This transformation happened at a very specific point in time. By intervening in the conflicts associated with the internal reform of the Commission, the denunciation of the fraud by the UCLAF and the College contributed to a growing feeling of dispossession of the eurocivil servants at the same time that the internal struggles on administrative reform opened up the situation to a number of previously unthinkable counterattacks (Georgakakis 2002 b).

The effects of this discrepancy between moralisation and dispossession are particularly apparent at the beginning of the affair. The rupture common to all the ordinary transactions and the fact that they were put on the sidelines leads them to go back against the Commission and to 'give away' the accumulated files. In his book consecrated to the affair, the journalist Jean Nicolas shows very well the collaboration of actors of the affairs with journalists. It remains for other leakages to permit the file to be put together and above all to activate all of the press. If it is almost impossible to name the authors of the leakages, these leakages were nevertheless not without links to the new internal division at the Commission - namely the split between the College and the functionaries. Without always going as far as exposure, this split between the College and the functionaries is accompanied by a modification of the thin line between that which can be voiced and that which should remain unspoken, so as not to let out an opinion shared by a large number of the functionaries and 'give the game away'. This

modification can be observed in the conversations of the European functionaries and in interviews that they gave: the freedom of speech is much greater during this period but this effect is to be seen to the contrary in the silences after the dismissal. The modification is also to be seen in the vicious nature of the leaflets and the threats of punishment of the Commission's executive policy and, even if slightly hidden, the intention to inform the press, which then happened in the summer of 1998 (Georgakakis 2002 b).

The Press' anti-institutional attitude

Of course, those internal ruptures aren't enough to understand the crisis process. If the affairs were let out, it is also because they found an exterior audience. This is the case for one part of the press in particular. The repercussion of these intentions in the press reflects the image of the political distances, which could lead to the taking of power by the Commission. This dimension is particularly visible in the convergence, be it almost involuntary, of several journalistic strategies.

The disclosure of the scandal by the *Lanterne*, the complementary interviews led by a group of journalists and then by the entire press is characterised less by the will to bring a European "public space" into existence, than by the encounter of a process moving towards autonomy and journalistic strategies, both motivated by very different motives. For a long time the journalists had put into place a relay of information on the European Commission. The federalist vocation common to civil servants and journalists tended to merge their group to the somewhat larger movement of the European Activists. The increase in the number of journalists and the arrival of new journalists, showing themselves as more and more 'professional' (Baisnée 2001, Bastin 2002), and the correlative growth of the Commission's missions and authority were always a contributing factor to the change in the political order. This channelling of influxes of information and their inscription in one single technical dimension began to be more and more exposed. However, the tensions did not yet exist between the Commission and the journalists in an explicit form. At the beginning of the affair, the institutional connivance made the Commission's management 'problems' impossible to sort out and what is more, the journalists shared the rationalisations of the players within the Commission. The resort back to the "submarines", the personnel of the Commission paid from the budget for Community programmes instead of being paid from the stagnating functionary

budget, which is to become one of the core affairs is one of the 'half secrets' which bond those people who are 'informed'.

It is also that which restrains the development of the affair to the slow and continuous process towards autonomy and at the same time allows the encounter of the rather similar processes and journalistic strategies. Three types of strategies will allow the affair to be let out, and simultaneously accelerate the journalists move towards autonomy: the first initiated by a marginal journalist, who is specialised in the 'Belgian' affairs, the second initiated by the claim for a more autonomous position and above all a position that is adapted to the evolution of European policies and the third strategy is that of a German publication linked to the present economic climate, which aimed to weigh heavily on the Commission.

The *Lantern* and the journalist who brought the affair out into the open differ from the definition of journalistic purity which dominated the commentary of the victory for the European public space. The right-wing Christian Democrat paper is distinguished by its' critic of the affairs in Belgium and more generally by its' democratic representation. Jean Nicolas, the journalist that brought the affair out into the open, is the author of many works on scandalous subjects, - which is already evoked in their titles: *The Paedophiles are amongst us* on the Dutroux affair of 1997, *The Protectors* about the procurers of 1998. Even if in his book, he denies strongly his membership to the extreme right, his book *l'Europe des fraudes*, which was published immediately after the dismissal, leaves a large number of journalists in doubt as to his motives.

It could be seen as surprising that this 'disclosure' was then taken up by a newspaper such as *Liberation*. The affairs are taken up in a context (here following the second strategy) where they represent an opportunity for a new definition of European journalism to set in; a journalism more and more independent of the College, which is growing more and more towards being the 'European executive'. When studied from Brussels' point of view, this opportunity comes along at the moment that the mobilisation of functionaries comes into contact with the College, and it is quite probable that the frustration, like the mobilisation, was created to clarify the situation to the journalists, who were always very involved. Above all, the coming out of the affair presents all the advantages of a no-risk coup, so much so that the journalists are able to profit from the division of the College and the functionaries of the

Commission. By keeping the College against the functionaries, the terms of domestic exchange with the functionaries were not, at least to start with, upset by the exposure - but on the other hand, neither did they improve matters. It is rather shocking when one takes the viewpoint that, it is due to the very close principles shared by the European functionaries that the affairs were exposed. These principles are: good management, the future of the European construction, the 'charismatic deficit' of President Santer.

From the point of view of national journalism, the affairs offered an increased chance of recognition for the journalists who were specialised in European matters. For a long time, such journalists had a real struggle to get any recognition from their editors. European themes were reputed to be obscure and of no interest to the reader. On this occasion the journalists also had the opportunity to get a look behind the scenes, which proved to be an excellent method to learn about European politics. It was by the intermediate of a rubric about the 'backstage in Brussels' that Jean Quatremer managed to sustain his position with *Liberation*. In a way, the revelation of the affairs follows on 'logically' from here, conforming with the model of journalistic excellence, which has been held by the image of journalistic investigation, ever since the 1930s and above all, since the Watergate affair. Incidentally, the articles in *Liberation* can be classed as being both an apolitical and a moral turning point (Philippe Juhem).

This adequacy from the point of view of the national market's strategies is observed in a very different manner in countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom. The German way of looking at things can be seen as exemplary. The difference between French and German journalists specialised on Europe, is that the German journalists generally do not have to work at making a position for themselves like the French do. The German journalists are numerous and European politics are already amongst the accepted rubrics. However, it seems that this recognition plays a part in the equivalence of their position and that of the State's. The German 'position' in the negotiations for the Agenda 2000 and their demand for a re-balanced budget and the criticism of the Commission's acts of squandering was the object of a large consensus. The positioning was all part of one of the common campaigns of the German political forces, and not to be forgotten is that this 'pressure' from the Germans had a large impact on the Commission. Also, it is consequently not very surprising that a journalist from the *ARD* and others from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* were at the stem of the exposure. An article which appeared in *Wirtschaft Woche* in November 1998 is a good example of the themes which

brought about criticism of the Commission. The functionaries' disproportional salaries are exposed. The strikes against Likkanen and his introduction of the performance criteria are scoffed at by the functionaries' with a lack of realism. A number of minor facts were also exposed but were simply considered as symbolic of the Commission's poor management, like the fact that economy class tickets were reimbursed with the money for business class tickets, the doctoring of expenses slips, etc. A far larger number of examples were given in the British press.

MEP Mobilisation

If at the beginning these positions seem far from reconcilable, very soon after that the affair is developed further in Parliament. In Parliament another reading after the event could have lead to the exposure of the scandal and would have been the logical end to the Parliament's move towards autonomy. In fact, when observed before the whole affair had started, the European Parliament presented internal mechanisms of consensus and there was a relatively large amount of solidarity with the Commission, which was eased by the fact that European Parliament was deprived of power in peripheral matters. When inspected more closely, it becomes clear that the acceleration of the affairs in Parliament was more closely linked to a collective process of emancipation than to internal competitions. Even with its increasing power, the parliamentary game did not really change, but the quasi-monopoly of the two large political groups, the ESP (European Socialist Party) and the EPP (European People's party) is still a cause for a number of frustrations in this area.

When the affairs started to come out into the open, Edith Muller, an MEP for the Green Party, who was quickly backed up by the leader of her Party, was the most virulent and the first person to describe the 'affairs' of the 'scandal' - that was at the beginning of the September. As a member of the Commission's budgetary control (COBUCO), she made herself renowned for the strong position that she held against the opacity of the Commission's management and it is to her that the journalist from *La Lanterne,* whilst in posession of the files which he received from Claud Perry, makes his appeal. Consequently, it is around the COBUCO that the affair develops in Parliament. Still at this point the COBUCO held a position that allowed the weight of the 'frustrations' to be placed on the Parliament. The COBUCO does not represent

the most highly valued parliamentary committee, as it follows the definition of a budgetary orthodoxy which is closely in agreement with the expressed desires of the Commission. Placed on a technical axis, which opposes the political axis of the larger committees, like that of foreign affairs - the former committee of political affairs - or the institutional reform, the Committee neither benefits from the prestige of the budget or that of the juridical committee. It is not the most prominent MEPs that make up the Committee and the position of the minority groups, such as the Liberals and the Greens is also important. In fact the Committee is chaired by a German member of the EPP, even at that time where there is a lot of pressure on the Commission's budgetary affairs coming from the Germans and when the least involved Commissioners are the socialists - these points are important for the political direction in which the events consequently develop.

The politicisation process

The scandal takes its' form in the distribution of those interplay rather than in a face-to-face confrontation. For to face up to things, the players would have to delve into their political know-how, and by doing this, would create a dynamic in which the affairs would represent a 'focal point' (Schelling, XXXX) of a number of political means to test the waters. In the issues of 4th and 5th January, the editor of the European agency wrote: "the visible development of the events hides the manoeuvres, the intentions (which had not always been confessed) and sometimes even the manipulations and the intrigues". This formula shows that the situation favours an increasingly large number of political motives. It remains to say that it is more their relatively new status in the European political game than their number, that marks the deception, the surprise or the jubilation of players. Nourished by the encounter of the attempt to get out of the crisis, which was envisaged by the Commissioners and the increasingly similar mobilisations of MEPs and journalists, these motives soon took on the form of a left-right opposition, and then that of an ordinary internal group struggle, and then that of an executive/legislative struggle, which in this very uncertain game will offer the different protagonists opportunities to put the institutions back into line.

Being very similar, the converging positions taken by the journalists and the Greens are not without effect. E. Goffman presented very clearly what happens when this structure of interaction is broken down: the mad smile, the tears, the violence (Goffman XXXX). This

rupture of the structure can be seen behind Emma Bonino's public tears and her threats to register a complaint against the *Financial Times* (*Liberation*, 14th October). But it can also be seen in Edith Cresson's violent counterattacks.

Here it is necessary to make an inventory of all the strategies which played a role in the crisis. The journalist Jean Nicolas gives us a certain number of them, amongst which are misinformation, propaganda, secret pressures and manipulations, which fit in well with the increase in political motives and their inscription in 'classical' schemes of national politics (Nicolas 1999). On top of all that, at a later stage comes the exposure of the plot. The plot can be seen from this point of view as something other than the product of paranoid schemes. Opposing another disclosure than that of the affairs, the exposure of the plot fits in well to this situation of 'government system crisis', as it is seen by the protagonists and in this way also opposes the schemes of interpretation and historically proven actions. It also corresponds to a political strategy which is still in a test-phase in Europe: E. Likannen applies this when the examinations are leaked, Jacques Santer speaks of a 'witch hunt'. Above all, at this point the strategy seems particularly adjusted to the complexity of the matter. Due to the precarious alliances and the many uncertainties which weighed upon the internal relations of the European Institutions, this strategy in fact presents all the different characteristics of destruction and makes the situation incomprehensible. This is the case for the journalists who do not completely master the journalistic positions and usual strategies of countries other than their own. This is also the case for the relations between the different national representatives at the moment when the relations are tense between Germany and France in the negotiations for the Agenda 2000.

This politicisation of know-how concerns the Commission's counterattacks towards the press and also the relations to the Parliament. Looked at from this point of view Jacques Santer's reaction could well be due to a 'tactical error' (to use the term applied by the editor of F. Riccardi in a daily European bulletin, which shows again the strong presence of motives). At the time of the vote to discharge the budget in December, Jacques Santer did not want to interpret the vote as anything other than defiance and it was he who initiated the first 'ascent to extremes' by the intermediate of a letter to the President of the Parliament. In response came an institutional innovation which was reinterpreted as a 'heated' moment in the competition

between the two institutions. The Parliament refused to agree to the discharging of the budget by 270 votes to 230, with a few abstentions.

This situation of overhang changes its' emphasis from November onwards, but there again in a structure which stands up to a new political tactic: by giving Parliament the power of decision for institutional matters. None of the relations between the College and the MEPs are reduced to a face-to-face confrontation. Again here the vote of no-confidence should be put into context. Initially the vote was not exactly an act of democratic control, but more of a transaction which took place between President Santer and the MEPs and the socialists in particular, to make the situation legitimate once again.

It remains that this conciliation intervenes too late. Even more, by stressing alliance between the College and the majority group, it tends to exacerbate the oppositions. This change of the play is observed particularly in the overflow - in the sporting meaning of the term - which occurs via the second motion of censure, genuine rupture in relation to the compromise traditions. Deposited by Hervé Fabre-Aubrespy, French villierist delegate, master of the requests in the Council of old technical adviser State and Charles Pasqua's cabinet between 1986-1988, the second, on the other hand, motion of the socialists, as many terms which return to other political scandals is presented as "truth" motion against "truth-false". It is in addition the fruit of a paradoxical alliance concluded between sovereighist, liberals and greens which shows although it registers itself against dominant, and well-known motion played in advance, of the ESP. This composition shows although the "knock" starts from the margins and on the margins, but it also gives to be thought of the way in which superimpose themselves, here still, logical European and national. In France, the meeting of Parliament for the revision of the constitution having to allow the ratification of the treaty of Amsterdam takes place four days after the vote of this motion of censure. Similarly, the "farm" position of German is in close relation with that of the German journalists and can completely interpret itself as a preparation of the European elections. However, it intervenes so at a time when Germany assumes the chairmanship in the important negotiations around the 2000 agenda. In addition, for the German delegates, the motion of censure represents an occasion to make of a stone two knocks, the first directed against the Commission the second against France - via Edith Cresson - at a time when it represents its principal obstacle.

This transformation of the game is still given to be seen in the results of the vote of this second motion and in its interpretations. Those show, in a homologous way with it that is observed within the Commission, a very strong opposition between the countries of the North and those of the South. If all German voted yes, all Spanish, Portuguese and Italian voted against. At that are added the internal divisions and the politicisation of the speeches and of the standpoint. Throughout the debates, the "electoral" arguments are evoked constantly. The trade takes of the remainder the form of political plays-test where possible alliances grind themselves or the identity of the political marks. To give some examples, Nicole Fontaine and a number of delegates having voted no to the second motion denounce "the spirit partisan and the national interests" in a European register which prefigures directly what the countryside of the UDF will be. At the time of the nomination of the group of experts, Hervé Fabre-Aubrespy writes a mail to José Maria Gil-Roblès to propose to it naming Antoine Gaudino, the revealing of the Urba case, one of the most famous French affair a few year before.

This transformation of the play is observed finally in the distance that journalists take increasingly collectively. This distance marks itself in the democratic control function that they intend to embody, and it more especially as the Association of the international Press gave an opinion against the operations of the Commission. Jean Quatremer's article, of 31 January 1999, is thus perfectly exemplary of the way in which journalists put forward their vigilance. It reports indeed a blunder of the Commission which allows to post itself a note regretting "the taking of the press room by the investigation journalists" and prompts with "an amount of cynicism to hold confrontations" with journalists. This event makes still major noise there and takes all the characteristics of another affair within affairs, at a time when the effects of the nomination of the wise men's committee packed themselves and the majority of representatives agree to recognise that games are made.

But independently of this posture, journalists make use of interpretation designs increasingly close to those that they take or that they took historically in national space. It is the case when they engage in the almost heroic form of the open letter, as in this article of the page discusses heading "lives the eurocensure" co-signed by J. Quatremer (11 January 1999). But it is especially the case in the reading grids to which they have recourse. Beautiful joint illustration of the mechanisms of frustration and of politicisation of the categories which occurs, journalists are all the more led to see in Jacques Santer an anti-Delors, or even "man weak", as

it does not judge it to the height of the definition of the "government" that they have in their head. At that the consequence of calculations over the succession of Santer is added. Romano Prodi's name is thus put forward as from November 1998 i.e. five months before the resignation and more than eight months before the normal replacement of the Commission. Similarly it is in eminently political categories that the possible nominations are interpreted, such as that of Oscar Lafontaine, which there still breaks with the practices in use at the time of the previous nominations in the Commission.

One sees better how here these new ways of playing take form. It is not at the same time a chance if, as from February and under the effect of the meeting between journalistic pressures and the political standpoint, all the actors, including the closest ones to a compromise solution, Pauline Greene and Jacques Santer, are led to see in the resignation the only exit. In a very political way, they in fact are pushed to follow a movement which invokes increasingly "the European opinion" and to envisage a crisis exit in the guns of the parliamentary play. From this point of view, but there should be other development, the resignation does not appear only like a constraint, but like a "knock" intended to revalorise the communication and "to give again to it the hand".

The College's communication: between wrong-footed and off-side

In this fast moving context, one can say that the Commission's communication was in delayed action. On the one hand, it seems that nobody in the Commission envisaged what was going to occur. Actors, in other words, were overtaken by the situation. Even more, one can say that attacks caught the college and its routinized communication register on the wrong foot.

First of all, it seems that the College was caught on the wrong foot, because its communication register is based on long-term legitimisation. This register is mainly based on its capacity to embody the Community interest, and in particular on its capacity to promote European integration via technical achievements. To borrow a hypothesis developed elsewhere (Georgakakis 1999), one of the specific characteristics of the European communication is its capacity to distribute "assets of salvation, like other hierocratic groups", as Max Weber would have said (Max Weber XXXX). That is typical of what J. Santer did in the beginning of the crisis. The context of the crisis was the launching of Euro, which was considered by

everybody, at that time, as a major mission, an imperative for the future and, especially, a success. It was in this register that Jacques Santer and the college played in the beginning. All his speeches rested on the success and tended to devalue the crisis. Thereafter, other major issues of European integration served as a base in the communication of the president of the Commission, enlargement, "the 2000 agenda", etc.

But the problem here is the fact that this communication occurs in a context of politicisation of issues and of the European political practices. This context does not await technical merits or capacity to conclude successfully and discreetly major issues, but “charisma”, which is a political resource by definition. This observation doesn’t consist to say if Jacques Santer has charisma or not. But the charismatic register took more values in this context. This was very new within European institution and the actors are rare who are ready to hold the role. Moreover, in a context of strong oppositions, few actors are willing to recognise this charisma. It is the first time the EC has been wrong-footed, which makes it possible to speak about "poor" communication.

The second wrong footed action is due to another legitimisation process of the Commission, which is newer. When J. Santer arrived at the head of the Commission, he followed a moralisation policy. This policy falls under the new ideology of the "good governance” and was intended to do two things. On the one hand, it wanted to mark a political brake in relation to the Delors Commission. On the other hand, that was a useful means of positioning the Commission above the power of the states by embodying a high and moral value. The problem here is obviously that what the Commission had intended to be its strength had actually ended up being its weakness. Considering the impossibility of breaking the College's collegial dimension, it is a case of paradoxical communication, like Watslawick would have said (Watslawick, XXXX). Either the College protects its members and disavows the moralisation policy on which its new credit is based, or it denounces them, and is led to "political suicide".

These paradoxes of the Santer Commission certainly had an effect in terms of blurring its image to the journalists, as to the general public. But this blurring is also due to the distending relations with journalists and, as we will see, to the fact that the EC strategies of communication occurred with mishaps. After the wrong foot came the off-side. One would like indeed to suggest that the shifting of the political game put the strategies deployed by the

Commission off-sides. First, this off-side is due to the fact that there is no close journalistic field at European level, and that therefore the effects of censorship on which the professionals of politics rest are inefficient. The case of the communication from Edith Cresson is representative of this problem. Immediately following the publication of the affairs, the French commissioner used a traditional tactic in the ordinary political game. Affairs were revealed by the Belgium press, but especially it seems that a group of journalists had joined forces, including french journalists of *Liberation*, *Le Monde* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*. In regard to this situation, Edith Cresson filed a lawsuit against *Liberation*, but at the same time, she gave an exclusive interview to *Le Monde*. On the one hand the sanction, on the other hand the symbolic remuneration. This tactic allows the effective newspaper *Le Monde*, which is considered the most institutional one, to take distances in relation to the revelation of affairs. It also results for the journalist of *Le Nouvel Observateur*, which had political sympathy for the non-communist left-hand side, in withdrawing itself from the group in the process of forming itself.

In a national situation, this tactic should lead *Liberation* to withdrawal, insofar as this newspaper would be isolated. The prestige of the press being connected with its institutional dimension, a link rupture involves a downgrading. But here Jean Quatremer found support in the foreign press, which is not held by the commissioner. It is exactly the same situation with Belgian journalist Jean Nicolas, who found supports in the German and English press. The failure of communication is here due to the fact that the game escapes the national journalistic field without inserting itself in a new European journalistic field, structured and therefore comprising effects of censorship.

That is valid for the initial period, that of the release of the affairs. But in a second time, the situation changed. Everything indicated that the Commission would contribute to unifying the journalists, but it would do so at its own disadvantage. First of all, this unification passes through multiple consultations, and in face to face with journalists. But it also passes through a common tactic. The given instruction concerning the management of relations with journalists within the administration and intended to cut with the leaks is of this order. There again, it seems that the Commission sought to establish competitive relations between journalists, intended to hold the play, or so that it itself held the ultimate position of power.

Unfortunately for them, the game moved too quickly. Certainly, a field set itself up temporarily, but with logics of autonomisation which led the journalists to obtain common rules and to detach itself very early from the political authority. The place and the role of the association of the accredited journalists in the conflict are exemplary from this point of view. For instance the International Press Association declared: "Europe is now so important that we need a strict control from parliament and press". The consequence is that all the tactics of the College failed. For instance, the rumour concerning Jean Nicolas and his neo-nazi connections were immediately understood as disinformation and propaganda.

As a conclusion, one would say that this case pinpoints the past "non political communication" of the EC. All political problems used to be denied, and that can explain the surprise of these affairs, and this particular case of political mismanagement. The crisis shows that something is "turning" in this matter, but in very different and non coordinated ways. To some extent, that makes the game uncontrollable and that is now the problem of the new Commission. –ore generally, on peut dire que l'épisode de la démission est un bon exemple de la façon dont s'invente de nouvelles façons de faire de la politique dans l'espace européen. De ce point de vue, la crise n'est pas à seulement à comprendre comme un moment où la Commission aurait perdu en légitimité. Il ne fait nul doute que cela a été le cas pour certains membres du collège, ou plus généralement les fonctionnaires, dans leur relation avec l'extérieur. Mais, au delà de cela, la crise a représenté un moment fort de construction de l'espace politique européen, comme le montre les jeu-test, dans l'émergence de catégorie d'action et de perception politiques, si ce n'est l'émergence d'une représentation de la commission comme gouvernement de l'Europe, responsable devant le parlement et cette „opinion publique" européenne si souvent invoquée dans la crise. De ce point de vue, si, en tant qu'institution poltique, la Commission n'a rien gagné dans la crise, rien ne dit non plus qu'elle ait perdu sur le plus long terme.

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