

Szűcs Anita: Regionalisation in a unitary state – the case of France

France is the traditional example of the unitary state, but the process of decentralisation – initiated in 1982 – clearly eroded the coherence of a model built around the strong centralized government. During the last decades the centralization turned to a decentralized territorial administration. The contemporary territorial administration is composed by a three level framework of local governments: *région* (NUTS 2), *département* (NUTS 3), commune or municipality (NUTS 4). In November 25, 2014 the National Assembly accepted the law on the delimitation of the metropolitan regions of twenty-two to thirteen, and the postponement of the elections. In this mini-revolution François Hollande wants to reform the size of the regions, so as the new regions should be of European-scale to be able to build territorial strategies. The new law will come into force 1 January 2016. By creating new constituencies, the government takes the risk of worsening the debacle expected for the Socialist Party in the regional elections of December 2015.

One of the most important issues in European integration is the effect of regional reforms within member states. What will be the role of regions in the future European political system, and what relationships will they establish with national governments and Community institutions? France is no stranger to these questions, as the debate on the new law on the territorial organization of the republic shows.

After more than thirty years' experience of decentralization, one is tempted paradoxically to emphasize the weakness of French regions in comparison with their foreign counterparts. Their competences and financial powers remain weak. Regional politicians and their policies make little impact on public opinion. The attempt to relaunch national regional policies after several years of neglect seems to presage a reinforcement of the central administration. I would insist, however, that the regional reforms, combined with European integration, are leading to qualitative changes in centre-periphery relations. The development of the Community and the Commission's emphasis on the „Europe of the Regions” provided weighty arguments for seeking wider competences and more autonomy from the central state. While still relatively unfamiliar, the regions are beginning to make more impact on public opinion and are taking an active part in the making of public policies. They have also seen a political restructuring as part of the realignment of the French party system in the 1980s. Finally, new political networks have been established by trans-regional and transnational cooperation, undertaken to manage the effects of integration on regional economies and to express regional interests in Community programmes.

In many respects, the region appears to be the 'core' for the definition of new policies, or the institutional base for a form of meso-government. Yet the expression meso-government can be misleading, since it is not a level of government with well-defined characteristics or autonomy, as in a federal system. The French region remains poorly differentiated and weakly consolidated. Regionalization „à la française” follows a specific trend in comparison to other European states. Although in most of the European states, regionalization practices try to regulate different secular cultural, political claims made by distinguishing territorial communities, a functional vision of the

region has been assertive until the 1980s in France. This explains the current identity and political structural disability of the *régions françaises* compared to other states. The application of EU policies after all made significant changes in French center-periphery relationships. The Europeanization of the French territorial governance gives new economic and political capacities to the regions. They use the European norms to grant resources their territorial governance. However, the political results turn out to be quite different in each region. The Europeanization process has produced policy and strategic changes for the French regions and the implementation of the decentralization act in 2003-2004 modified the main political structures of the French decentralization. The regionalisation shows the resistance of the decentralized Jacobin state.

The local administration in France

Classical histories of French sub-national government gave us enough description. A statute about the local administration was edited shortly after 1789 Revolution which became the model of the Western European local government systems. It was similar to the previous Bourbon system in its centralization of power. The Jacobin governments systematized territorial arrangement into a uniform structure of 83 *départements*, headed by a central government official, the *préfet*. The prefects dominated the proceedings of departmental councils (*conseils généraux*) and also exercised powers of supervision over decisions by the communes.

This system of centralized regime dominated the next 180 years, while local powers developed step by step towards local democracy. In the 1830s local authorities (the *départements*) were officially acknowledged, but they earned full recognition only in 1871 as „*collectivités territoriales*“. Till March 1983 the prefects were the chief executives. As a next step, the mayors became generally elected in 1882, and obtained full budgetary competence and general competence for communal assemblies. Cultural standardization was a kind of precondition of the unification of the politico-administrative structure. The base of the French nation state was the the consolidation of the institutional structures by building a strong national identity. The main proponents of this process was the school and the army. The Third Republic built up a forceful national educational project led by the republican teachers known as the „*hussards noirs de la République*“. The Great War played an important role to turn regional identities into a national one. In France ethno-regionalist movements did not play an important role until the 1960s. The „*belle époque*“ has seen the first wave of regionalism, when the leading class in the great depression used the cultural and linguistic heritage of some regions to resist to the republican unification.

The *Circonscriptions d'Action Régionale* under the authority of the prefects and the *Commissions de Développement Economique Régional* (CODER) in 1964, then the *Etablissements Publics Régionaux* in 1972 following the rejection by referendum of the reform proposals of 1969, first marked the end of the traditional republican rule of the notables and inaugurated the new system of planning with its complex relations between the State administration and modernizing local élites. The decentralization reforms, notably the laws of 1982, 1983, and 1986, strengthened the region by increasing its competences and resources and giving it political legitimacy through direct election. More recently, the regions have allowed the French political and administrative system

to adapt to the needs of European integration by providing a territorial level of management for the single market, notably through the dispositions of 1992 on interregional co-operation and the creation of new metropolitan structures in the form of 'communities of communes' and 'communities of towns'. From 2004 on France held regional elections. Regions still do not have neither legislative powers, nor significant budget.

In the French State tradition the territorial administration provide complementary forms of political legitimation and evolve in ever-more complex forms, rather than a strictly regional type of representation, autonomous from the State and distinct from local government. It is significant that regionalization was put in place in France without a direct link with regionalism, that is, demands for autonomy impelled by ethnic or cultural factors. Such movements do certainly exist, in the peripheral parts of metropolitan France such as the Basque Country, Corsica, Alsace, and Brittany and, to a lesser degree in French Catalonia and Occitania, in the overseas departments (Guadeloupe and Martinique) and the overseas territories (New Caledonia). These nationalist or separatist movements have led to some violent confrontations with the State and to the adoption of reforms or special-status arrangements which, in Corsica, the overseas departments, and New Caledonia, have taken a regional form. For the most part, however, French regionalism has had little connection with regionalist demands. The striking contrast in this respect with Spain, Italy, or Belgium is testimony to the high degree of integration in the Jacobin State. The paradox is that the metropolitan regions where regionalist sentiment is weakest are the ones whose identity is most strengthened by European integration, while the peripheral regions, although benefiting from Community regional programmes, are politically little affected by integration and look to direct negotiations with the State to enhance their autonomy. Regionalism in France thus follows different logics which are in turn differently affected by the construction of the Community.

Because of the importance of recent changes, the study aims to present a broad picture of the evolution of the French region and the means by which it can intervene in public policy. I will show how this process is affected by European integration while, in its turn, it influences that integration. To see how the regions can shape the development of Europe, I will first examine the effects of the election of regional councils, showing that this represents a broad change in the French political system as a whole in the 1980s, rather than an example of local democratization. The weak institutional differentiation of the regions allows them very limited domestic political impact and this in turn limits their influence at the European level.

The impact of the regional elections on the French politics

The regional elections of 1986 were the first to be held by universal suffrage and in 2004 France introduced the proportional list in the elections. The overseas regions (Guadeloupe, Guyana, Martinique, Réunion) each comprising a single department, must be analysed separately. Regionalization here took a different form, with special statutes taking into account their problems of economic development and autonomist demands. Direct election of regional councils was introduced in 1983, with the 1986 elections representing a renewal. In the French Antilles and Guyana, participation was lower than in the metropole, with abstention reaching 53.5 per cent in

Guadeloupe. This reflects a tradition of low turn-outs in these departments due to socio-economic factors such as the low level of education. In the Antilles the separatists called for a boycott of the elections, so that abstention here cannot be written off as mere apathy. Local and ethnic issues featured prominently in the campaign, economic development being presented by each party in various ways as a means of integration into the national community. There was a sharp division between those supporting decentralization (the socialists and independent right) and those ignoring the issue to focus on the national election issues (RPR-UDF) or to strike anti-colonialist positions.¹ It is striking that the Communist Party obtained better results here, with 29.3 per cent in Réunion, and that the left overall was in a stronger position than in the metropole, with the socialists and their allies winning four of the five regions. Only Réunion was gained by the right.

Despite the fact that it is considered part of the metropole, Corsica produced the most distinctive results. The island has a special statute under which elections were organized in 1982 and again in 1984 after the assembly had been dissolved because of its inability to approve a budget. This second election was won by a right-wing coalition including the National Front, as was the 1986 election. The special statute remained an object of contention and the target of a campaign of violence by the Front National de Libération de la Corse (FNLC). A new bill, increasing the powers of the regional assembly, was adopted by parliament in June 1991 after the expression "Corsican people", inserted in the first article to placate autonomist sentiment, was declared contrary to the Constitution and deleted. In spite of these special features, the election overall was more national than regional, with local issues confined to small groups or peripheral regions. Only six councillors belonging to regionalist movements were elected, all of them in Corsica.

Although ill served by the electoral system, the region as an institution has consolidated itself over two decades of decentralization. It has first of all gained in terms of public opinion. The conditions shaping attitudes to regionalization and to the construction of Europe are broadly the same. A high socio-economic status, income, and level of education and a declared interest in politics are all factors conducive to a smooth support for institutional reform. The regional elections of March 1992 can be seen as a turning-point in Mitterrand's second presidential mandate, demonstrating political realignment. Never before have the usual social determinants of voting been so weak or the volatility of the electorate so great. Proportional representation revealed the loss of support for both the governing national majority and the main opposition parties, and the dispersal of votes among various single-issue movements concerned with matters such as the environment or immigration. These movements and the turnover of regional councillors have reshaped the local policy agenda, notably in relation to the environment, which is partly a regional function. The election of National Front representatives has ensured that the themes of security and above all of immigration will feature in the next municipal elections. The regions have thus served as a laboratory for national politics, although some of the experiments, such as proportional representation, the realignment of governing coalitions, and the new policy agenda have not had as much of a national impact. Since 2004 a new mode of election was initiated: a proportional list vote in two rounds with majority premium. The regional elections are held in March every six years, with the exception of the upcoming 2015 elections which were shifted in December. The

¹ A.-P. Bleard: *Le Renouveau des conseils régionaux de Guadeloupe et de Martinique de mars 1986: Les Enjeux d'un scrutin*, in: *Annuaire des collectivités locales*, 1988 (Paris: GRAL), 85-105.

patterns have not changed much since 1986: they were more about the national agenda than about the regional. The voters usually gave a protest vote against the party in power.

Few observers have remarked on the distinctiveness of the results in the peripheral regions. In Corsica, while the RPR, then the UMP kept its majority till 2010, the nationalists made a significant advance. In the single-department overseas regions, despite the peculiarities of each case, there were two general tendencies. The parties of the right progressed less than in metropolitan France; they did not win a majority in any case and gained the presidency only in Guadeloupe. Local autonomist parties, however, did advance. The Parti Socialiste Guyanais in Guyana and the Free Dom list in Réunion won the presidencies of their respective regions; and the independentist Union pour l'Indépendance de la Guadeloupe and the Mouvement pour l'Indépendance de la Martinique won two and nine seats respectively. These developments are noteworthy in that they show the relative isolation of these peripheral regions from the movements of opinion in metropolitan France. They also demonstrate that regionalization has not resolved the problem of economic underdevelopment nor the conflict in the local political culture between the desire for autonomy and the need for development. Regionalization helped the left-wing government sustain its support better than elsewhere, but without preventing the advance of autonomist groups.

The elevation of regions to the status of full local governments by their direct election represented an important step for the whole French political system. Yet the effects have been attenuated by the national character of the regional elections, at least in metropolitan France; and by the marginal impact of the peripheral regions, where the issue of representation was most starkly posed, on the elections as a whole. Each regional election has been seen more as a new element in national political life than as a step in the localization or regionalization of the democratic debate.

The political locus of the regions

The region as an institution has also been reinforced by the practice of its elected members as well as by its legitimation through universal suffrage. The social composition of the new regional assemblies presents several new features. Compared with the departments, there are fewer farmers and members of the liberal professions and more industrial and commercial professionals, white-collar workers, and teachers. Regions thus present a more "modern" composition, less dominated by rural interests and more open to the new middle classes. In policy terms, their modernity is reflected in their concentration on development, with a large part of their budgets devoted to investment. This logic of development is further encouraged by their staff recruitment, the reinforcement of the executives against the assemblies and the presidentialization of leadership, with presidents establishing their own staff "cabinets" and assigning key functions to vice-presidents. Although this phenomenon can also be seen in cities and departments, it takes on a particular importance in the regions because of the proportional composition of their assemblies and the political instability which ensues. Their most important political feature has been the need for party coalitions between the moderate right and the National Front or between the left and centrists to secure the election of their presidents and the passage of budgets. In the 2000s

dominated by the right, the regions have had to undertake difficult negotiations with the State and have at times come into open conflict with the socialist Government. The most spectacular conflict was that between the Government of Michel Rocard and the local politicians in Île de France, including mayor Jacques Chirac of Paris and regional president Pierre-Charles Krieg, over planning in the Paris region. The new 2015 law on the restructuring of the regions aims to create broader institutions to facilitate the economic planning and growth.

More generally, regions act as a pressure group on national government, especially through the activities of some of their heavyweight politicians. The political assertiveness of the regions nevertheless remains limited. One indication is the pattern of accumulation of mandates following the 1985 law which restricted the number any individual is allowed to hold. Most politicians have chosen to give up the regional mandate, with two consequences. It is primarily the heavy-weight politicians who have abandoned the regions, giving way to more junior figures, less well established in the public mind and with less influence in central government. At the same time, there is a new pattern of accumulation, with individuals tending to accumulate the positions of mayor and parliamentarian on the one hand, or of regional and departmental councillor on the other. It is the mayor Member of Parliament who is clearly the more important. Co-ordination and regulation are provided increasingly by partisan networks, in which teams of individuals accumulate offices in a form of collective political enterprise.² With the development of complex systems of co-financing for projects, this produces a politicization of local public policies, whose implementation is dependent on the degree of partisan harmony among the various levels of government involved.

Another basic limitation on the political assertiveness of the regions is the electoral system itself. A reform proposal introduced in Parliament in the spring of 1991 which would have provided for elections on a regional rather than departmental basis was denounced by the opposition as a manoeuvre to limit the socialists' expected losses. Significantly, however, it received less than whole-hearted support from the president of the republic, who did not like the idea of powerful regional notables emerging. This itself is an indication of the potential for regions were they not constrained by political manoeuvring at the centre. Thus a political cleavage has been added to the expected institutional rivalry between the State and the regions. Initiated by a left-wing government, regionalization was slowed down by the rise of the right-wing parties in local and regional elections. This territorial political division obviously tempered the enthusiasm of the central government for further decentralization.

So, while opinion polls show that the public are in favour of regionalization, its political base is weak and it remains subject to powerful political constraints. Regions have provided the site for important changes in the balance of power among the parties and thus represent a prize in national political terms.

² Philippe Garraud: *La vie politique locale*, in: dans J.-L. Parodi (dir.), *Institutions et vie politique en France* (nouvelle édition complétée), Paris, La Documentation française, coll. « Les notices », 2003, p. 157-166.

The competences of the regions

The main aims of the successive decentralization reforms were to transfer new competences to the regions in the fields of planning, economic development, education, and professional training. These competences are tightly defined and must be exercised within the limits specified in the law. The task of the regions is to stimulate and co-ordinate regional development while not encroaching on the prerogatives of the communes and departments, over which they have no legal control. This transfer of resources and competences has led to a spectacular increase in expenditure for the regions of metropolitan France and a more rapid increase in debt than for the departments and communes. The financial situation of the regions remains healthy overall, thanks to debt management and self-financing from transferred taxes, though regional taxation remains moderate in comparison with that of the other local authorities. In spite of the increase, the budgets of the local and regional councils in metropolitan France represented only 7.3 per cent of public expenditure in 2010.³ Investment accounts for two-thirds of their expenditure, reversing the proportions found in the communes and departments. The regional councils account for a third of the economic interventions of local government in the form of direct aid and loan guarantees, though strangely they are still spending less on this, their most specific function, than are the communes. Despite the increase in the regions' fiscal capacity, intergovernmental transfers remain decisive. The contractual planning system established with decentralization marks an important change from the past.

The formulation of regional plans has two distinct phases, looking first downwards and then upwards. In the first stage the central government takes the initiative, drawing on its more or less permanent consultation through the tripartite working parties of the *Commissariat Général du Plan*, bringing together business and professional groups, trade unions, and the various ministries. In 1988, Prime Minister Michel Rocard indicated the Government's priorities as sustaining economic development and employment and relaunching an urban social policy through contracts with local governments. Regional prefects were then instructed to prepare provisional documents, in co-operation with the regional presidents and regional planning committees. Local consultation practices turned out to be very variable. The law also obliges regions to consult the departments, the chief cities of departments, and towns with a population over 10,000, but leaves the means at their discretion. In practice, it is local political circumstances which have determined the form of this consultation but the departments have been reluctant to allow the regions to take the lead in operations, requiring them to make a financial contribution, for example in highway construction. Large firms, despite their impact on employment and economic development, have tended to hold back in order to protect their margin of manoeuvre in national and international strategies, which might not always be compatible with medium-term commitments at the regional level.

The provisional documents thus produced are then negotiated upwards between the regions and the State, to be inscribed in the priorities of the national plan and finally entrenched in planning contracts between the two parties. A feature of the last, the Eleventh Plan (1992-2006) was the

³ Claire Dhéret, Andreea Martinovici and Fabian Zuleeg: Creating greater synergies between European, national and subnational Budgets. European Policy Centre. 2012.
<http://cor.europa.eu/en/documentation/studies/Documents/greater-synergies-btw-eu-nat-subnat-budgets.pdf>

concentration, at the insistence of the central administration, on specific objectives, limiting the interventions of central government to specific domains. From this angle, contractual planning looks more like a means to mobilize the regions behind State policies than a mechanism to provide State support for regional policies. While regional politicians complain about this tendency, they go along with it because of the urgency of their needs and the opportunity it provides for regions to enter new policy fields. Nor does their limited margin of influence prevent the emergence of new relationships among regional councils, organized interests, other local authorities, prefects, and the central administration. The region even weakly consolidated politically and institutionally, remains at the centre of an organizational restructuring. After 2004 the planning contracts between the State and departments or cities diminished the region's key role in the planning procedure. It could also provide the occasion for a reinforcement of the power of the prefects. These developments show how regionalization is still being played out. It has established an evolving system of relationships, in which the position of actors is negotiated according to political circumstances through the formulation and implementation of policies. The State retains the preponderant position, but in putting these negotiations not at the margin but at the heart of the system of centre-periphery relations, the system has experienced a major change. Planning contracts have thus been dissociated from the policy sectors in which they originated, regional and national planning, and become a mechanism for intergovernmental negotiation of public policies. Local policies are now not so much the work of isolated institutional actors such as deconcentrated arms of central government, or local governments, but rather emerge from interorganizational networks adapted to political or sectoral needs. Negotiation and networks are the dominant forms of public action in regionalized France. Planning contracts provide the technical, legal, and financial framework for this.

These relationships are further complicated by the development of the Community. Like their foreign counterparts, French regions are affected by the single market and the movements of capital and labour which result from it. They are also sensitive to the effects of Community policies on regional disparities, notably the effect of the Common Agricultural Policy on the least developed rural areas. The weakness of French regions compared with the German Länder raised concerns among regional politicians and the Government from the 1990s.

Central government is not alone in planning for Community integration. The regions themselves have developed initiatives, at first dispersed and then more and more organized. Enlargement of the Community to the south has transformed the more peripheral French regions such as Brittany and Aquitaine from the richest of the poor to the poorest of the rich. This reclassification has cost them their eligibility for certain types of regional aid such as the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes.

How does the implementation of structural-fund programmes affect political relationships within the regions? Regions are far from being an essential link in the expression of territorial interests in Europe. These interests rather express themselves through their own channels – chambers of commerce or professional organizations – or through national government departments such as External Trade or Research and Industry.

At national level, Community regional policy has produced some complex patterns of interorganizational relations. These are at once horizontal, among the different branches of French national government, and vertical, among the various directorates of the Commission, national ministries, the regions, and the national field administrations. Interministerial relations are themselves complex and marked by rivalries among bureaucrats and politicians. The key central agencies are the Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale (DATAR), the Ministry of Employment, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of the DOM-TOM (overseas departments and territories), the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Secretariat of the Interministerial Committee for European Affairs (SGCI) which comes under the Prime Minister. It is the SGCI which officially works out the French position in relation to Community regional policy, which is then expressed by the ambassador to the Communities. In practice, it is more often DATAR, the Social Fund branch of the Ministry of Employment, or the Ministry of Agriculture which actually formulates the policy. Negotiations in the SGCI do not take place among sectoral interests but rather pit the Ministry of Finance against the spending agencies which have worked out the programmes. In case of deadlock, the Prime Minister decides.

One of the most important changes affecting French regions has been the development of direct links, intra- and internationally with other local governments, bypassing the central State. While the first links, with Belgian, British, Swiss, and German local governments, were the result of interstate agreements, more recent developments have been decentralized. At first, these were confined to creating enlarged frontier regions, such as the Pyrenean Working Community or the Western Alpine Working Community. Now there are efforts to establish Euro-regions, with agreements among Nord-Pas de Calais, Kent, Flanders, Wallonia, and the Brussels region; among Languedoc-Roussillon, Midi-Pyrénées, and Catalonia; among the regions of the Atlantic Arc. These regions aim to ensure that their problems as a whole are taken into account by European institutions. Such exchanges have developed into veritable international relations, as in the Four Motors initiative associating Catalonia, Rhône-Alpes, Lombardy, and Baden-Württemberg. These links break the French law limiting associations to territorially contiguous areas and have extended beyond the regions to the large cities which have joined the club of Euro-cities.

The Community encourages such initiatives, notably with the programme for cross-frontier co-operation Interreg, of whose budget 800 million ECUs in 1990–3 is devoted to French frontiers. The implementation of Interreg has caused some lively exchanges between prefects and regional politicians. The Working Community of the Pyrenees, although it lacks a legal standing, complained through its president Jacques Blanc, who is also president of the region Midi-Pyrénées, that it had not been formally associated with the operational programme. The politicians are reluctant to see the prefects control the allocation of funds to which the State has made no contribution. After the failure of attempts by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to monitor and control the external activities of local governments, the Ministry of the Interior has set up a study group in the hope that it can at least influence if not master them. It is significant that the prefects have sought to extend their own prerogatives in controlling external activities, for example by advocating international agreements between central governments. This indicates how European integration has altered relations between the State and the regions, adding to the ambiguities and uncertainties of decentralization.

Europe has modified centre-periphery relations, which have passed from a bilateral to a trilateral mode. In this three-part harmony, each actor possesses in the duets (bilateral relations) resources acquired through its relationship with a third. The system is thus much more complex and changeable than before. At first sight, there appears to be a convergence of interests between the regions and the Commission to reinforce their power at the expense of the State. But the State is also able to use its position in the implementation of Community policies to strengthen itself against the regions, recovering some of the influence which it lost through decentralization. The result appears to be a positive-sum game in which the stakes are larger and the issues less determined than in the past.

Conclusion

After more than thirty years of decentralization, the institutional and political status of the French region remains below its ambitions. Both in domestic politics and in Europe, its capacity for initiative is tightly constrained by the State. Practitioners and academic observers alike have emphasized its limits in comparison with the Italian regions or, a fortiori, the Spanish autonomous communities or German Länder. This should not lead us to underestimate the changes which have taken place. The State and the regions negotiate their relationships from day to day and Community policies are a determining element in these transactions. It is already the local governments which present the visible face of implementation of Community policies and take the initiative in the exchanges to which the integration process has given rise. Because of their competences in matters such as economic development, the environment, and training, the regions are necessarily implicated in Community policy-making. The fact that these competences are rather narrow compared to those of other levels of government in France or to regions elsewhere in Europe, merely incites their political and bureaucratic leaders to be all the more active. European resources, both budgetary and political, may be marginal but, for French regions, they represent a rare opportunity.

This process has modified considerably the French model of territorial integration. Decentralization has marked the end of the *pouvoir périphérique* model, in which the key figure was the prefect. The prefect's technical-bureaucratic legitimacy is now subordinated to the political legitimacy of the elected councillors. Political legitimation may be more important but public policies now emerge from a territorial system which is both political and administrative. The process of decentralization thus represents more of an interlinking in the policy process rather than a differentiation. It rests on co-operation among the various levels of government and State administrative agencies rather than the institutionalization of two separate levels. French territorial government has become more complex. European integration encourages the tendency for policy-making to move into networks. Community regional policy, in particular, represents a complex form of negotiation in its various stages of elaboration, implementation, and evaluation which, given the multiplication of objectives or programmes and of levels of decision, are almost simultaneous. This dense set of interactions among regional, national, and European politicians and bureaucrats produces networks of policy-making which are more sectorial than territorial. French regions are rather well equipped to gain access to Community decision-making in so far as

the process for negotiating Community Support Frameworks seems to derive from that used in the French regional planning contracts. So they have benefited from an export of their administrative procedures. The degree of organization of these networks varies and they tend to be rather unstable. If there is an appropriate image it is that of a cloud formation in which the various elements interact at a distance and whose state is continually changing. This instability shows itself in the rapid changes in programmes and the continuous rotation of bureaucrats among local, regional, national, and European administrations, making evaluation particularly difficult. Although these networks are difficult to identify in a stable form, however, it is evident that politicians and bureaucrats within them do share a number of key values, such as democracy in Europe and subsidiarity, of types of expertise, notably law and European policy, and of behaviours, such as trips to Brussels and the promotion of a cosmopolitan image. These elements help shape the policy community and promote a common cognitive framework for European policy. The complexity and uncertainty give regional actors the opportunity to affirm their identity, to define their competences and means of intervention, to mobilize European resources in order to negotiate better with the State, and to gain an advantage on their competitors. This does not happen in the same way throughout France and there are disparities resulting from the economic impact of integration and the history of relations with the national State.