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Does professionalization matter (or why studying the professionals of European institutions and policies) ?

Conference pronounced for the *First Pan-European Conference on European Union Politics*, European Consortium of Political Research, Bordeaux, septembre 2002

My contribution is not a real contribution but rather a presentation for this collective book. Some of you already know this book because you are the contributors. But I would like to have a few words to present it. The sociology of people who run Europe is curiously absent of the majority of the works on the European integration, and specially the process of their professionalisation, and in fact their professionalisations. In this respect, this book is an attempt, in the experimental meaning of the word, to benefit from the lesson of the sociology of profession in the European field.

In this contribution I would like to present some benefits of the sociology of profession in order to understand the differentiation of a European political space. Whatever the research trends of the sociology of profession, it invites us to wonder about the experience of those involved in the European integration, about their beliefs and their assets, or about the internal and external rifts which define them. In the meantime, this sociology is studying the very process of their creation. In this perspective, the sociology of the Euro-professionals makes it possible to identify, at least, three directions in order to understand the differentiation process of the European political space.

The first one concerns the Competition between the group and the out-group

The mechanisms of opposition between groups, or even, in the English tradition, of competition between the 'professionals' and the state are at the heart of the sociology of the professions. It is to say that in the case of Europe, this prospect invites us to pay attention to the effects of the opposition between the actors labelled as "nationals" and those labelled as "Europeans »

From this point of view, the differentiation process of the European political space can embody itself in several dimensions. The first one concerns the definition of proper skills. In this way, the contributions to this work make it possible to refer to the mechanisms which enable them to embody, even with differentiated success, the Community interest. The capacity to play with this new definition of the 'general interest' appears to be the key element of the differentiation between 'eurocrats' and national bureaucrats. But still, the capacity to embody the Community interest supposes more than the success of a strategic mechanism: it goes through the process of production and of interiorization of belief. The chapters devoted to the Commission thus show that it involves a number of *modus operandi*, like the personal presentation of the Commissioners (A. Smith), the reactivation of "Community" values in the officials' mobilisations (D. Georgakakis), the tendency to claim the competence of regular 'practitioner' of Europe (C. Robert), for example. And this is the same way outside the commission.

The issue of the definition of proper skills and of their monopoly invites us to wonder up to what point this differentiation occurs the constitution of specific careers, like those that distinguish the 'jazzmen' of the 'business musicians', to take up Becker's analyses. Several contributions invite to distinguish gradual stages of the entrance in this kind of career. From

this point of view, the commitment and the belief in the 'things' of Europe could represent a first stage. We find This same faith in the case of the College of Bruges (V. Schnabel), the choice of international schools or in the internal communication newspapers of the European officials. The second stage of the career, could concern the stage of mobilities. They are first of all geographical, whether they represent frequency of the displacements or the 'expatriation' to one of the institutional places of Europe. But, this also involves sectoral mobility, as shown in the chapters by Eric Davoine, Cécile Robert or Virginia Schnabel.

Nothing says that all the actors shift naturally from one stage to another. It remains that at the stage of commitment and of mobility, it is possible to add the stage of the limits of Europeanisation and, especially, of the return of 'the national habitus'. This is the real turning point to take up Evereth Hugues' analysesⁱ. The doubts that mark out the expatriates' careers, The transformations of the networks from Bruges, the anticipations on the careers or, as well, the officials' resistance to the 'nationalization' of the Commission in high level are as many indicators of what an important moment goes on.

The question of the differentiation of an activity encourages finally to wonder to what extent the identities and the careers of those involved are in harmony with their social 'career'. The definition of a profession is always the result a meeting between the definition of the job and the social history of those who practice itⁱⁱ. Yet the following chapters on the officials, the lawyers, the managers or the trade-unionists do not answer entirely the question, but they invite us at least to raise it by referring to the social strategies of internationalization of experiences or the social background of European vocation, and how does it change.

But let's turn to the second point : Internal competition and effects of closure

Indeed, these differentiation processes draw a second prospect. Numerous are the authors who show that a profession is everything but a homogeneous whole. It is rather a competition space between very different entities. Further more, it is within this competition between entities that the 'dynamics of the professions' is created, to take up again the title of an article by Ruth Bucher and Anselm Strauss. This trend has the advantage of showing that internal shifts are not only due to the multicultural characteristics of the European Union. The differentiation process necessarily goes through the growing autonomy of a number of issues and through the constitution of new drifts that outgrow national drifts and which close the group on itself. A sociology of euro-professionals therefore tends to draw a map of positions of the European field.

These internal fragmentation processes can be seen within the Commission. But, beyond the Commission, these shifts appear to be connected with the possession of different resources which tend to separate the European area in antagonistic poles. These poles oppose actors evolving within "strategic" functions, developing skills of regular political 'practitioner' thanks to the multiplication of the experiences or the memberships of elite colleges (Bruges, ENA, sciences-po, London School of Economics, etc.), to actors with more sectoral resources. They also oppose technical profiles (agricultural and scientific engineers...) to economists or management officers, increasingly numerous. Many of the shifts can be seen in the reform of the Commission and in the phenomenon of racism between the north and the south or between the new generations and the keepers of the European tradition. From this point of view, the fights for the acquisition or the safeguard of skills have to be analysed for what they are : fights for the definition of the legitimate property of professional skills that transcend national shifts.

But at the same time, the existence of these various structuring resources also invites us to wonder about the weight of the national identities from another point of view than the one of cultural determinisms. When they are, in this area, at the heart of internal conflicts, national identities indeed appear as 'labels' which blend different kinds of legitimacies (or different deviations). Being a member of a 'small' or of a 'big' state gives the actors different importances. These national labels also refer to sectoral legitimacies: for France the agricultural skill or the ability to cooperate with the African countries ; for Germany the economic and monetary policy ; for Greece the (unique ?) maritime issues...If nationalities refer to different types of legitimacy, they also refer to types of deviation. The actors belonging to a big country are suspected more spontaneously to serve their national interests prior to the European idea, which induces some kind of fragility for their position in some negotiations. In the same way, the representatives of the southern countries become less able to prove their ability of being good managers, in so far as the criteria for a smart management are defined as northern criteria.

What are, in the meantime, the changes that occur within the European area, which is still building ? Do we attend to the relegation of some assets to the benefit of others? Undeniably, the legal and economic skills seem to overcome the sectoral knowledge and assets (agriculture, science). It is even more so concerning both the ability to speak foreign languages and the possession of a 'european culture', which are essential during the first period. In the same way, the fact that the "sound management" imposes itself according to northern criteria, means, as a result, according more importance to recent european members and especially to young representatives, more receptive to the new trends and requirements of the anglo-saxon management, than to the 'oldest', who prefer classical economic theories.

And now the last series of questions that can provides sociology of profession : The effects of situation and practices

These changes encourage, consequently, a third prospect: that which consists more largely in wondering about the logics of situation, and even more of interiorization of practices that try to ward off the strong uncertainty concerning Europe.

Several contributions thus refer to the flow of the conjonctures which characterizes the European area and make that, after all, it does not have the required degree of objectiveness which characterises an already studied topic. This flow is first of all due to the way in which the actors try to locate political Europe in the major international issues : opening to the East, multilateral trade negotiations, etc. It also appears in the rediscovery of problems which were driven back in the first years of the European integration, such as the foreign policy, the "political" practices of the commissioners, or the issues of a social policy at an European level. The assertion of these new skills and of the roles which refer to them supposes mechanisms of knowledge that occur out of any "European" pre-existing reference and in a strongly competitive context.

The important weight of the conjuncture is also due to the existence of particularly strong inter-institutional competition, as the first two parts of this work show. In many respects, the European area is placed under monitoring, in the sense that the members of the European Parliament, of the Commission and of the Council are in perpetual competition. The understanding of the situation is vague because the auxiliaries are increasingly numerous, and because they tend to weigh on the definition of the conjuncture. It is particularly true for the regional representatives, but more especially for the journalists or for the trade-unionists, as

many agents who can connect themselves to create new group dynamisms within the european political area.

The sense of innovation or opportunism which characterizes the European leadership managers can also be the subject of a similar study. For sure, they are also involved in compensation strategies that imply the necessity of conquering new types of skills. But, is this skill equally shared ? What determines the sharing of these skills ? Careers, positions, situations? Similarly, what are its effects on the inner organisation of some sectors of activity? These are very different and go from the assertion of the regular 'practitioner's' skills to the regression on status negotiations, as shown successively by Cécile Robert and Yves Buchet de Neuilly.

It is nonetheless true that what binds the very different actors analysed in this book, is the ability to learn how to manage situations defined on several levels, and give oneself reading grids to do so. It is also because of this complexity that institutional and national definitions emerge. Their explanatory power is weaker than what do think the actors, but, after all, they tend to clear the way and to, therefore, influence the strategies they develop.

As a conclusion, I would like to say that this collective work can open new way on eurean studies. Tracks on recent transformations of european union. To take up again the weberian analogy (see infra), we can legitimately ask ourselves : to what extent do 'priests' succeed to 'prophets' and, above all, what kind of incidences does this produce on the definition of 'function charismas', specific to Euro- professionals ? But ther are also traks about European integration process. in other words, the objective is to analyse a 'europeanisation' process linked to the actors' careers. Here, analyses show that this professionalization is not a uniform logic, nor is the differenciation a completed process. Thus, it is much rather on the diversity of these processes , their unequal success or the resistance they cause that the contributions to this study analyse, and then again, three types of processes constitute the framework of this book. The creation of a focal group, the multiplication of the auxiliaries, the Europeanization of the professions. But this is anather debate