Strategies of Interest Intermediation in the European Union:
French trade associations under pressure?

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Introduction

The increasing competencies of European institutions are often captured by the term *Europeanisation*. But Europeanisation has to be defined as a wide phenomenon: It extends the spatial boundaries of the polity (Kohler-Koch 1996b) and leads "to a wider European polity, not only by including more member states but also by integrating more societal actors in European policy making" (Sidenius 1999: 176). With the growth of regulatory powers at the European level of governance a European system of interest intermediation "co-evolved" (Eichener/Voelzkow 1994c) and today a wide range of interest organisations can be found at the European level (Greenwood 1997).

What are the features of the European system of interest intermediation? Considering the institutional set-up of the European Union a number of aspects allow us to define the EU as a multi-level system (Jachtenfuchs/Kohler-Koch 1996b). This becomes especially visible with regard to the policy cycle. While the process of policy formulation takes place at the EU level, starting generally as a draft bill produced by the European Commission and decided upon by the Council of Ministers and – in case of the co-decision procedure – the European Parliament, the process of policy implementation lies in the responsibility of the member states and the national administration. The fact that the implementation of EU *directives*\(^1\) introduces a whole second policy cycle at the national level, adds another facet to the complexity of the EU policy making process.

Owing to the multi-level system of the EU, the European system of interest intermediation, too, has a European and a national component. Due to the increase of competencies of the European Union, national interest groups cannot confine their strategies of interest representation to the national level anymore; if they want to represent their interests successfully they are compelled to represent their interests at the European level as well. Thus, Europeanisation not only led to an increase of the number of interest organisations in Brussels. It also involves adjustments of national interest groups to the European Union at the national and at the European level with regard to their strategies of interest representation. In

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\(^1\) Directives "are binding on the Member States to which they are addressed only as to the result to be achieved" (Weidenfeld/Wessels 1997: 62).
In conducting my research I have employed historical institutionalism as my tool of analysis (Pierson 1996; Bulmer 1994). The model underlying my research project is that of the interaction of the "logic of membership", the material conditions under which actors are constituted and operate, and the "logic of influence", i.e. the institutional structure and prevailing processes within the relevant political arena (Kohler-Koch 1997b: 42), both resulting in specific patterns of interest intermediation. Generally, business associations are perceived as intermediaries between state agencies on the one hand and firms on the other. Both sets of actors impose conflicting demands on trade associations. The latter "(..) must, on the one hand, structure themselves and act so as to offer sufficient incentives to their members to extract from them adequate resources to ensure their survival, if not growth. On the other hand, they must be organized in such a way as to offer sufficient incentives to enable them to gain access to and exercise adequate influence over public authorities (...) and, hence, to extract from this exchange adequate resources (recognition, toleration, concessions, subsidies, etc.) enabling them to survive, even to prosper” (Schmitter/Streeck 1981: 49). From the perspective of the European multi-level system the European logic of influence forces national interest groups to organise themselves in such a way as to gain access to and exercise adequate influence over EU as well as national public authorities and political actors if they want to represent their members’ interests effectively in the European policy making process. However, "(..) national styles [of interest representation] are firmly rooted in national specific legal, political and administrative institutions and cultures” (Waarden 1995: 334) and the process of adaptation to the EU may therefore be easy or difficult, depending on the compatibility of the European and the national logic of influence (Schmidt 1999: 156-157).
The EU political culture and political system is generally characterised as rather co-operative, consensual, and open to interest groups (Kohler-Koch 1997b; Schmidt 1999). Thus, interest groups from corporatist polities such as Germany, which “tend to be open only to certain privileged interests in policy formulation, more corporative than regulatory in implementation by applying the rules in conjunction with those self-same interests, and more consensual in culture, with decisions less clearly political and rarely taken at the top” (Schmidt 1999: 3) can easily adopt to the European logic of influence owing to the similarity of the two logics of influence.

The situation looks different regarding statist or étatist systems, whose political culture is more conflictual with interest groups only being involved to a limited extent in the policy making process, as often described for the case of France (Schmidt 1996; Waarden 1995). As will be shown, the European and the French logic of influence differ considerably and the underlying hypothesis of this paper, which I have "borrowed" from Vivien Schmidt, is that French trade associations today still have significant problems in adapting their strategies of interest representation to the European logic of influence.

In the following I will first give an overview of the logic of influence, i.e. the political system, the role of interest groups, and the political culture, in the European Union and in France, drawing on the existing research literature. In the second part, European strategies of French business associations will be analysed empirically, taking into account the French and European logic of influence as well as the logic of membership. Although the focus of this paper is on French trade associations, the empirical part will also include data on their German counterparts. Comparison as a tool of analysis will help to get a better insight into the characteristics of French European strategies of interest representation. Finally, adaptation of French trade associations to the European Union will be assessed.

For the empirical analysis, I draw on a comprehensive survey which we carried out between June 1998 and March 1999 at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES). A "Questionnaire for Associations and Companies" of 15 pages was sent to trade associations in Germany, Great Britain, France and on the EU-level, as well as to the biggest companies in the world. A very general overview of the survey results can be found in our working paper "Intermediation of Interests in the European Union" (Kohler-Koch/Quittkat 1999).

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5 All associations which have the task of representing their members’ interests mainly (or exclusively) vis-à-vis EU institutions are summarised under the term "EU association".
each of the countries. The questionnaire aimed at gathering information on three distinct issues: (1) the frequencies of contacts trade associations maintain with European and national political institutions; (2) the quality of their relations with these political institutions and other organisations; (3) the characteristics of the trade associations’ organisation, their members, and their economic sector.

The European and the French logic of influence

The institutional set-up or - to capture a wider range of aspects - the logic of influence of the European Union and France differ widely and, as already pointed out, an extensive process of adaptation for French trade associations is expected to be necessary for successful interest representation (Schmidt 1999). Concerning the logic of influence, two factors are decisive: the role and importance of different political institutions in the process of policy-making and the readiness of institutions or political actors to provide access for interest groups, i.e. the political culture concerning the relationship between political or administrative actors on the one hand and private actors on the other hand.

At the European level, the Commission and the Council of Ministers can be considered as the main actors in the policy making process. The European Commission plays a decisive role in the European process of policy making due to its exclusive right to initiate European legislation; at the same time the Commission promotes the inclusion of affected interest groups into the process of policy formulation in order to draw on the expert knowledge of external actors (Hull 1993; Grant 1993; Wallace/Young 1997a). The Council, on the other hand, although probably still the most important European institution in the policy-making process, is for interest groups difficult to access due to its inter-governmental and international composition. Therefore interest groups not only must try to convince their own national government of the legitimacy and appropriateness of their demands, but they also have to make sure that their interests are supported by a sufficient number of states, either in order to form a veto-minority, or to ensure a stable majority of EU-member states (Kohler-Koch/Quittkat 1999). The European Parliament (EP), finally, still has less influence on the policy-making process than the European Commission or the Council of Ministers, although it

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6 For the survey, the twenty biggest companies in each country, measured by number of people employed, have been contacted. The questionnaire was sent in German, French or English versions to the trade associations and companies, depending on the country investigated. The European trade associations received the English version of the questionnaire except when a questionnaire in a different available language was expressly demanded.
has gained importance through the expanded application of the co-decision legislative procedure. The EP is very interested in the communication with interest groups as this is a good opportunity to interact with the electorate and to become a "spokesperson" for the voters’ concerns, but this applies more to NGOs than to business interests (Kohler-Koch 1997b; Kohler-Koch/Quittkat 1999).

At the French national level, the Prime Minister, government, and often even the President, are considered to be the main actors in the policy making process. The constitution of the Fifth French Republic puts parliament in a rather weak position (Kimmel 1983; Legendre 1993), as the often applied term of "rationalised parliamentarism" (Mény 1996b) indicates. It is government which controls the political agenda and even the organisation of the parliamentary debates (Mény 1999a: 74). Although French parliament only has limited influence on legislation, the accumulation of posts (for example: "député – maire – conseiller général"; Mény 1999a: 74) offers single members of parliament a high standing in the French political system: "more than 90 per cent of members of parliament have at least one local mandate" (Mény 1996b: 132). As far as local or regional issues are at stake, members of the Assemblée Nationale often represent - or defend - their local electorate’s and local interest groups’ matters when taking up contacts with the national administration and negotiating with high bureaucrats (Suleiman 1976: Chapter VI).

The different role of political institutions in the policy making process is further reflected in the policy cycle. Due to the multi-level character of the EU system, the European policy cycle is characterised by the interlocking of European and national institutions. EU institutions play an important role in the process of policy formulation; the implementation of EU law, however, falls exclusively into the scope of the national administrations’ duties (Wessels 1997). A look at the policy cycle reveals in addition differences in the consideration of private interests during the process of policy making. European institutions involve interest groups in the policy making process at all steps of the policy cycle, similar to corporatist systems like Germany (Schmidt 1999). Affected interests are heard by the European Commission already at the agenda setting and the policy formulation stage and the decision-making culture at the EU level is rather consensual. For France, in contrast, Vivien Schmidt identifies a "statist pattern with heroic and everyday policies at the formulation stage and the policy of

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7 It should be kept in mind that France, of course, still is a parliamentary system, albeit the parliament’s rights being limited compared to the German or British system. Articles defining and limiting the parliaments role in the process of policy making are mainly §28, §34, §40, §43, §44, §48, §49 of the French Fifth Republic Constitution.
accommodation, co-optation, and confrontation at the implementation stage” (Schmidt 1996: 49). While interest groups are excluded from policy formulation, French civil servants have relatively much discretionary authority in negotiating with business over the observation of the rules of implementation.

The degree of integration of private interests into the policy making process points to one of the most often observed differences between the French and the European political system and political culture, but also between the French system on the one side and the German system on the other side: the low acceptance of interest groups in France. As already mentioned, interest groups play an important role in the policy making process at the EU level. They are accepted as representatives of private interests and considered to be important sources of information. Business associations are especially well established at the European level. The European Commission relies on the know-how of technical experts when formulating regulations and decisions on economic questions and technical standards (Kohler-Koch 1997b). However, not only the access of trade associations to European institutions is well institutionalised, broader societal interests like consumer or environmental interest groups are also more and more heard at the European level.8

As to France, it can by and large be observed that French (state) authorities are much less enthusiastic about involving private interests in public policy, as they fear that the particularism of these interests will threaten the ‘national interest’ (l’intérêt général) for which they themselves stand guard (Meynaud 1960; Nonon/Clamen 1991; Waarden 1995; Schmidt 1996).9 The bureaucracy in statist countries like France, so the often presented picture, regards the influence of lobbies as illegitimate and traditionally uses its formal consultation process more as a way of gathering information than as an opportunity of incorporating interest views (Suleiman 1976; Wilson 1987). Hayward describes the attitude of French bureaucracy and government towards particularistic interests as follows:

"paternalistic government officials have generally regarded the private sector as composed at best of ‘partners’ and at worst of satellites. (...) The relationship between the public authorities and business is conceived primarily in hierarchical and unilateral

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8 The European Commission has drafted a discussion paper in January 2000, which shall help to strengthen its relations with NGO’s (COM (2000) 11 final).

9 The concept of the ‘national interest’ plays an important role in French politics. It is used by many political actors and high bureaucrats as a proof of subjectivity to underline their "neutral" position. The concept of the "general good" is especially used by the French president (Bacqué 2000) as a reference to his position as arbitrator. Constitution du 4 Octobre 1958, § 5: “Il [le Président] assure, par son arbitrage, le fonctionnement régulier des pouvoirs publics ainsi que la continuité de l’État.”
In France no institutionalised or formally guaranteed access for interest groups in the policy-making process exists, as it does in corporatist systems or at the EU level. As far as interest associations are consulted by civil servants, this happens in an ad hoc and arbitrary manner and it is up to the discretion of the civil servants whether private interests are heard at the policy-formulation stage (Waarden 1995: 345; Baumgartner 1996). Consequently, France is considered to have a conflictual decision making culture where decisions are ultimately political and the most important level of decision making is at the top so that any decision, however technically competent, can be reversed relatively easily for purely political reasons (Schmidt 1996: chapter 7).

Considering the low acceptance of interest groups, the difficult access to political actors at the formulation stage, and the tendency of French governments to take - or change - a decision on political rather than on substantial technical grounds, these factors, of course, have repercussions on the interest representation "style". On the one hand, the scepticism of French bureaucracy towards interest groups results in the development of rather aggressive (protest) strategies such as the holding of demonstrations.10 On the other hand, the French system of interest intermediation is characterised by the high importance of policy networks and the clientelistic structures, dominating the relation between business interests and French bureaucracy (Waarden 1993; Schmidt 1996 and 1999; Suleiman 1976; Wilson 1983 and 1987). The French élite education system transmits among other aspects "norms and values pertaining to 'serving the interest of the state' and the entry to the élite Grand Corps, brotherhoods which reinforce the socialization in public norms and which give their members an élite self-image" (Waarden 1995: 358; Thenig 1996). The fact that the political and the administrative élite, but often even the business élite, are all educated at the same schools (i.e. at Grandes Écoles like the National School of Administration (ENA) or Polytechnique) entails personal relations between actors from different spheres.11 This leads Vivien Schmidt to observe a very specific pattern of lobbying à la française: "For French business, (…)

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10 The events following the introduction of the 35 hours working week in the transport sector in January 2000 prove that demonstrations are not necessarily limited to employees and trade unions as an instrument of interest representation; in France employers, too, use strikes as a tool to make themselves heard.

11 These close personal relations are further strengthened by the mobility of French bureaucrats within and outside the administration thanks to a rather high number of nationalised or semi-national companies. The practice of high-level civil servants moving back and forth from administrative posts into top positions in politics
personal contacts based on personal relationships or positions of power which are focused on swaying the Prime Minister or, failing that, the ministers of the more technical ministries, are the main means of influencing policy formulation. Also helpful would be the President as long as his party controls the government” (Schmidt 1996: 203), while the administrative level is of secondary importance for French interest representation.

Therefore, adaptation of French interest groups to the European logic of influence would in the first place include the expansion of personal contacts from the national to the European level. But French trade associations also have to adapt to the openness of European political institutions. To what extent have French trade associations adapted to the European logic of influence? How far are the general characteristics of the French and the European logic of influence reflected by the European strategies of interest representation of French trade associations? Is there a French ”style” of European interest representation discernible? Can patterns of European interest representation strategies of French trade associations also be explained by the logic of membership? To be sure, the data does not allow me to assess how successful interest groups are in representing their interests. Rather, I look at the patterns of interest representation and I am mainly interested in how far French trade associations are able to exhaust the whole range of possible instruments and strategies of interest representation in the EU.

**European strategies of French trade associations**

For the analysis of European strategies of French trade associations, I will first look at the adjustment of French trade associations to the European multi-level system, and secondly examine some French characteristics of interest intermediation more closely, both with regard to the different logic of influence structuring interest groups’ strategies at the national and at the European level. Finally, the impact of the logic of membership on European strategies of French trade associations will be considered.

*French trade associations and the European multi-level system*

European strategies of national trade associations can involve contacts with national as well as European political actors due to the EU multi-level system and the interlocking of national and business, at the head of public or sometimes also private corporations and banks, has even a special name: *pantoufage* (Schmidt 1996: 26).
and European institutions. The analysis of the data shows that most French trade associations have extended their realm of activity by adding contacts with EU institutions to mere national strategies of interest representation (Kohler-Koch/Quittkat 1999). However, integration of affected interests into the policy making process at different steps of the policy cycle reveals the delayed involvement of French trade associations into the policy cycle and the dominance of national strategies of French trade associations.

An overwhelming majority of French business associations does not try to influence the political agenda of the European Union, neither directly by establishing contacts with EU institutions, nor indirectly by using national channels. A comparison with German trade associations makes the French retarded commencement of interest representation even more visible. Being used to influencing the national policy making process already at the agenda setting stage, German trade associations are similarly active in the early phase of the European policy cycle and make use of the openness of the European Commission towards interest groups. The late entry of French trade associations into the European policy making process, too, is a reflection of the situation at the national level. Here, affected interests are not incorporated into the policy making process in the same way as trade associations in Germany. For French trade associations interest representation at the national level only starts at the policy formulation stage. The repetition of these national practises at the European level can be taken as an indicator for difficulties of the French trade associations to adapt to the European logic of influence.

Vivien Schmidt has pointed out the importance of "heroic policies" in France (see page 7), where affected groups are not consulted. In France, the agenda setting stage can be defined as the stage at which "heroic policies" are developed. The drafting of grand political blueprints of economic policy by the political and administrative élite on political or ideological grounds rather than in response to the needs of (particularistic) economic interests are a common feature. A recent example, affecting business and labour significantly, is the introduction of the 35 hours working week in 1997. Arguing in this line, the policy formulation stage can be defined as the transformation of "heroic policies" into "everyday policies", in the course of which trade associations are definitely included, as our data shows (see appendix). However, the connection of a "closed" policy formulation process with an "open" implementation

12 "(...) [G]overnments with solid majorities and ‘vision’ are generally able to move ahead swiftly to fulfil their campaign promises with ‘heroic’ programs in which government leadership remains paramount and consultation is often minimal.” (Schmidt 1996: 50)
process in France is not fully supported by the data. To locate French trade associations’ main
terrain of activism at the implementation stage (Schmidt 1996: Chapter 2; Schmidt 1999)
seems exaggerated. Like their German counterparts the majority of French trade associations
is very active at several steps of the European policy making cycle. The central focus is on the
phases
- when the Commission formulates its proposal,
- when EU law is transposed into national law, and
- during implementation by the national administration.

At all these steps French and German trade associations have contacts with European as well
as national authorities. In both countries trade associations represent their “European”
interests rather vis-à-vis national authorities than vis-à-vis EU institutions, but this strategy is
much stronger developed in France. The national government, which plays the dominant role
in the French policy making process and which is also part of the Council of Ministers, is the
institution considered to be of most (63,4 %) or second most (47,3 %) importance for French
trade associations regarding their European interest intermediation. The share of French trade
associations that name the European Commission as the most important (16,1 %) or second
most important (18,7 %) institution for their European interest representation is much smaller
albeit its openness towards business interest groups. This result confirms the dominance of
national channels of European interest representation in France. Finally, the national
parliament is only named by 2,2 % of the French trade associations as the first most important
political institution for their European interest representation; around ten percent of French
trade associations name the national parliament as the second (11,0 %) or third (9,0 %) most
important institution for their European interest representation. As national parliaments are of
importance only when (European) directives are transposed into national law this ranking
comes to no surprise.

Summarising the data on French trade associations’ movements in the EU multi-level system,
a dominance of the use of national channels of interest representation is to be observed.
However, not only the different role of political institutions in the European policy cycle, but
also the relative weight of national political institutions in the national policy making process
are well reflected by the importance attributed to them by French trade associations. Only the
delayed beginning of interest representation with regard to the agenda-setting stage of the
policy cycle indicates significant problems of adaptation of French trade associations to the
European logic of influence. But are there other French characteristics of European interest representation?

**French characteristics of interest intermediation: "Lobbying à la Française"?**

National characteristics of interest representation are best detected by looking at the instruments used. Especially relevant with regard to French trade associations is their belief in and reliance on personal relations or networks because these are instruments considered to dominate French strategies of interest representation as a result of the élite education system (Waarden 1995; Schmidt 1999).

However, personal and regular contacts are considered as very useful lobbying instruments by a large majority of German as well as French trade associations. A comparison with German trade associations shows that the French attribute only a slightly greater relevance to personal contacts (personal contacts: F: 81,3 %, FRG: 78,1 %; regular contacts: F: 74,5 %, FRG: 67,4 %). A more differentiated picture is offered by the importance attributed to several criteria for the selection of contact partners. More than fifty percent of the French trade associations agree that personal relationship is a very important criterion for the selection of a contact partner. Although this holds true for the EU level as well, its importance is more prominent at the national level (European level: F: 53,5 %; FRG: 44,3 %; national level: F: 59,8 %, FRG: 45,4 %). At the European level, personal contacts are often grounded on common nationality. Nationality is considered as a very important selection criterion by roughly a quarter of the French trade associations (F: 26,5 %; FRG: 16,2 %). Thus, the presented results reveal some dependence of French trade associations on personal relations, which are a well established practice at the national level, but which are less easy to develop at the European level due to the complexity of the decision making process and the plethora of actors and decision makers.

The importance attributed to party membership for the selection of a contact partner is worth noting, too. At the national level, party membership is considered as a very important selection criterion by 15,1 % of the French trade associations (FRG: 7,1 %). This comes to a surprise, as French parties are traditionally considered to be rather weak and it is generally assumed that the French presidential system leads to powerless party organisations (Portelli

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13 Meaningful in this sense is also the fact that Commissioners of German nationality are often reproached for not considering enough their own national clientele. In how far the data can be taken as an indicator for French nationals working in European institutions to be more open to their compatriots than their German counterparts has to be left open.
The importance of party membership has to be attributed to the politicization of the French administration. When a new government is elected, usually all high bureaucrats are exchanged and administrative "top positions" are filled with new experts from the "right" political camp, most of them graduates from one of the French Grandes Écoles. For French interest representation it is thus important to consider an interlocutor’s party membership when trying to build up contacts, in order to be on the safe side with regard to the possible influence of the person contacted. Since parties play only a limited role at the EU level, the criterion of party membership is much less often considered to be very important for the selection of "European” contact persons, although here again twice as many French than German trade associations consider party membership as very important (EU level: F: 6.9 %; FRG: 3.4 %).

Despite the politicization of the high French administration – and this can be seen as contradictory – the obligation of French bureaucrats to remain neutral and to serve the intérêt général is an important element structuring the relations between French trade associations on the one side and the French administration on the other side. The dominant role of the "intérêt général concept” leads French trade associations to value some formal instruments of interest representation more than their German counterparts whose access to and co-operation with decision makers at the national level are well established.

The co-operation with scientific institutes is considered more often a very useful instrument of interest representation by French trade associations than by German trade associations (F: 21.6 %; FRG: 16.4 %). Similarly, 48.0 % of the French trade associations consider the presentation of scientific expertise as a very useful instrument of interest representation, while this is only the case with 27.7 % of the German trade associations. As the intérêt général is a central concept in the French political discourse, scientific expertise is a way of underlining parallels between a trade association’s ”private” interest and the ”general interest”, i.e. expert opinion can be used as a proof for a convergence of the national and private interest. Further, scientists generally play an important role in France as consultants for political projects. At the European level, scientific expertise plays an important role, too. The Commission strongly co-operates with scientific institutes. The inclusion of experts in the policy formulation process,

15 Within the French administration personal networks play an important role and they are often based on one of the following three factors, but which can apply all at the same time: graduation at a specific Grande École, the affiliation with one of the Grands Corps, or party membership (Suleiman 1976).
and debate within specific policy communities help to legitimise European decision making. In this respect the use of scientific expertise as a national strategy of interest representation can be considered as suitable for interest representation at the European level as well.

Other formal instruments of interest representation such as the preparation of written position papers and the presence in committees and hearings are also instruments highly esteemed by French trade associations. While 59,4% of the German trade associations consider position papers as very useful, in France 81,3% agree on this point. Here once more it is the difficult access of French authorities which forces private interests to rely heavily on written papers as they can be easily sent to decision makers. Written position papers are useful instruments to provide bureaucrats, parliamentarians, and other decision makers with technical and economic information and arguments, an advantage, which is also of relevance at the European level, because of the prevalence of very technical EU regulative policies which EU bureaucrats can only formulate with the help of expert knowledge.

The share of French trade associations considering the presence in hearings and meetings as useful (F: 39,0%) or very useful (F: 51,4%) again lies slightly above the German share (FRG: useful: 36,9%; very useful: 46,2%). The case of France is rather complex in this respect: despite the fact that "[France] continues to set up countless committees and commissions of all kinds within the State apparatus (personnel commissions) and in its dealings with groups" (Mény/Knapp 1998: 137), French administration tends to be selective about partners, "bestowing the label of 'representativity' and according 'official recognition' (...) to those with whom it feels most comfortable" (Mény/Knapp 1998: 137).

This discrepancy is reflected in our data: although only a third of the French trade associations participating in our survey represent their members’ interests in political hearings and committees (F: 33,3%; FRG: 82,3%), the large majority of French trade associations considers hearings and committees as a useful or very useful lobbying instrument.16 The arduous way to get in touch with French authorities makes rare institutionalised platforms where trade associations are heard, if not listened, a valuable instrument for interest representation. Again, hearings and meetings are important instruments at the European level, too, but here they have a different quality: they are well institutionalised, easily accessible, and

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16 It is worth noting that the French socialist EU-Minister at the time, Edith Cresson, established in 1988 consulting committees for the co-ordination of French European policies in which interest groups (and trade associations) were invited to participate (Groupes d’études et de mobilisation (GEM)) (Nonon 1989). For a very profound analysis of the co-ordination of French European policies at the French governmental and administrative level see Lesquesne 1993.
organised by the European Commission, or the European Parliament, in order to provide a forum where different viewpoints can be expressed and thus taken into consideration by the decision makers at the formulation stage.\footnote{Assuming EU trade associations to be specialists regarding EU interest representation, the presentation of expert knowledge, the use of position papers, and the presence in committees and hearings are probably instruments quite suitable for "Euro-lobbying", as they are also very much esteemed by European trade associations (Kohler-Koch/Quittkat 1999: 10).}

Finally, the media and the public play a quite significant role as "instruments" of interest intermediation in France, too. While in Germany 33.2\% consider the mobilisation of the public and the media as a very useful instrument of interest representation, in France 42.7\% do so. French trade associations fall back on a "public strategy" more often than business associations of other provenance, as political pressure is more probable to be successful in political systems where decisions are reversed for political reasons (Schmidt 1999). But the mobilisation of the public is also a way to convince authorities of the relevance of private interests for the general good. However, this instrument is only of limited use at the European level. The complexity of the European decision process due to the involvement of actors from 15 member states renders strategies of interest representation like demonstrations and strikes useless: decisions which are usually a compromise between the member states are not easily overturned by public pressure once they are taken. As there exists no "European public" as of yet, demonstrations and strikes are usually limited to single member countries and thus have no direct impact on the EU decision process except for the case of a national government vetoing a decision in the Council. But even then a blocking minority is generally needed and hence trade associations have to lobby several national governments directly or by cooperation with their counterparts in other member countries.

The instruments of interest representation used by French trade associations reflect to a certain extent Vivian Schmidt’s description of \textit{lobbying à la Française}: personal contacts based on personal relationships definitely play a prominent role and the importance attributed to nationality at the European level might point into the same direction. However, the use of other - more formal – instruments of interest representation like scientific expertise, position papers, or the presence in committees and hearings has to be regarded as important characteristics of \textit{lobbying à la Française} as well. As for the mobilisation of the media and the public, the preference of all these methods and mediums of interest representation can be attributed to the French logic of influence, especially to the low acceptance of private interest
groups which in turn is connected with the omnipresent concept of the \textit{intérêt général} in the high French administration.

The analysis of the European strategies of French trade associations underlines the structuring force of the national and European logic of influence and points towards some inadequacies in the current adaptation of French trade associations to the European logic of influence. However, an analysis of European strategies of French trade associations also has to consider the structure of the French federation system and the logic of membership. They also should have some explanatory power with respect to French patterns of European interest representation.

\textit{The structure of the French trade association system and the impact of the logic of membership on European strategies of French trade associations}

When analysing interest representation strategies of trade associations, the organisational properties and the trade association system’s structure are relevant, as they too influence organisational behaviour. It is generally assumed that the representativeness of interest groups is related to its prospects of access to political actors (Olson 1965; Schmitter/Streeck 1981). As it is easier for decision makers to negotiate with only few representative trade associations than with a whole range of different interest groups each representing only a small segment of affected interests, trade associations with a comprehensive membership are assumed to have privileged access to political institutions.

However, we only know little about the French system of interest representation. The information we can find in the literature is somewhat vague. There exist few genuine empirical studies on French interest groups, which are either quite old (Ehrmann 1958; Meynaud 1960; Wilson 1987) or do not differentiate sufficiently between different interest groups, especially not between different economic interests like trade unions, business associations, or single companies (Waarden 1995; Schmidt 1996 and 1999). Further, while we know a lot about French trade unions, their role in the French political system (Jansen et al. 1986; Jennings 1990; Bridgford 1991; Mouriaux 1994; Karila-Cohen/Wilfert 1998; Visser 2000) and their organisational properties, i.e. the logic of membership, only very little information can be found on French trade associations (Weber 1986; Kowalsky 1989; Guillaume 1987).
The organisational weakness of French trade unions is often projected on to French business associations, especially with regard to their density ratio, sometimes their finances, and equally regarding the pluralistic structure of the federation system (Goetschy/Rozenblatt 1992; Ronit/Schneider 1997; Mény 1999a). Our data confirms only partially the often presented assumption that the distribution of trade associations in France measured by personal and by financial resources is dominated by small and weak organisations. Measured by people employed, the distribution of trade associations in France and Germany is quite similar; measured by budget, the picture is slightly different and points into the expected direction: in France half (50,0 %) of the trade associations have a budget up to 500.000 ECU, while in Germany the share of small trade associations only lies by 44,2 %. Thus, in France fewer trade associations have available a high budget (more than 500.000 ECU) than in Germany, but it seems exaggerated to speak of a federation system dominated by poorly equipped trade associations.18

Regarding the pluralistic structure of the French federation system, here too more differentiated statements are desirable. Whereas French trade unions “are to a far greater extent fragmented and ideological [than in most other European countries], while political rivalry between different union currents and organizations is overwhelming” (Visser 2000: 237), the situation for French trade associations is quite different. In industry, similarly to the German system, there exists mainly one trade association per sector or sub-sector; yet, French business associations have territorial branches which might pursue different strategies and are members in different national inter-sectoral trade organisations. Most sectoral or sub-sectoral trade associations are members at the main French federation of industry Mouvement des Entreprises de France (Medef; before October 1998: Conseil National du Patront Français (CNPF)) and many sectoral or sub-sectoral trade associations – or at least some of their regional sub-branches – are also members of the Confédération Générale des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises (CGPME). The existence of two main inter-sectoral trade associations, of course, points into the direction of a system with competing associations. But although there exists an ever lasting conflict between Medef and CGPME, the latter concentrating on the organisation of small and medium size enterprises, both business associations co-operate

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18 Analysing the frequencies of contacts, the size of the budget, however, plays a dominant role: the higher the budget, the higher is the probability of trade associations having frequent contacts with political institutions (Kohler-Koch/Quittkat 1999).
regularly (Wilson 1987; Goetschy/Rozenblatt 1992).19

The rather low relevance of competition (compared to pluralistic systems like Great Britain) between different French trade associations is also underlined by the share of trade associations organising more than 76 percent of their potential members, which is equally high in France (55.66 %) as it is in Germany (55.43 %). It turns out that French trade associations have a similarly good starting point to gain access to political actors as do German trade associations. Missing contacts of French trade associations with political institutions or characteristics of their European strategies of interest representation cannot simply be attributed to a deficiency in representativeness. As shown above, the frequencies of contacts with political actors as well as the instruments used by trade associations for European interest representation are highly influenced by the logic of influence at the national as well as at the European level.

However, the function assigned to trade associations within political and economic systems by their members also play an important role for the structuring of interest representation strategies. To put it in simple terms: strategy follows task.20 Three main areas of responsibility for trade associations can generally be distinguished: interest representation, provision of services, and market co-ordination. While most German business associations cover the whole range of possible functions, only around a third of French trade associations are involved in political interest representation like informing their members about political developments (F: 39.0 %; FRG: 81.6 %) or representing their members in hearings and committees (F: 33.3 %; FRG: 82.3 %). Thus, the share of German and French trade associations performing these functions differs between 42.6 % and 49 % despite the fact that around half of the French business associations monitor political developments (F: 53.3 %; FRG: 68.1 %).

The situation looks different with regard to the provision of services: French trade associations are more of a service provider for their members than anything else. The services provided by a large part of French trade associations are: the disposition of statistics and branch information (90.7 %); advertising and public relations activities (90.7 %), legal and

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19 A recent example for this co-operation, which also included the French Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Assemblée des Chambres Françaises de Commerce et d’Industrie (ACFCI)) is the jointly published paper on the politics of transport "Politique des transports: Les priorités des entreprises" (MEDEF, CGPME, ACFCI 2000). Concerning the competition between the often named association SNMPI (Syndicat Nationale de la Petite et Moyenne Industrie) (Ronit/Schneider 1997) and the other inter-sectoral federations, the SNMPI can be considered as marginal, regarding the number of members as well as its influence on the policy making process (Wilson 1987: 104).

economic consulting (86.9 %), market research (75.7 %), access-provision to consultancies (60.7 %), and further education and qualification for members (54.2 %).

Finally, although a similar share of German and French trade associations is involved in different aspects of market co-ordination, the definition of technical norms and standards (67.6 %) as well as the definition and specification of quality and educational standards (59.3 %) play a dominant role with regard to European interest representation of French trade associations. The frequency of contacts with the national and European regulatory and standardisation authorities is striking: only around 12 percent of all French trade associations have no contacts with national regulatory and standardisation authorities at all (F: 12.3 %; FRG: 19.2 %). Although this share is more than twice as high for the European level (no contacts with EU national regulatory and standardisation authorities: F: 28.9 %; FRG: 43.1 %), standardisation and regulation is the terrain on which French trade associations are extremely active: at the European level 32.9 % of the French trade associations even have monthly or weekly contacts with standardisation and regulation authorities (FRG: 13.7 %), at the national level this is the case for 58.5 % (FRG: 29.1 %; see appendix for a more detailed picture).

Thus, summarising my findings, political interest representation does not present an important part of French trade associations’ duties. The low percentage of associations being active at the agenda setting stage of the European and the national policy making cycle, as presented above, is a reflection of this, although the other factors discussed do not lose explanatory power. At the national level, a very important part of French trade associations’ duties falls in the realm of industrial relations. Many French trade associations also act as employers’ associations and represent their members’ interests vis-à-vis trade unions (F: 64.8 %; FRG: 27.3 %). This task, of course, only plays a limited role at the European level. Social policy still falls mainly into the member countries’ scope of duties and trade associations are rather weakly organised at the EU level (Ebbinghaus/Visser 2000). On the other hand, the high frequencies of contacts between trade associations and standardisation institutes demonstrate the important role of French trade associations as intermediators between their members on the one side and standardisation and regulatory authorities on the other side. Setting standards, being it technical norms or quality standards, however, is the central aspect of European economic legislation. To a large extent the establishment and the functioning of the Common Market consists in and depends on the harmonisation of technical norms and quality
standards. In this regard, the French trade associations’ European interest representation which is characterised by a considerable extent of contacts with EU regulatory and standardisation authorities, is a reflection of the duties delegated to them by their national members.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this paper was to analyse how French trade associations have adapted their strategies of interest representation to the European multi-level system. The underlying model of the analysis was that of the interaction of the national and European logic of influence and of the logic of membership, which are considered to structure national trade associations’ European strategies of interest representation.

The analysis of the empirical data shows that most French trade associations have expanded their strategies of interest representation from the national to the European level. They have contacts to political institutions at the national as well as at the European level, i.e. French trade associations have reacted to the emergence of the European multi-level system by applying a multi-level strategy of interest intermediation. Despite this adaptation to the European multi-level system the data also reveals that French trade associations rely much on national channels for the representation of their interests in the EU policy making process, the main focus being on the national government. Finally, the empirical analysis allows us to discern specific national patterns of European interest representation. This is observable with regard to the French trade associations’ strong reliance on formal instruments as well as personal relations when trying to influence the European policy making process. Yet, the national characteristics of French European interest intermediation strategies become most visible with respect to the policy cycle and the late involvement of French trade associations only at the policy formulation stage.

Summing up the results of the data analysis, is the underlying hypothesis of this paper confirmed, that French trade associations still have significant problems in adjusting their strategies of interest representation to the European logic of influence?

The rather late involvement of French trade associations into the policy making process only at the policy formulation stage, as well as the use of strikes and the mobilisation of the media and/or the public, are both aspects not considered to be very useful instruments for European interest representation. They seem to confirm the hypothesis that French trade associations so
far have not fully adapted their strategies of interest representation to the European logic of influence. But there is even stronger evidence for a non-confirmation of the adaptation-hypothesis. French trade associations have regular and often even frequent contacts with EU institutions. Further, the instruments of interest representation they use at the national level like personal and regular contacts, written position papers, scientific expertise, or presence in hearings and committees are, as shown above, also adequate for European level interest representation. Finally, the relations of French trade associations with EU institutions are as co-operative as the relations between EU institutions and their German counterparts albeit the latter’s better pre-requisites of adaptation due to the similarities between the German and the EU political culture.

My conclusion is that the hypothesis of non-adaptation which is well established in the research literature, has to be rejected on the basis of the empirical data. The empirical proof of French trade associations not being active at the agenda setting stage must not be equated automatically with problems of adaptation to the European logic of influence. To interpret the late beginning of French interest representation as a sign of non-adaptation to the European logic of influence only because the European Commission is open to interest groups at the agenda setting stage means to ignore the influence of the logic of membership as an explanatory variable and as a structuring element of interest representation strategies: There might exist factors which render the application of some strategies of European interest intermediation unnecessary.

One such factor could be the "division of labour" between French trade associations and their members (i.e. companies) with regard to political business interest representation at the national as well as at the European level. Several points indicate the existence of such a division of labour between French trade associations and their members: The analysis of the tasks and duties assigned to French trade associations by their members shows clearly that only around a third of the French trade associations are charged with political interest representation, i.e. with influencing the political agenda. The prominent tasks of French trade associations are to provide services, to represent their members’ interests as employers vis-à-vis trade unions, and to represent their members’ interests as competitors in the Common as well as on the world market by co-ordinating technical and quality standards and to get them recognised by European standardisation and regulatory authorities either directly or via their national standardisation and regulatory institutes (in the case of European standardisation and
regulatory authorities not allowing for the membership of (national) trade associations). Further, there exist French (national) equivalents to the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT), which are forums used by business representatives and company executives to develop and co-ordinate their political preferences and to represent their interests vis-à-vis political actors or institutions. Finally, the often named dominance of informal contacts between French business on the one hand and French government or high administration on the other hand has not been confirmed by our data for the case of French trade associations. French trade associations apply, as presented above, a whole range of instruments of interest representation and they show a high dependence on formal instruments (position papers, hearings, committees, etc.), which implies that with regard to French trade associations informal contacts are not as well established as commonly assumed. But there is a high probability that company representatives can rely on the famous French personal relationships built up at the Grandes Écoles and in the Grands Corps. The move of executives from private to public posts and functions, and vice versa, leads to a high degree of inter-penetration between the political, administrative, and economic élites. The existence of important personal networks in France between private and public actors has been observed (Suleiman 1976; Schmidt 1996; Mény 1989) and it is very likely that these personal relationships between company executives on the one hand and political and/or administrative élites on the other hand are used for political interest representation.21

Research outlook

What becomes evident through the analysis of European strategies of French trade associations is the imprecision of some authors concerning the term “business interests”. This is due to the fact that most researchers analyse either interest groups in general (Wilson 1987; Mény 1999b) or business interests as a whole (Vivien Schmidt 1996), with no special interest in French trade associations. Therefore it is the aim of my PhD research project to focus on French trade associations and their duties with regard to their national and European strategies of interest representation. I will analyse the relationship between French trade associations and their (company) members, especially as regards the possible “division of labour” between trade associations and big companies. My working hypothesis is that the adaptation of French

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21 The representative of the average French trade association probably comes from a different (more technically oriented) educational background than the French economic, administrative or political élite – dominant trade associations like Medef, CGPME, UIMM (Union des Industries Métallurgiques et Minières), etc. excluded – and therefore cannot fall back on these élite networks.
trade associations to the European logic of influence has already taken place to the "necessary" extent: If "political lobbying" is traditionally done by French (big) companies themselves and not by French trade associations, and if direct company lobbying is becoming more and more a characteristic of the European interest intermediation system (Coen 1998; Green Cowles 1997), then the differences between the European and the French logic of influence affect French trade associations to a lesser extent than generally assumed. In this case, other national trade associations which focus to a greater extent on political interest representation, might be challenged much more by the European logic of influence than French trade associations: companies might withdraw part of the traditional (national) tasks and duties from their (national) trade associations as far as European interest representation is concerned, in order to represent their interests directly vis-à-vis European political institutions.
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