FRENCH UNITY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION: THE ROLE OF REGIONS

ANGELA GIOVANANGELI

Translated from the French by Travis Watters

In France, the term “national unity” is a slogan that remains the prerogative of politicians from both sides of politics concerned with expressions and phrases that speak of the importance of French cohesion.

The subject of French national unity is vast, touching the heart of France’s political, economic and social structures, including education, work, linguistic policy, the legal system and social assistance. The notion of unity within the territorial context, especially that of the French regions, is of particular interest for certain reasons: French regions are closely tied to the administrative division of France, which is tied to the policy of national unity. An historical study of the territorial evolution of France highlights the fact that, since the Ancien Régime, the territorial division of France has been executed with the express purpose of unifying the French territory politically. European integration, however, has introduced a new way of viewing the role of the European regions. It involves considering regions no longer as divisions within a nation, but rather as areas capable of dialogue with other regions of European Union member nations.

In this study regarding the idea of French national unity, European integration will be examined, as well as how it coexists with policies in place in France, a country that favours the cohesion of State. It will seek to determine whether the European Union’s regional policy, which encourages co-operation between regions of different European countries, calls into question the notion of unity in France, and will focus in particular on the regional groupings of the Upper Rhine and the Basque Country. These ideas will be
considered in the context of ongoing debates amongst thinkers like Robert Lafont who argue that Europe is a way for French regions to regain their voices,\(^1\) while others like Pierre Lellouche insist that European integration is a vehicle for reinforcing French national policy.\(^2\)

More generally, and in order to justify our interest in the words “national unity”, a rapid examination of a few speeches given and words published by political figures over the course of the last few decades will attest to the difficulty of the term “unity”. By way of example, the second volume of Charles de Gaulle’s *Mémoires de guerre* is entitled “l’unité” and retraces the period from 1942 to 1944. This book provides a taste of what was the objective of Gaullian politics in the context of the year 1942. It portrays the cohesion of French resistance as a “legitimate instrument in the struggle against the enemy and, with regard to the allies, an essential support for my policy of independence and unity”.\(^3\) In this context, the word “unity” clearly refers to that of a France divided between the German occupation and the multi-factional resistance, where the word “unity” becomes the leitmotif of a nation torn apart by war and political ideologies. But this term also reveals a significant preoccupation of General de Gaulle: for him, unity is the general response to French national crises.

Some examples of the use of the term “unity” also appear in connection with other politicians. On 29\(^{th}\) August 2004, at the time of the kidnapping of two French journalists in Iraq and within the context of the new law prohibiting “conspicuous” religious symbols, the *France 2* news bulletin broadcast a speech given by the then-President Jacques Chirac. The *France 2* presenter described this speech as “a call to national unity”. Chirac described the tradition of equality, respect and protection of the free practice of all religions in France as the “cement of our national cohesion”.\(^4\) This theme is reminiscent of an article published in *le Monde* on 27\(^{th}\) December 2003, where Chirac

---

declared himself in favour of a law prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols for “national cohesion” and in order to avoid “division”.

In a more recent article, *le Nouvel Observateur* on 20th August 2006 published the main points of a keynote address given by Ségolène Royal at the fête de la rose in Frangy-en-Bresse (Saône-et-Loire), in preparation for her candidature in the presidential elections of 2007. During her speech, Royal affirmed her support for Mitterrand’s ideology, and passed it on to a 2006 audience. For her, “the words of François Mitterrand went straight to the heart of the matter: the duty of unity, without which nothing is possible…”.

Finally, on 6th May 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy called the French to unity on the occasion of his victory in the presidential elections. He asked the French to “present the image of an undivided, united France”. He also “declared that there is only one France.”

These examples illustrate how the political framework changes, but the theme of French unity remains at the centre of the French national interest of major political players.

Yet, parallel to this idea of French unity resides a unity that is contested. Historians such as Suzanne Citron demand a re-examination of the past in order to shatter the myth of a united France. Others, such as Colette Beaune, speak of France in the plural, or of “two Frances”, a two-faced France hidden behind the illusion of unity.

French unity is also contested by the emergence of new territorial identities. These new expressions of identity are created by transformations in contemporary society, especially due to European integration, which require a new way of understanding the territorial area.

In the context of the regionalisation of France, the evolution of the concept of French unity is all the more intriguing, given that the region is perceived as being capable of

---

7 ‘Sarkozy remercie ses partisans à la Concorde,’ www.france2.fr, accessed online 7/05/07.
breaking or reinforcing the unity of France at two levels. The first is at the sub-national level, where the battle over the regionalisation of France has enlivened debate since the nineteenth century. The other is at the super-national level, within the framework of European integration. Today, the French regions are at the centre of controversies concerning the national cohesion of France. Some political thinkers note that a deepening of the role of regions at these two levels highlights the unity of France. Others see in this only the division of the nation, hence the paradox of the unifying aspect of French regions.

The 1960s were a period of reflection in terms of French regionalisation. The arrival of the notion of Europe – the European Community at the end of the 1950s – and of discussions about the regionalisation of France in the 1960s, evolved alongside each other. In his work *La révolution régionaliste*, Robert Lafont explains that, in the context of the 1960s, the idea of Europe stirs up contradictory positions for regional nationalists. On the one hand, Europe adds another layer of administration and threatens regional identity. On the other, it is a way for regions to reclaim their voices, insofar as Europe is able to “loosen the stranglehold of French centralism…”  9

In a more contemporary context, the politician Pierre Lellouche refers to the notion of Europe in terms of nationalism. For Lellouche, Europe is a “Gallic illusion” that the French dream of glorifying and converting “into a sort of ‘bigger France’, where our other partners would only – and much to their delight! – increase national power and champion the hexagonal model”, 10 as it were. Lellouche highlights the paradox that has emerged from European discourse – a discourse which, since 1958, has called for the free circulation of good, assets and people, while the debates favouring the construction of Europe have leaned little by little towards “an anti-globalisation rhetoric” of broadened discriminatory national preference…” 11, i.e. a new nationalism that would foreground the nation. For thinkers such as Lellouche, the construction of Europe leads to nationalistic thought, which clearly underlines the existence of the nation.

---

11 Ibid., p.90.
Definition of the term “region”

In France, the notion of regions is both ancient and modern – ancient in the sense that France is a patchwork of cultural and linguistic identities attached to the past and to regional identity. It is new in the sense that the administrative division of France into regions took place in the 1980s. Certain modern-day regions in France evoke historic regions – Brittany and Alsace, for example. Other regions are new creations with no ties to history or culture. The Centre, for example, is a purely administrative name explaining the geographical position of the region.

In the European context, the meaning of the word “region” is problematic, since, “due to the differing attitudes of the Member States, Regions are not equal in the eyes of the European Union…”. The word “region” carries different connotations depending on the country in question: Länder in Germany refers to a federal administration; for France, the word région signifies a decentralised administration with limited powers; in Greece, local administrative divisions refer to an extremely limited governmental authority.

French regions in the debate on unity

After long debates reaching back to the 19th century on the problems linked to centralisation, an historic trend in France, and after the increasing number of talks over the course of the 20th century, the speech given by General de Gaulle in Lyon on 24th March 1968 proclaimed that “The centuries-old effort for centralisation… is no longer necessary”. This speech on the necessity of decentralisation in France echoes the debates that began at the end of the 19th century and continued throughout the 20th century, culminating, or rather ending disappointingly, with the vote against the idea of regionalisation, the theme of the referendum that resulted in the resignation of President

---

de Gaulle in 1969. Yet, the idea of reforming the territorial divisions of France was taken up again by Maurice Couve de Murville’s government, which drew up a referendum law leading to the creation of regions in France. The report, prepared by the Délegation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale (DATAR) in 1970, defined the regionalisation of France and highlighted the problems created by centralisation: economic instabilities, social inequalities and political tensions between the French departments. Reinforcing regional power was, to politicians, the answer to this instability. It was only in 1982, after the Socialists came to power, and with the Defferre laws, that regions became fully-fledged administrative units (law no. 82-213 of 2nd March 1982). Since 2003, regions have become an essential characteristic of the Republic, appearing in the French Constitution.14

Throughout these debates, the same theme has dominated and reflected the institutional evolution of France, oscillating between centralisation and decentralisation.15 The movement of this pendulum, swinging between a centralising State and decentralisation, shows the concern modification of the territorial and administrative divisions of France caused in terms of national unity. For example, when France was divided into regions in 1982, political discourse clearly reassured the French public that national unity was not in danger. In the final paragraph of article 59 of the law of 2nd March 1982, the legislator asserted that “the union and organisation of the regions in mainland France and the overseas territories undermines neither the unity of the Republic, nor the integrity of the territory”.16 Since their creation, regions have kindled much controversy and continue to be contested even today. Articles addressing the failure of regions in France17 clash with research indicating that “surveys are showing more and more that regions are the politico-administrative units of the future (65% in 1990 compared to only 59% in

14 Constitutional revision - loi constitutionnelle n° 2003-276 du 28 mars 2003 relative à l'organisation décentralisée de la République. For further information see the J.O. no. 75 from 29th March 2003, p. 5568.
15 It is a phenomenon that has existed since the feudal era, by nature decentralised, followed by the monarchy, which brought the kingdom together under a single unit of power, culminating with the absolutism of Louix XIV. Then came the Revolution and Bonaparte, establishing a strong centralised system, followed by the Third Republic, which instated parliamentary democracy, while still allowing the State to dominate. Finally, the decisive debates between 1968 and 1981 on the regionalisation of France.
16 Rémond, op cit., p.32.
The failure, according to critics, is in fact due to a lack of efficiency and a lack of power in the political decision making process. Despite the fact that, since the law of 13th August 2004, the regions have found themselves endowed with more and more responsibilities in terms of economic development, regional development, education, professional training and health, a paradox exists in that the State is still omnipresent. As Dumont highlights, “the State retains a dominant role, as illustrated by the fact that it maintains certain services at different territorial levels”. Indeed, this is a unique situation when compared with administrative structures elsewhere in Europe, in the sense that France has established a double administration “one of which depends on the State and the other on the regional council, each in charge of operations falling within comparable rationales within the same territory”. This is unlike other European regions “where regional executives have the responsibility of applying national laws in their geographical jurisdiction”.

Another paradox that springs forward is linked to the way in which the French State uses its regions to finance sectors that should, by law, be financed by the State itself. According to the law of 29th July 1982, the State has put in place contracts defining the actions that the State and regions commit to undertake during a certain period. These contracts are called State-Region plan contracts and, within the framework of regional development, give the State the right to obtain funding from the regions for sectors for which the State is responsible, such as higher education and research. The State must pay an amount, but, according to Dumont, it “has only paid part of the promised amounts, or with unjustified delays”. As a result, regions are at the service and under the authority of the State for matters of development concerning only a section of the territory. This financial dependence highlights the fact that the country’s unity is still seen by the State in terms of central domination.

---

18 Rémond, op cit., p.7.
19 Le Galès and Peter John, op cit., p. 51. This article notes that, despite an increase in the allocation of the regional budget since the 1980s, the regions have very little influence in the French political system.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
Taking these various factors into account, it is difficult to measure the success of the introduction of regions. Moreover, the economic and demographic disparities between the regions indicate that unity in these territorial domains has not been achieved, despite all the regional reforms. French regions present great demographic disparities: the most populous region of France is Ile de France, with 11 million inhabitants, whereas Corsica has only 0.3 million inhabitants.\textsuperscript{25} Inequality is also seen in other areas, such as the rate of employment, due to differing economic histories (Nord-Pas-de-Calais, Languedoc-Roussillon, Lorraine and Corsica are the regions most affected by a low employment rate, whereas Rhône-Alpes is experiencing strong economic development).

The success of regionalisation is sometimes explained by politicians by the fact that regions can today intervene more efficiently in areas such as secondary education. Yet, as Dumont explains, despite the decentralisation of power since the 1980s, “regulatory legislative powers belong to the State alone. As soon as a regional policy implies regulations, only national institutions are authorised to prescribe norms which, incidentally, cannot differ from one region to another”.\textsuperscript{26}

In the European context, the issue of regions is not confined to the national level, but spills over to affect the construction of Europe. The European Union has added an additional dimension to France’s territorial administration. That is, development in France is no longer carried out only at the national, regional, departmental, intercommunal or municipal levels; regional development also occurs at the European level. Furthermore, Europe is changing the relationship between Paris and her regions. Paris, who has for centuries dominated the French territory, must now, in a sense, share this privilege with Brussels, the capital of Europe.

\textsuperscript{25} Estimates: INSEE 2001.
\textsuperscript{26} Dumont, Op cit., p. 106. It is important to note that the regions in Belgium have legislative power, the Länder in Germany each have a constitution, while in Spain, Catalonia and the Basque Country have increased power in terms of legislative and regulatory decisions.
The voice of the French region in European dialogue

The goal of creating the Common Market in the 1950s was to develop a common economic zone, in order to improve the standard of living for the six original member countries. The first treaties (the Treaty of Paris in 1950 and the Treaty of Rome in 1956) focussed on economic exchanges between the member countries. The Treaty of Rome makes little reference to regions, but, in the context of the economic development of member countries, mentions the importance of harmony between regions of member countries and that “the gaps between different Regions and the lag of the disadvantaged” must be reduced.27 It was only on 18th March 1975 that the European Regional Development Fund, the ERDF, was created to help regions that, for various reasons, were in need of financial assistance (industrial redevelopment, compensation due to the negative effects of community policy, economic instability caused by the joining of new Member States). The European Community grew, and, as a result, was confronted with the problem of member countries with regions lagging in economic development. It was for this reason that the European Council of Paris, in 1972, entrusted to the European Commission the drawing up of a proposition concerning the establishment of a Regional Fund in order to help the regions of the EC that were the most disadvantaged in terms of funding for industrial investments, services and infrastructure. This marked the beginning of Community regional policy, but, it is important to note, it was a policy in keeping with the national policy pursued by the States in question.

With European integration, the regions of France were vested with a new role, as Claude de Granrut, a member of the Committee of the Regions in 1994 explained: “A triangular regional planning process, Region-State-Commission, is established. It gives the Regions a sort of status as interlocutor with the Commission. It reinforces them in their economic and regional development capacities”.28 Indeed, the regional economic disparities highlighted by the European Commission in the 1980s propelled the regions to the fore of their countries’ economic policy.

The evolution of the role of the region continued during the 1990s. The Treaty of the European Union, also known as the Treaty of Maastricht, signed in December 1991, created additional space for the regions, firstly with the establishment of the Committee of the Regions,\(^{29}\) then with the principle of subsidiarity desired by the regions, and finally with the regions’ right to “sit on the Council of Ministers for matters falling within their scope of activities, as far as they are empowered by the central State”.\(^{30}\) The scope of regional activities was at first limited to five areas: economic and social cohesion, health, education, trans-European infrastructure and culture. With the Treaty of Amsterdam, it was extended to the following areas: social policy, the environment, employment policy, professional training and transport. Until the end of the 1990s, the State was France’s sole interlocutor with the Commission. Since the reforms of 1999, the regions have had the ability to legally negotiate the management of structural funds directly with the European Commission. It is true, as de Granrut states, that there has been progress in the evolution of dialogue between the regions and the European Commission. We may even note that the regions have acquired more administrative power since their creation. It must be remembered, however, that in its mission to preserve the country’s national cohesion, the State has implemented a legality control allowing the State to maintain its right of surveillance over decisions made by local authorities. Although the regions have a certain level of independence concerning the direction to be taken in regards to their local area and the nature of the dialogue they would like to establish with the Commission, the State reserves the right to make all final decisions. The orientation of this policy is clearly determined by the policy of national unity set out in the French Constitution.

Since the Treaty of Maastricht, very few initiatives concerning the regions have been outlined. The Treaties of Nice and Amsterdam did not develop the issue of regions. It is true that the Committee of the Regions remains a consultative body, or even a limited power. Nevertheless, this study aims to see how the programs developed for the regions

---

\(^{29}\) As indicated by Granrut, the Council and the Commission consult the Committee of the Regions on all issues of specific regional interest. The Committee may put forth opinions by its own initiative. For the regions, this means an institutional presence in the European Union. Granrut, Op cit., p. 29.

in Europe – especially the programs facilitating co-operation between regions of different countries – coexist, in the case of France, with the country’s unity.

Certain regions in France are currently reinforcing their economic and cultural collaboration with other regions in Europe. In fact, the regions are even recognised for the central role they play in the economic construction of the European Union. A quick look at the European Commission’s regional policy website provides evidence of the contribution made by regions within the framework of the global economy. According to the Commission, the regions of the European Union are the first to be affected when economic changes occur at the world level. It is for this reason that it is necessary to manage each nation’s economy through the regions.³¹

Several initiatives have been implemented in order to facilitate and encourage links between the regions of the European Union. The fact that communication tools such as the trans-national blog “Tales from the Borderland” exist, launched in August 2007 with the goal of informing cross-border communities, is proof of the links between European regions, and highlights the dialogue that goes beyond national borders. Moreover, projects encouraging co-operation between regions with common goals, and competitions promoting the concept of regions also deepen the dialogue between the regions of Europe. The competition for innovative action and programs such as INTERREG (inter-regional co-operation) are some examples of this co-operation.

The first competition for innovative action was launched by the European Commission in 2004, with the goal of showcasing regional initiatives. The les Créanautes ³² project from the Limousin region in France won one of these prizes (amongst seven other European regions) for a project that exhibited the region’s uniqueness. Seven teams of young people were sent out for this project, with the mission of finding the ‘happening’ places in the Limousin region. The result: a series of seven films was produced, showcasing the region’s strong points.

This journey draws parallels with the school book *Le tour de France par deux enfants*, published in 1877 and written by Augustine Fouillée under the pseudonym of G. Bruno (and used in French primary schools until the 1950s). Bruno’s book recounts a journey taken around France by young people. The story’s objective is to acquaint children with the French territory and its activities, and subsequently link all of France through a feeling of shared nationhood, common destiny and national identity within the framework of the national policies of the Third Republic. The Limousin project begins with a similar format, but in contrast to Bruno’s schoolbook, the journey occurs to showcase the region’s difference and specificity, and is a way of highlighting its strong points. The project’s logo depicts seven young people with cameras in a yellow bus. Its poster, too, features this idea of recording and capturing images of regional activities.

In the same vein, the INTERREG program was created in the beginning of the 1990s, with the help of European funding, to promote projects and communication between the regions of several European countries, particularly member countries of the European Union. The program’s objective is to group cross-border, trans-national and interregional regions in order to improve the economic and social cohesion of the European zone.

The goals of these projects vary according to the economic, industrial or technological interest of the region. By way of example, a project’s theme could be the sharing of common borders, ecological research, coastal conservation, industrial interests, or the reduction of suburban violence.

The INTERREG newsletter 33 speaks of the importance for regions of working and learning together in order to reduce the social and economic disparities generated by the ever-increasing integration of European countries and the competition brought about by an increasingly global exchange system. During a conference held in June 2007, the commission member responsible for regional policy, Danuta Hübner, noted that in order to confront global economic competition, regions should create ties between themselves, to align themselves with innovation coming out of countries such as Japan and the United

States. She also stressed the necessity of creating a regional brand to better attract investment to European regions.\textsuperscript{34}

The recognition of regional identity features in these interregional projects, as in the ALICERA project (Action Leaning for Identity and Competence in European Rural Areas), for example. This INTERREG project, begun in 2005, is an education program in rural areas involving seven regions in five European countries, including Brittany in France.\textsuperscript{35} In the context of an exchange of ideas between young people working in rural areas, it is also a question of realising that regional identity can be a way to achieve better economic success. Within this project, for example, a visit to farms in order to learn more about regional produce is also a way to increase regional identity and knowledge levels.\textsuperscript{36}

Two key elements of this European regional policy must be noted: the promotion of a regional identity and the grouping of regions beyond national borders. In regards to French policy, these two concepts seem to be at odds with the idea of national unity, especially that of the Third Republic, which worked to erase all notions of regional diversity.

Certain factors of INTERREG projects must be considered in greater detail to determine whether a grouping of regions from different countries would result in the unifying aspect of a State being called into question. In the case of France, the fact that the State still reigns supreme in decisions regarding national issues has been emphasised, yet this grouping of European regions raises other cultural and legal issues.

The European regional policy initiatives of particular interest are those concerning the border zones of different countries. Cross-border co-operation distinguishes itself from other co-operation between European regions by the fact that regions share a common border, i.e., a common geographical space. A shared border also implies historic ties between these neighbouring regions. It is even possible that, at certain times, these regions were part of the same national area (like Alsace, which was part of Germany

\textsuperscript{34} Danuta Hübner, \textit{Regions of the future: Innovation, Regional Development and Cohesion Policy}, IANIS + Annual Conference, Bilbao, 15\textsuperscript{th} June 2007, pp.1-5.
\textsuperscript{35} The other countries are Germany, Latvia, Hungary and Austria. See www.alicera.org.
between 1870 and 1918, then between 1940 and 1944) or of the same linguistic or cultural area (like the French and Spanish Basque Country). This is why it seems logical to focus this study on the national policy of unity in France, compared to the nation’s territorial administration, while concentrating on cross-border co-operation. This study begins with the idea that if a threat to the cohesion of France existed, due to the ties between European regions being deepened because of European Union regional policy, this would be evident in the regions with the most historic, linguistic or cultural ties, such as the Upper Rhine and the Basque Country.

The Upper Rhine is a co-operation between the borders of France, Switzerland and Germany. It is one of the oldest partnerships between border-sharing regions, dating from the 1960s, and began with the goal of creating economic stability between these regions. Today, the partnership has taken on various forms, including a cultural and educational dimension.

Owing to geographical similarities, common economic interests and similar historic ties, the Upper Rhine appears to be a zone that could easily free itself from the national yoke, to create a new entente founded on striking similarities. A school textbook was compiled by these regions to identify their social, historic and linguistic similarities. Yet, a conference on the intercultural connections of the Rhine revealed that cultural issues were at the root of the failure of certain common projects, notably between the French and German regions.

The cultural differences cover several domains: geographical, linguistic and historic. These differences are first visible in regards to the territories themselves, as the divisions are not uniform. As already mentioned, the meaning of the word “region” differs depending on the territory. Alsace is a region, Switzerland has five cantons (Bâle, Bâle Ville, Campagen, Aargau, Soleure and Jura), while in Germany there are two Länder (Bade-Wurtemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate). The way in which each division is

---

administered in regards to the national power is different, the German Länder being federated and enjoying greater autonomy than the French regions, which are part of a highly centralised administrative structure.

Concerning intercultural communication, in addition to French and German, the official languages, the presence of six local languages must be taken into account in this grouping (Frankish, Northern Alemanic, Badois, Alsacian, Southern Alemanic and Swabian).39

Added to this are factors tied to historic culture. The historian Birte Wassenberg cites the difficulties created in the cross-border project of a schoolbook for the Upper Rhine, whose goal is to “make young people aware of what unites them, distinguishes them and what can bring them together”.40 Wassenberg explains that the chapter on history in this textbook is lacking, “because of the disagreement between cross-border partners in regard to the necessity of describing the Second World War and its consequences for the Upper Rhine, and the way this is done”.41 These difficulties are not limited to the past, but also affect the domain of work. Another example given by Wassenberg explains that in the conventions regarding the signing of contracts, the French are more vague concerning a project’s settlement date, whereas a German expects a specific duration to be indicated for each activity covered by the contract.42

These intercultural problems have given rise to training programs seeking to inform participants in cross-border projects of the possible communication difficulties involved with these common projects. Despite the visible similarities between cross-border regions and the logic behind economic and cultural co-operation between them, the problem of culture exists and goes back to both political and historical structures, as well as to ways of thinking and acting. To aid in understanding the intercultural difficulty involved in a grouping of regions and, in this case, the French, Swiss and German cultures, a study carried out by Jacques Demorgon on the Complexité des cultures et de l’interculturel,43

39 Ibid., p. 408.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
highlights the genesis of the opposing political organisation in Germany and France, a key factor in the cultural antagonisms between the two countries. Demorgon is opposed to the policy of unification pursued in France under the Ancien Régime and the Republics, as opposed to the policy of plurality and diversity in Germany.44 This comparison underlines the fact that the policy of national unity in France is closely tied to the cultural elements that determine the thoughts and social and political behaviours of the individual, as is the case with the French in the common projects mentioned in the INTERREG program. In summary, the political structure of a country will have consequences for its culture. Demorgon proposes a geo-historical approach as a way of understanding cultural differences. In France, a long period of royal culture was followed by a market culture defined by successive complex crises (empires, restorations, republics, revolutions), while in Germany, “because Romanisation was repelled and Christianisation was partial or late”, community-based societies existed for longer.45 This late evolution from community to State stresses the notion of territory, or, as Demorgon explains, “a strong attachment to the natural and human environments”,46 which explains, in the context of Germany, “the political solution of Federalism in order to maintain these local and regional attachments”.47 This can be taken further with Alain Touraine’s assertion that some countries without a long tradition of a national State, such as Germany and Italy, disassociate the notions of nation and State (Deutschtum compared to Deutschland or italianità compared to lo Stato italiano). This stands in contrast to France, which “remains attached to the identification of the nation and the State, proclaimed and brought about by the French Revolution”,48 even in the context of European economic and political integration. This different political genesis in Germany and France, and this different way of understanding the nation, identify the reason why intercultural problems could emerge, and may also explain the differences that exist in regards to communication.

44 Ibid., p. 290.
45 Ibid., p. 291, Demorgon defines community-based societies as being “composed of groups of a limited number of human beings, living a subsistence lifestyle based on hunting and gathering. They were characterised by an overall perspective of the relationship with the natural and supernatural environments”.
46 Ibid., p. 294.
47 Ibid.
The following anecdote illustrates the antagonisms that appear concerning communication:

... when the French conference attendees speak, the German conference attendees and audience are unsatisfied. They find the presentations brilliant in the way they throw light in all directions but don’t make clear and coherent sense. The presentations are felt to be pieces of verbal gallantry, in the end superficial language games. On the French side, the German presentations are often judged as long, unoriginal, not enriching, too educational.  

In an attempt to explain communication difficulties, Demorgon’s idea of “two poles, amongst others” in communication will be used: “that of the explicit, and that of the implicit.”  

The German and the Swiss tend to be rather more explicit (the meaning of words must be made clear), while the French are often implicit in their conversation (the meaning of words must be alluded to). What is most interesting in this theory of the explicit and the implicit is its link with the nation policies of a country. Demorgon points out that countries with strong religious, political and cultural unity, such as France and Japan, have no need to make the meaning of all their words clear, since words are understood through shared symbolic, cultural, political and social allusions. In countries composed of many States, such as Switzerland, Germany or even the United States, explicit language and very precise communication is needed, due to socio-historic and cultural roots not being shared. In the French context, national policy favours the unity of the country, where “A more implicit communication could not exist, except in a common social context. From the same common experiences, the references will be understood”.  

Common experiences are justified by the successive unifications of France: the Roman Empire, Christianity, the evolution of the national territory, linguistic unity and secularism. This point of view sheds light on the differences encountered in the world of Franco-German affairs in cross-border projects, for example.

50 Ibid.  
51 Ibid., p. 296.  
52 Ibid.
The Basque Country will now be considered, in order to determine whether, in a different situation, dealing with a grouping of regions with an identity defined as similar or even common, the implementation of a project of European co-operation increases the threat to the national cohesion of France. To begin with, the common European project entitled *Eurocité*, a network linking French and Spanish Basque cities, will be examined. The project involves the creation of communication (cross-border, trilingual Internet), transport (TGV planned) and education networks (Euro-Institut planned).

To determine whether this kind of project brings about modifications of France’s national cohesion, the place occupied by the Basque Nationalist Party in these two countries will be examined. We begin with the assumption that if the bringing together of the Basque country, through European Union regional projects, were likely to bring about a deeper identification with the region, this would manifest itself in support for a party that represents the regional or even historic identity of these regions in the two countries.

A study carried out by Jean-Marie Izquierdo found that the Basque Nationalist Party (BNV) in Spain occupies an important place in this country. It is a party that “draws its legitimacy from the history of Basque nationalism as a whole, it holds a privileged position at the centre of Basque and Spanish institutions”.53 Founded in 1895, the party has a determining role within the government of the Basque Country, governing alone or in coalition for nearly thirty years. The Spanish Basque Country has enjoyed autonomous administrative powers since 1979, and has institutional visibility in Spanish life. In France, the Basque Nationalist Party (PNB) is in a different position. The party remains almost unknown to the French residents of the French Basque Country, and obtains minimal results in elections.54 This distinction in the institutional visibility of the political party is in fact linked to the French policy of national unity, which continues to be felt for the following reasons, despite the new area heralded by European integration. Firstly, the

---


54 At the 1998 regional elections, the PNB received 3.8% of votes (counting only Basque constituencies, if we take into account total figures for the department of Pyrénées Atlantiques, the PNB received 1.8%, while the PNV received 19.4% of votes). Ibid., p. 206.
territorial division where the Basque Country is located is part of the department of the Pyrénées Atlantiques, which is also home to a Béarnaise minority. These identities are located in the Aquitaine region where all departments are part of a national whole, sharing institutions, a legal system and similar administration. The provinces that were historically part of Basque identity are today tightly integrated into the national identity, making it difficult for a political party such as the PNB to pursue a policy based on regional identity.

Next, and in the context of the Basque Eurocité project, the grouping of regions sharing a similar past demonstrates that the national policies of a State are a determining factor in co-operation between regions. The communication problems encountered in the Upper Rhine are also felt in the Basque Country of France and Spain. From a linguistic point of view, the Basque language is spoken very little in France, due to the linguistic uniformity imposed since the 19th century. It must also be noted that in the Basque Country in France, a major portion of the population originates from other areas of France. On the other hand, Basque is very much alive in Spain and even dominates the Spanish language within the region. When it comes to learning a foreign language, the French and the Spanish in the Basque Country show a preference for learning English, rather than the language of their cross-border neighbour. As a result, publications and colloquiums arising from this cross-border co-operation necessitate the use of French, Spanish and sometimes even English.55

Conclusion

A country’s national unity is measured in terms of political, legal and cultural factors. European integration, it is noted, coexists in parallel with a strong French national policy, which continues to influence the political and cultural aspect of the country. For France, the European Union has added a new dimension to the region, but rather than putting the idea of national unity in peril, the structures in place (such as education and political

55 Izquierdo presents a series of differences between the French and Spanish Basque Countries and highlights their linguistic, historic and economic imbalance. Ibid.
institutions) protect the unity of the State. The construction of Europe has invested the region with a role requiring the accentuation of its diversity and regional identity, in order to increase the economic sector for the benefit of the national interest. Yet, regional power remains in the sectors that least antagonise national cohesion, such as economic development, infrastructure and culture, steering clear of domains of national significance, such as justice, police, defence and international relations. It should be noted, however, that European integration has given a new voice to the French regions. The regions are endowed with the ability to communicate directly with Brussels. This co-operation also implies changes in regards to the law. In order to respond to the new legal structures presented by the grouping of common projects between European regions, France has had to put in place methods adapted to cross-border co-operation. It would be pertinent to see how these conventions will be adapted as European integration is deepened. For the moment, these conventions are signed within the limits of the powers of local authorities, while respecting international commitments.56

56 According to the law of 6th February 1992 concerning the territorial administration of France, local authorities, and groupings with other foreign local authorities, may sign conventions within the limits of their authority and in accordance with article 131 of the French constitution, respecting international commitments. It should be noted that the methods for each grouping vary according to the grouping. For example, the most successfully completed is that between France, Germany, Switzerland and Luxemburg with the Karlsruhe agreement (1996). See also Pierre Gévant, Comprendre les enjeux de la décentralisation, Paris: l’Etudiant, 2006, p.152.
Bibliography


