“We have wanted to play the game of democracy”.

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Draft: this version is intended for discussion.

Let us start this paper by a short chronology of the French socialist 2004 summer, which should help us to draw a picture of the situation. On the 20th June, former Prime Minister and number 2 of his party, L. Fabius declared he had judged the European Constitution’s text “disappointing”. Two days later the leadership of the party, in the name of the organization, underlined some “real overhangs”, admitting “French socialists had hoped for more”. On the 20th August, a month after President Chirac’s announcement of a national referendum on the Constitutional text, F. Hollande, the socialist First Secretary who had declared he was in favor of the text the day after Chirac’s declaration, asked to the activists of his party “not to fall into the trap of division”. On the 26th August, the three minority factions of the party launched together what they called “a decisive battle” in favor of the “no”. On the 9th September L. Fabius announced his decision to vote “no”, while on the 16th, F. Hollande foresaw “a double crisis: European and Socialist” in case of the victory of the “no”… Thus, at the beginning of the 2004 autumn it seems clear that the French Socialist Party (PS) was facing a deep internal calling into question. As the party was splat right down the middle, something had to be one…

Here is the political chain of events that led up to the decision to hold an internal referendum.

Procedures of direct democracy are more and more used in many countries and so in many partisan systems. The usage of referendum has become quite well established in many countries on international issues. In the scope of European integration, we can note several important examples (France 1992, Denmark 1992 and 2000, Sweden 1994 and 2003). The increase of EU referendums has attracted the attentions and the studies of a number of scholars (Bjørklund, 1982; Bogdanor, 1994; Gallagher, 1996; Setälä, 1999)

In most member states, the mainstream left now favors further European integration. Socialist or social-democrat parties generally approve the development and the deepening of the European Union institutions, competencies and to a certain extent independent political arena. Thus, if we expect the Maltese Socialist Party (Partit Laburista), all the organizations
members of the Party of European Socialists (PES) have decided to support the project of European Constitution. But for the PS this support was not obvious. Predicting internal squabbling and wishing to present a unique socialist answer to the national referendum decided by President Chirac, an internal referendum was decided. This consultation appears to be an experience as new and original as dangerous in terms of internal partisan cohesion.

Political parties are central in modern democracies. However, the analyze of their increasing failure to perform their classical functions (instruments of mobilization, vehicles of representation\(^2\), and channels of interest aggregation and articulation) and more generally the disappointment and discontent resulting from the ways parties usually operate is far from not having any impact on democracy’s conceptions. If Michels underlined in 1911 the inevitable tendencies towards ‘oligarchy’, the modern context does not seem to have deeply democratized the partisan organizations. New partisan procedures, as intra-party referendums, might be experimented to contain the weakening of the linkage between societies and political parties (Katz and Mair, 1995).

In this paper we will try to understand why the PS executive accepted to organize this referendum, questioning intra-party democratic habits as well as the political context of this procedure. Underlining the actors and forces in opposition, we will describe the various ways they appropriated this direct consultation in order to challenge intra-party balance of power. The analyze of the turnout and the results will make us question the relevance of direct democracy procedure within the party. The use we will make of three grassroots’ interviews will be useful to illustrate changes and evolutions even if not methodologically central. Before concluding remarks we will try to question the future of this democratic practice in the PS.
A referendum, why?

The PS organizing such an internal ballot underlines a shift within the French socialists’ habits towards ‘democracy’, we will discuss this assumption.

Even if activists are used to vote to design the party’s leadership (they vote for the Congresses of the party as well as to determine the party’s candidate for the Presidential election since 1995), this was the very first time they expressed themselves through a process of direct democracy. For a long time, this type of internal procedure was considered as a ‘plebiscite’ and so as deeply antidemocratic. The memory and the criticism of Napoleon III and De Gaulle’s uses of direct democracy are part of the socialists’ identity and ideas about democracy. Nevertheless, after ‘the 21st April 2002 earthquake’ and the absence of PS’ candidate, L. Jospin, in the second round of presidential election, the leadership and the line of the party have been criticized and challenged.

Back in opposition, the Socialists hold their Congress in 2003 in Dijon. If the team around former First Secretary F. Hollande won the internal election, the three minority factions (analyzed as more “leftist” and representing all together 37.63% of the Congress’ votes) imposed an evolution of the party’s statutes, with the institution of a new procedure to decide the party’s line: direct consultation of the members.

This procedure was meant to be used only for central questions and issues that matter for the party’s identity. At the beginning of October 2004, the National Council of the party decided to organize the first internal referendum about the project of an European Constitution. As we already mentioned, former Prime Minister L. Fabius had declared a few days earlier he was opposed to the treaty. Thus, he was surprisingly joining the three minority factions, even if he still was the number two of the party’s leadership. The intra-party left-right divide was cut across. The text, analyzed as challenging the tradition, the identity and the political goals by a lot of activists (grassroots as well as elected persons), was considered as dangerous in terms of partisan unity and coherence and so to be discussed. Messages and positions’ clarity appears to be important for a political organization. The PS was lead to this internal procedure not to present itself with various and opposite discourses, which is often perceived as a lack of credibility. D. Strauss-Khan, former Finance Minister (from June 1997 to November 1999) even proposed, 30th September 2004, at the beginning of the internal campaign to hold an extraordinary Congress dedicated to European issues whichever the result was to be. He expressed the feeling that the European issue had to be deeply debated
within the party. Thus it was clear to everyone (members and analysts) that the text of the European Constitution could damage the unity of the organization.

The weakening of the linkages between parties and people replaced by linkages with the State (Katz and Mair, 1995), has questioned the centrality of parties as political actors. Scholars have noted new democratic habits, with a more important place for citizens’ direct participation, in which political parties are deprived of their functions. For instance, new social movements allow citizens to be more directly involved in policy-making process than traditional political parties. Scholars (Cain, Dalton, Scarrow, 2003) mention an ‘advocacy democracy’. Thus, to get back their centrality and role, parties have to take these problems into account and develop new forms of intra-democracy.

As when a governing party opts for direct democracy strategy, the head of the PS organized this referendum in the expectation that it will win. J-L. Parodi (2001) underlined the link between the originator, the stakes and the circumstances, in what he called the “referendum triangle”. In the case of this procedure, we can say that the PS’ head could be quite sure of its legitimacy and authority: the Congress that confirmed its leadership was only one year old and its strategy had leaded the PS to two important electoral victories a few months earlier. So, even if the minority factions had asked for this internal referendum, the PS executive had some good reasons not to be too anxious about the result. Moreover, the PS has had a strong pro-UE identity since Mitterrand’s years in the Elysée. The political circumstances (domestic ones with a deep discontent about the conservative government and so the perspective of changeover of political power between parties, as well as international ones with a quasi-unanimity of the other parties members of the PSE in favor of the text) could make the socialist’s leadership think that activists would not feel the need to adopt an anti-establishment or protesting attitude and would prefer to act in a “responsible way”, as a government party is expected to do. However, it seems important to underline here that minority factions found that this new procedure could enable them to gain greater leverage within the party than is possible through traditional agenda and channels of partisan democracy. But at the same time this would be wrong to forget that the party’s majority had not found such devices useful. There were different reasons for F. Hollande and the leadership to opt for a referendum.

Referendums, especially on EU issues are often analyzed as a leeway to escape political problems at national level. Using direct democracy gives a clear majority. The opinion of the majority revealed in this case is an important "legitimiser" of political
orientations. In the case of the PS’ referendum the notion of the “the will of the majority”, clearly expressed, is based on the idea of the sovereignty of the “party’s people”: the activists. Thus it has a strong normative appeal. The leadership of the party might have concluded that this particular issue was requiring clear, demonstrated and democratic support to be carried through. This referendum has, partly, been organized to achieve a more stable decision, since more legitimate, than if the party’s executive had decided the position of the organization on the Constitutional treaty in Paris by itself. We will discuss, and contest, the reality of this stability and legitimacy later in the paper. Parties seem very concerned by “relevance” which is not always easily compatible with democratic procedures. French parties are not known by scholars to be very democratic, partisan elites have always had a decisive role. Nowadays partisan democracy almost exclusively means representative democracy. On complex issues such as European integration, the elitist character of politics is often considered as a necessity (Raunio, 2002).

L. Morel (1993) underlined that referendums are usually organized because of divisions within parties on a sensitive issue, as a resource of managing the intra-party conflict. In the case of this partisan procedure, the same logic is in action as in nationwide referendums: compartmentalization of a possible and foreseeable discord. M. Ostrogorski analyzed in 1902 that all kinds of problems may happen when issues are mixed together in election. For parties it can often be preferable to cut off an issue that is seen as a possible problem in terms of internal cohesion or a possible tumult in terms of internal balance of power from the rest of internal policies and political arguments. By passing the responsibility for taking the PS’ decision to the party’s people, leaders probably hoped to quell dissent within the party on a divisive question.

What Lagerspetz (1996) underlined about the problems of preference-aggregation in representative democracy, the fact that it may distort the will of the majority because it is a compound social choice method, can also be applied to parties internal lives. National partisan elites defend more integration whereas local grassroots are often scared of it. Direct democracy may be characterized by the separation of issues, organizing this internal referendum the PS’s leadership tried, on the one hand, not to let the European issue affect internal balance of power and the race to the 2007 presidential candidature. And on the other hand this would also have been a solution that activist’s preferences on the European question is not disturb by positions or decisions made on other issues.
We have to underline that Europeanization poses a series of policy challenges and opportunities to political parties. As domestic policy choices and orientations are increasingly influenced and framed by EU politics, researchers (Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999) believe that the parties seem in terms of ideology less cohesive on integration than in traditional left-right questions (Hix, 1999). If we look at domestic party systems integration appears not to have had an important impact (Mair, 2000), however it is clear that EU construction has had many impacts on intra-party lives. EU issues’ penetration into national party competition has caused factionalism (grassroots, back-bench rebellions), leadership reorganizations or resignations and even the formations of new political parties.

A direct consultation could also be a way to give a more important place to the questions of European integration, especially at such a decisive moment. We usually agree that in France there has been no real and deep European debate since the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. At a glance, referendums were used to reduce the ‘democratic deficit’ of the EU. We have noted that European Integration does generally increase leadership autonomy (Raunio, 2002). The complexity of the European debates is often employed within the parties as “a reason not to bother grassroots with the EU”. Direct democratic practice on EU referendums could provide an important institutional channel via which rank-and-file activists’ voices could be heard and took into account. Socialist leaders could also predict that after having experienced this campaign and referendum grass root militants would demonstrate more awareness of the integration process. Scholars (Christin and Hug, 2002) have verified, by formal modeling as well as quantitative analysis, the impact of referendum application on the public support for the EU. Deciding to organize such a procedure could thus be analyzed as the partisan leadership’s wish to force the grass roots to appropriate this issue, and contribute to the democratization of the European integration. Especially after what happened in 2002: two central campaigns (presidential and legislative elections) and the non appearance of the European issue, socialist leaders felt like they could not avoid the subject this time (Hug, 2002).

But “politicking calculation” was not missing as we will see in the section where we discuss “the actors and forces” of the campaign. The leaders’ internal competition needed a battle field and had found one…
The internal campaign: a definite procedure.

The conflicting talks on the text of the European Constitution project began, during the “summer School” that the PS held every year in La Rochelle, between various figures of the party (traditionally called “les éléphants du PS”). As we mentioned earlier, the new statutes, adopted in the 2003 Congress, made possible the organization of an internal referendum to decide the partisan stance on this issue. The national press made a great fuss on these nascent dissensions, presenting the PS as, once again, being a prey to internal leaders’ battle, as well as confronted to a deep question of identity: had the PS became a classical social-democrat party or could it still call itself “socialist”? After the National Council of the 9th October, the rules of the campaign were defined.

The national headquarters ordered to the 102 departmental federations to organize rapidly a political meeting with an open debate, followed by an other meeting with contradictory speeches in every 3,700 local sections of the party between 4th and 30th November. Thus before activists had to vote, more than 400 meetings had been hold, to which we must had those dedicated only to the ‘yes’ side and those to the ‘no’ side hold by local comities. We can underline here the important explicative aspect of the campaign. European issues are usually considered as to technical and complex to interest people and grass root militants. What has been built by the French Socialists during their internal debate shows that they tried to foresee this customary critic. Structured as a national electoral campaign, the debate between socialists used the same techniques: from the huge public meeting with party’s leaders to small and informal local reunions. This multiplication of campaign actions makes impossible an inventory of all the events made by the two sides. However, Pascal Popelin (first secretary of the Seine-saint-Denis’ federation, in favor of the ‘no’ like his current’s leader L. Fabius) relativized: “With all this type of meetings, we only touch 50% of the activists”.

The two sides did not conserve their forces. Thus, T-shirts (“free to say no” or simply “yes”), stickers have been printed, new slogans have been created. It is not possible to count how many texts, arguments have been written and distributed to the members of the PS. The party spent 65,000 euros in providing each militant one version of the project of European Constitution, with the annexes. A mass mailing was done by the two sides. Posters were pasted on walls. Right from the day of the National Council that decided the organization of this internal campaign and the direct consultation, the party’s newspaper, its official publication (“L’Hebdo des socialistes”) published each week many pages split equally between the two camps on the issue. Internet was also used during the campaign as a way to
develop campaign’s arguments: on the ‘yes’ side the site www.ouisocialiste.net was created; whereas the ‘no’ side had two sites www.nonsocialiste.net and www.ambitioneurope.com. We can already underline one point on which we will come back later: the plurality of the ‘no’ side and its incapacity, and its lack of desire, to make a common campaign.

The party gave 15 000 euros to each side in order to finance the internal campaigns, but both sides explained that the budget was still insufficient and many local leaders said they had to pay for the organizations of meetings themselves and all the main meetings with national party’s leaders invariably ended with calls for cash donations. Associations were created to receive this money. On the financial aspect of the campaign, once again the diversity of the ‘no’ side, did not help them coordinate its actions.

**The principal actors and forces:**

The French Socialist Party has always been a political organization composed of diverse currents. Balance of internal power has always been something difficult to manage. The unity of the party has often been fragile, especially when not in office. Challenging the party’s leadership looks like a socialist’s tradition when it is in opposition. The PS already experienced an “European crisis” at the time of Maastricht treaty in 1992. If the principal opposition to this text in France came initially from the extremes, in particular the Communists (PCF) and the National Front (FN), there also were opponents in all of the other parties, including a small number in Mitterrand’s own PS. Jean-Pierre Chevènement, an historical leader present in Epinay in 1971 with François Mitterrand to create the PS, was the most prominent of them and left the organization to found a new political party the Mouvement Des Citoyens (MDC). Later in the 1990’s the party faced some new internal disagreement on the European issue, with Amsterdam Treaty, but this did not become more extensive because of the national political context and the beginning of the Jospin’s cabinet (Ladrech and Marlière, 1999). Once again during the parliamentary talks about the EU’s enlargement some socialist MPs voted against their party’s line. But in these two cases, this item of socialists’ divisions got no coverage in the press, and even within the PS not many members gave any attention to it. We can underline that European issues have also often been in the European Socialists’ family a factor of factionalism this is not specific to the French socialists, we can rapidly recall the Swedish experience where national referendums have been used to manage internal divisions on this question (Aylott, 1997).
All the party grandees have had to give her/his verdict on the text, and to enter the internal campaign. The party apparatus was also deeply divided, in the national headquarters as well as in regional federations and local sections. Every members of the party had to espouse a position.

The ‘yes’ side: the ‘yes’ camp has mostly been embodied by members of the head of the party. Most of the party grandees have been defending the ‘yes’. Thus, with first secretary Hollande, most of former Ministers (from Mitterrand’s year as well as from Jospin’s year) have been in favor of a ‘socialist yes’. D. Strauss-Khan, E. Guigou (former Minister of Justice during the last Jospin’s cabinet and Minister of European Affairs at the beginning of the 1990’s), J. Lang (former Education Minister with Jospin and emblematic Mitterrand’s Minister of Culture) have all embarked upon a trip round all the federations without respite. In addition to the leadership of the party, the socialist’s establishment, we must underline the active part took by the Party of European Socialists’ President Poul Nyrup Rasmussen in the internal campaign. In other words the people defending the ‘yes’ were familiar figures. In the one hand they represent the legitimacy of the organization, but on the other hand they also mean the party’s elites.

The ‘no’ side: the leaders of the ‘no’ mainly came from the three minority factions of the party: the faction ‘Nouveau Parti Socialiste’ (new PS), leaded by a new generation of MPs like A. Montebourg, got 16.88% of the votes in the 2003 Congress; the faction ‘force militante’ (activists’ force), leaded by the first Secretary of the important federation of the North, M. Dolez, got 4.38% of the 2003 votes; the faction ‘nouveau monde’ (new world), leaded by former n°1 H. Emmanuelli and former Minister J-L. Mélenchon, which can claim representing 16.37% of the party. But one politician transformed this internal competition into something more complex than a simple opposition between the majority and the minorities of the PS: L. Fabius. Fabius has been embodying the liberal leanings within the PS, the right of the party, for years. J-L. Mélenchon was very pleased about this reinforcement: “the ‘yes’ side wanted to caricature us as immature eurosceptical leftists, now with Fabius with us this not possible anymore...”.

So if the minority factions were glad to welcome such a famous and respected politician, it is important to underline that at no point Fabius and his friends mixed their internal campaign with the minority groups. The minority currents did not want to trouble internal identities in the party. Campaign is important in determining referendums outcome (Johnston et al., 1996), so between the moment the PS’s leadership called this referendum and the day the results were announced, a very hard fought campaign of two months stood. If the
popular adage says that “civil wars are the most violent ones”, this socialist’s experience could illustrate the same dynamic for political campaigns. In this internal campaign, as usually in every referendum campaign, the two camps were conglomerations of very varied forces.

Even if the sociological composition\textsuperscript{7} of the party, as well as the balance of internal power could suggest that the ‘yes’ side would win this referendum, an important electoral volatility was feared. The leadership of the party kept on saying during the debate that they had the feeling the protest stance was popular and the ‘no’ arguments were gaining grounds campaign meeting after campaign meeting. Their elections stumps through the country aimed to present a record of socialists’ achievements in the European integration process and so underline a part of the PS’ identity. As it often happens on European issues we faced a real dramatization of the campaign. There were two sides in this strategic dramatization: on the one hand the denunciations of a possible isolation of the PS within its European political family. Indeed all the parties of the PES are in favor of the text and so the French leadership made its very first argument of this political reality\textsuperscript{8}. Saying everywhere that the French PS “\textit{could not be right against its entire political family}”, the ‘yes’ side welcomed during its campaign events a lot of European Social-Democrats (a huge meeting with new Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero was announced as the biggest event of the internal debate), illustrating the uniqueness of the position of the European Left family on this issue. The contextualization of the referendum has been used in order to show grass-root militants that a more leftist stance, as proposed by the anti-liberal ‘no’ campaign, made no sense in the integration environment. Some journalists even talked about a kind of ‘Bad Godesberg’ syndrome, to illustrate a decisive moment in French socialism’s history, a turn to ‘realism’.

On the other hand, for the other aspect of this dramatization the leadership used the argument of governing parties’ duties in terms of ‘pragmatism’, ‘realism’. The theme of ‘we have to behave in a responsible way’ has been recurrent all over the internal campaign. The ‘no’ side have been widely analyzed as the part if the PS defending a leftward shift, and so assimilated to leftist organizations. The assimilation of the factions in favor of the ‘no’ to ‘unrealism’, ‘immaturity’ ‘trotskyist parties’ was successful in what it meant to activists that a socialist ‘no’ may cause growing loss of credibility in perspective of political discontinuity. To be credible in its wish to take hold of the reins of national power, the PS had, according to the leadership’s arguments, to accept the constitutional treaty, as a sign of political maturity.
To conduct the ‘no’ campaign the minority factions and Fabius’ friends insisted on the ideological stock-in-trade. The campaign tactics were trying to “butter up the activists-voters” on their concern about socialist identity. The ‘no’ side developed the idea that the party’s people had to use the opportunity of the referendum to take up with the more leftist part of PS’ electorate. The ‘no’ side presented itself as the custodians of the socialist orthodoxy. A parallel was drawn between the loss of popular votes in the Presidential race in 2002 and a too centrist stance of the party. A kind of sociological rupture with the traditional electorate of the Left was foreseen. European integration challenges the traditional cleavages. In his introduction to the edited version of S. Rokkan’s researches, P. Flora (1999) underlines that: “for Rokkan, cleavages are fundamental oppositions within a territorial population which stands out from the multiplicity of conflicts rooted in the social structure”, and they rise up: “at critical junctures where basic decisions are made concerning external boundaries and internal structures which are frozen over a long period of time”. Building a definition of cleavage, Bartolini and Mair’s work (1990) included empirical, normative as well as organizational and/or behavioral elements; here the social category has to lead to a consciousness of its political relevance, a group culture, and to organizational expressions. Factionalism in action in the French socialist party on European issue illustrates what Marks and Steenbergen underlined, (2002) arguing that European questions have now become central for both political parties and voters and the EU dimension is neither independent of the Left/Right dimension\(^9\) nor fused with it. French socialists are facing internal divisions, which they tried to manage through a direct democracy process, questioning their identity, their ‘sociological anchoring’.

The results and analyzes of the votes.

The dramatization of the campaign we just mentioned seems to have worked quite well. A grass root militant admitted: “After such an intensive blackmail during all the internal campaign, the fear to loose the little influence the French still have in the European socialist family, […], the lack of credibility of our organization defending an anti-establishment stance, whereas we have been in office quite a lot recently, […], there were no real surprise with the results[…] In my section, I would say that militants have been legalist and legitimist, that is
to say, they have paid attention to the ‘no’ arguments, and have often been very sensible to them, but the idea of being the only socialist party in Europe to reject the text has made activists think this would not be good... for the party. I must for instance admit that voting I have paid attention to the European integration, but also to the French context and to 2007 elections...”.

With 99,162 activists who voted out of the 120,038 official members of the party (82.61%), the very first analyze which can be made is about this high outcome never reached before in intra-PS votes. In May 2003, for the last PS’ Congress, only 76.95% of the party’s members voted to choose between the various currents competing for the leadership. Thus, we can underline that direct democracy seems to be more successful than representative procedures. If the dramatization of the campaign probably caused this high turnout, we must not forget the atmosphere of the last Congress was also very strained. So the two contexts and campaigns have been quite similar, so we will come back later on an analyze that would underline that activists took this very first opportunity to be directly decisive.

57,421 votes were in favor of the ‘yes’, that is to say 58.8% of the members, whereas 40,228 voted for the ‘no’, which represented 41.2%. If we try to compare the importance of unmarked ballots and spoilt ballot papers in these last two internal procedures we would find that for the 2003 Congress 99.03% of the activists that voted did choose between the various possibilities they had, and for the 2004 referendum 98.47% of the “militants-voters” chose the ‘yes’ or the ‘no’. So in these two different cases of intra-party democracy (one representative and one direct) we faced similar electoral practices with relatively high participating in the voting, especially in the French context, and a low rate of spoilt ballot papers, signifying the centrality for grass-roots to have one’s say in the intra-party life.

The geography of the referendum’s results has to be underlined. The results in the various factions often corresponded to the internal balance of power. Local results were deeply swayed by local leaderships. As we will develop later, leaders exerted a huge influence in their respective strongholds. The principal federations where the ‘yes’ was the most important were symbolically the ones where the main figures of the ‘yes’ side are registered. F. Hollande’s Corrèze (82.06%), F. Rebsamen’s Côte-d’Or (81.97%), J. Auxiette’s Vendée, S. Royal’s Deux-Sèvres (74.19%) and J-M. Ayrault’s Loire-Atlantique (72.31%). The leaders of the ‘no’ also got their best results in their strongholds: V. Peillon’s Somme (81.76%), H. Emmanuelli’s Landes (80.44%). Let us note that there were no surprise with a the majority of ‘no’ in Fabius’ Seine-Maritime (62.93%), but the 100% of electoral participation illustrates
perfectly how the members of the PS wanted to use the direct democracy to contest, or not, the party’s majority and line.

But electoral competitions without any surprise do not exist. Thus, the two main socialist federations (Nord and Pas-de-Calais), which were meant to have constituted a wealth of ‘no’ votes, finally ended to vote ‘yes’ (respectively 55.73% and 59.83%). National leaders had repeated meetings in these two federations, where local leader, B. Dolez, urged activists to use this opportunity to force a European position closer to grassroots’ desires. It is a sticking example of a local stronghold acting in a national perspective and not following local leaders. It would be interesting to look in the next months the evolution of these two important federations, if this referendum has changed local internal balance of power.

We can question if the large victory of the ‘yes’ had more to do with the actual beliefs of socialist militants on the text of the Treaty than with the dynamics of the campaign or than the perspective to change the equation of intra-party power. In many referendums’ cases public opinion polls taken in advance of the campaign would have presented different results from those that finally occurred. But in the case of a partisan referendums, unpublished opinion polls (of the voters that is to say here the members of the PS) would have, according to the leadership during the campaign only presented the reality of internal balance of power: the addition of the three minority currents and Fabius’ network in the ‘no’ camp, whereas on the ‘yes’ side we could find the last Congress’ majority…except Fabius’ friends. A voter swing is less possible to happen with partisan militants than with ‘classical’ voters. In the case of party’s militants, assimilation to leaders is deeper and stronger. The idea of activists acting as ‘followers’ is not recent.

Classical literature on referendums often underlines that the messengers matter as much as the message (LeDuc, 2003). Although no factions’ names or socialist leaders’ names were written on ballot papers, arguments, in favor of the ‘yes’ as well as these in favor of the ‘no’, were interpreted by participants as support to well known politicians. While the question of the European Constitution was quite new in the debate, the socialists who convey information and positions to the party’s people are very familiar figures about whom “militants-voters” have opinions. No one during the internal campaign ever forgot that what was behind this procedure: the positioning of the party’s leaders for the 2007 presidential candidature.

Scholars have looked at voters’ volatility at referendums. It seems that referendums involving a cleavage or ideological issues, in which political actors (parties, parties’ factions
or well known politicians) take predictable positions, ought to face the least volatility (Tonsgaard, 1992). Whereas referendums involving new questions or in which parties line up in a non classical manner, are more uncertain in terms of volatility and results (LeDuc, 2001). How can we class this internal referendum? European issues usually involve cleavages within political families. In the left area, the opposition to European integration (the Swedish example is striking) comes from the liberal dimension of the EU. Left factions of social-democratic parties are traditionally quite skeptic towards the integration. But at the same time the question here, the European constitutional Treaty, was something new. Moreover, traditionally voters in EU referendums, even if they are well informed, still need the debate to asses the new arguments of the new text they have to judge. But when we look at the results with a deep confirmation of the balance of power within the PS, and no noticeable volatility, we could class this socialist’s referendum in the first category.

However, we have to keep in mind the particular aspect of an internal vote. Grass root activists cannot be totally assimilated with voters in a nationwide referendum. There is a question of identity that is directly linked with the impact of an internal vote on an important political question. Being involved in the decision process forces the militants to question themselves what image of their organization they want to give to the rest of the country. There is evidence that the unpopularity or the popularity of leaders, as well as opinions towards the PS’ leadership have affected the outcome of the votes. The model of opinion formation developed by J. Zaller (1992) argues that process of opinion formation proceeds from the interaction of predisposition and information. Thus, if the national results have been interpreted in the press as an “anti-Fabius vote”, a geographical analysis of the results that we already mentioned show how faithful to their respective leaders the local sections and federations were. Moreover, the activists’ votes in favour of the line defended by the party’s leadership can also be analyzed « a vote of confidence » in a leadership that did lead the PS to two huge victories in the 2004 mid term elections (regional in March and European in June).
What future for this kind of procedure in the PS:

The use of intra-party democratic processes is not just a practical question. It has profound implications in the way the organization sees itself as well as the image it wants to give to the citizens. At the beginning of the internal campaign the French socialists were very proud of the democratic dimension they were giving to their European orientation: “Now every one in France is going to notice an important difference between us (PS) and the parties of the right: we organize an internal debate and a referendum, and so grassroots are really involved in the decision making process, whereas in the conservative parties (UMP and UDF) everything is decided in the parties’ leaders’ offices and grassroots just have to execute orders. This referendum is a great experience for the PS but also a good publicity...”. But can we say it has been a successful experience for the PS? Will the use of internal become recurrent? Will participatory politics be an evolutionary process?

A low turnout would have been an illustration of a certain lack of participatory culture within the party, and could have been used as an excuse not to repeat this experience of direct democracy. But as we already mentioned the large and deep campaign resulted in a high turnout at the polls (82.61%). This illustrates that grassroots are willing to use all opportunities to decide. Developing opportunities for activists to have a direct impact on party’s policies may increase their wish to participate. We can underline interdependence between the will to participate and its possibility in the party’s statutes. So we can wonder if direct democracy will become a banal procedure. On this point interviewed activists do not share the same point of views. Moreover, we can underline that an activist (C.) interviewed twice, once six weeks before the votes and once three months after the referendum, has changed his mind because of internal disputes that have followed the ballot: he said before the votes: “We are having such an interesting debate inside the party; we, the grassroots, get involved and have the possibility to make things different [...] and I do really hope that from now this will be the way the PS decides of its important orientation...”, whereas three months after the votes, he said: “I really thought referendums would be a democratic way to decide the position of the party on important issues but when you look at the confusion in the party after the votes, I now hope we will not use this procedure to often because instead of giving a clear and legitimate answer to a question, it has challenged the party’s unity [...] direct democracy is not part of the socialists’ tradition and now I understand why...”. Thus, more than the European Constitutional Treaty, the 1st December referendum was the opportunity for many socialist activists to solve the leadership question.
Having held an internal referendum on an issue like European integration, deeply seen as being pursued by elites, creates a precedent. So how would the executive of the party explain in the future that no intra-party direct democracy procedure would be organized on issues with a similar magnitude? Consulting the party’s people on important questions appears now quasi-inescapable. The 2003 statutes’ reform might become quite central in the PS’ decision-making process. Improved methods of communication, advancing technology could help to accelerate a trend toward more participatory forms of intra-democracy. LeDuc (2003) does not predict a rapid shift from conventional political processes to ‘electronic democracy’, but underlines that some forms of political participation that seemed unrealistic a few years ago are now feasible. This shift would certainly be even more possible in intra-party lives.

The main arguments for the PS not to repeat a direct democracy experience lies in the total absence of partisan discipline that followed 2004 December’s vote. We are facing three various behaviors of leaders of the ‘no’. We can also foresee that their respective faithful supporters will act in the same way:

- Some like E. Valls (MP) or Fabius’ friend P. Druon (President of Basse-Normandie Regional Chamber) will finally vote ‘yes’ in the nationwide referendum. They will campaign for the ‘yes’ because they believe that: “We must try every thing to preserve the party’s unity, it is our most treasured possession”.

- Some like Fabius and his friends or the NPS’ members (Montebourg and Peillon’s friends) will still vote ‘no’ but do not campaign publicly anymore. They say they respect the militants’ decision. If they have not changed their mind they do not want to trouble the PS’ cohesion. For instance A. Montebourg keeps on repeating to the press that “his current can not want to change the party toward a more democratic organization and not respect a popular vote”. Let us note that annalists seem to know that the NPS faction has converted its silence during the national campaign into the promise that the 2007 Socialist’s project would take some of their propositions into account. The respect of the militants’ vote becomes a bargaining counter.

- Some like J-L. Mélanchon (MP) or H. Emmanuelli, have decided to campaign against their party’s decision. If Emmanuelli has suspended its participation to the party’s executive, Mélanchon refused to do so. The press made a great fuss about possible disciplinary sanctions; an internal petition called ‘Socialists’ Militants’ Call for the respect of democracy’ have been diffused. Since nothing was provided for such a situation, the dissidents have only been officially reprimanded. The members of the
faction ‘Nouveau Monde’ argument that thanks to their campaign the Left ‘no’ will not be totally disconnected from the PS.

The intra-party divisions that the referendum could not manage and solve might cause a long-lasting split of the PS. Thus, we can wonder if such a procedure has had a positive or negative impact on the party. On the one hand, it gave a great legitimacy to the head of the party to defend the ‘yes’ stance in the national campaign and moreover it could be analyzed as a successful intermediary election: after the two electoral victories in 2004, this new, internal, success strongly confirms the party’s leadership, especially its National Secretary, F. Hollande, who entered the group of possible 2007 candidate. The reorganization of the party’s leadership, with Fabius’ maintenance as number 2 of the party and Valls’ discharge, has been light but was the expression of Hollande’s authority. On the other hand the absence of strict partisan discipline might have disturbed PS’ message. In terms of PS’ democratic practices, the success of this procedure, especially in terms of turnout at the polls, could force PS’ leadership to multiply this type of exercise. But what would be the next discussed issue? The way the leadership has launched the construction of the 2007 project, with new forms of membership (only temporary for the time of the writing of the next presidential manifesto) seem to underline other original forms of decision-making process. The development of procedures permitting grassroots to have the opportunity to be more directly active is anyway an important challenge for political organizations. The French PS, two years after a “terrible earthquake”, needs to reconstruct a linkage with the grassroots, to find a better way to come up to the people’s expectations; without giving the impression of a deeply fractured party. It is surely a great challenge for socialists’ leaders…

**Concluding remarks:**

If naturally decision-making procedures are important as such, theorists of democracy also discuss the external values these procedures enhance. When we look at parties lives it is absolutely true to notice that the way decision are made, orientations are chosen, tells a lot about the organization and its values. The publicity that tried to make French socialists around this first intra-party referendum (based on the idea that in their organization democracy is
more than a vague concept, it is in action: grassroots’ voices do matter) illustrates clearly this aspect.

As we tried to explain in this paper, European issue, which is more and more central, disrupts intra-party cohesion, choosing direct democracy to manage it should have allowed the compartmentalization of the question; but “politicking calculation”, and the 2007 candidature’s battle, almost surpassed the constitutional treaty.

The fact that ‘pro-no’ socialists are still campaigning after the internal ‘yes’ shows that the use of direct democracy failed in what it was meant to manage internal divisions and give to the French people a clear answer. However, the party’s head that accepted to organize this procedure can congratulate itself for its reasserted legitimacy.

But what does it tell us about intra-party cohesion on European integration issue? When this question is not solved by partisan elites themselves, it seems quite difficult to find one position. Intra-party democracy does not seem to help. The fact that socialist important figures now campaign with the Communist party (PCF), dissident Greens, or Chevènement’s friends questions partisan stability in the integration context. Should we, in this environment, propose, like Ostrogorski did at the beginning of last century (1902), a polity with temporary organizations, rather than permanent parties, which would deal with one question at a time and then cease to exist? Will European integration reorganize partisan positions in such a way that parties systems will not be able to resist and will have to reorganize themselves according to this issue? We are still far from such a situation in 2005, but the permanent deepening of European integration could lead us to important changes for political organizations.
References:


1 To illustrate this statement we can underline the numerous literature on this subject and distinguish one book with a meaningful title: Butler, David, and Austin Ranney (eds), 1994, Referendums Around the World: The Growing Use of Direct Democracy, London, MacMillan
2 About the decline of parties representative functions, Bartolini and Mair (2001), underlined that in the same time the parties’ procedural role is increasing.
3 “Responsible way” or “to behave responsibly” are terms that have been widely used by the PS’ leadership insisting on the fact that the PS wants to be in office and so can not honestly defend a too leftist stance. We assume that this argument has worked quite well.
4 A rank and file socialist militant, A., interviewed by the author (8th October 2004).
5 Quoted by I. Mandreau, in Le Monde on the 22nd November. The turnout of the internal referendum could contest this comment of a leader of the ‘no’ side, who was maybe predicting the large victory of the ‘yes’ and was preparing a kind of explication for his defeat.
6 An other member of the PS’s leadership was in favor of the ‘no’, former Jospin’s counselor E. Valls, but the position of L. Fabius was much more emblematic.
7 The importance of sociological variables in behavior towards European integration has often been analyzed as central.
8 We can note that exactly the same argument is used in the nationwide referendum’s campaign in favor of the ‘yes’, denouncing the isolation of France that would result from a ‘no’.
9 Their work present the Left/Right dimension split into two: One economic Left/Right and another authoritarian-libertarian. In spatial terms the dimensions are not ‘orthogonal’ to each other but ‘oblique’.
10 On this point, we can underline Mitterrand’s statement in the early 1990’s “nowadays, no one can hope becoming President of the Republic without a pro-European line…”. This judgment of the former socialist President was often repeated during the campaign.
11 We can add that the socialist procedure also had an impact on the greens (the traditional champions of intra-party democracy), who decided just after the socialist’s results to have their own internal referendum. If the fear of appearing less democratic than the socialists was not the main argument of greens asking for direct democracy procedure, it was not absent of their reflection.
12 A rank and file socialist activist, B., interviewed by the author (25th October 2004).
14 Philippe Druon quota by L. Laroque in Le Figaro on 2005/03/28.
15 Former Minister Chevènement, who left the PS during 1992 Maastricht debates, even recently proposed himself as a socialist solution in case of the ‘no’ victory in the nationwide referendum for 2007.
ANNEXES :

- You could find here the text of the petition circulating in the PS at the moment. We can underline here the blackmail tone with the sentence: «Le 1er décembre, les militants socialistes ont voté. Ne l’oubliez pas ... Ils ne l’oublieront pas!», that is to say: «On the 1st December, socialists’ activists did vote. Do not forget about it...They will not!”

Appel du Comité du 1er décembre

Appel des militants socialistes pour le respect de la démocratie

N’oublions pas le 1er décembre!

Le 1er décembre 2004, les 125.000 adhérents du Parti socialiste étaient consultés au suffrage universel direct sur le Traité constitutionnel européen.

Le 1er décembre 2004, 100.000 socialistes se prononçaient à 59% pour le OUI.

Parce que pour les socialistes la démocratie n’est pas une option facultative mais un principe fondamental, ce référendum, demandé par tous les courants du PS, engage désormais tous les Socialistes!

Or depuis plusieurs semaines, certains responsables font campagne, jusque dans les médias, en faveur du NON, comme si les militants n’avaient pas voté ; comme si le 1er décembre n’avait jamais existé.

En faisant campagne contre la position de leur parti, ils méprisent le vote des militants dont ils tiennent pourtant leur mandat. Ils prennent le risque d’être les premiers responsables d’un éventuel échec de notre parti.

Si la démocratie a un sens pour eux, si le respect du vote des militants trouve écho à leurs oreilles, nous demandons à ces camarades de renoncer à leurs initiatives en faveur du Non. Il ne peut y avoir qu’une seule campagne du parti socialiste : celle en faveur du Oui!

Le 1er décembre, les militants socialistes ont voté.

Ne l’oubliez pas ... Ils ne l’oublieront pas!

Premiers signataires :
François Cormier-Bouligeon, secrétaire fédéral aux projets (Nièvre)
Loïs Lamoine, Premier secrétaire fédéral du Loiret
Abdelhak Fakir, secrétaire de section de Moins (Rhône)
Franck Heyde-Betancourt, secrétaire de la section d’Arras (Pas de Calais)
Magali Andréani, trésorière de la section Marseille 12 (Bouches du Rhône)
Paul Bourdet Secrétaire de la Section de Reims (Marne)
Hicham Boujlilat, secrétaire de section adj. de Cosne/Loire (Nièvre)
Paul A. Zereik, secrétaire de section de Saint Julien en Genevois (Haute Savoie)
André Dethier, secrétaire de la section de Coulanges (Nièvre)
Aleksander Glogowski Responsable Europe de la Fédération de Paris
Mohamed Moulay, section de Tours sud (Indre et Loire)
François Zaragoza, secrétaire de section d’Ingré (Loiret)
Jacky Muselli, secrétaire de la Section Action Socialiste à Marseille (Bouches du Rhône)
Antoine Lorenzi, secrétaire de la section Marseille 13 (Bouches du Rhône)
Philippe Moine, secrétaire de la section Paris 13ème ouest
Emmanuel Martineau-Gamand, secrétaire de la section d'Orléans (Loiret)
Catherine Picard, Secrétaire de la section de Malakoff (Hauts de Seine)

Les socialistes désireux de rejoindre cet appel peuvent nous écrire sur :
respect-democratieaups@hotmail.fr