

Europeanization of the French Electricity Policy: Four Paradoxes

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Summary: The European liberalization of the electricity sector led to four paradoxes in France. First, the transposition of European directives into French law has induced a clarification of the public service mandate; previously, its vague definition largely contributed to its quasi sacrosanct status. Second, while the initial European impulse was to break down national monopolies, we observe that French groups still control the French market, currently Electricité de France and, probably, Suez-Gaz de France in the near future. Third, the partial privatization of these two French operators is one of the key transformations of the electricity sector; this indirect impact of the European liberalization process is rather paradoxical as the EU has no legal power to regulate the ownership of market operators. Finally, while the current regulatory framework of the French electricity sector has formally changed, the same political and administrative French elites are still in control of the new regulatory agencies. In sum, we conclude that the liberalization of the French electricity sector may result in a fully accomplished French industrial policy.

Introduction

In this research note, we analyse the impact of European liberalization on the evolution of the electricity sector in France. Most of the prior empirical studies on this issue concluded that various forms of Europeanization were at work (e.g. Thatcher 1997:161, Cole 2001:33, Schmidt 2002:905, Levi-Faur 2004:26, Thatcher 2007b:12). In addition, in-depth case studies of the evolution of the French electricity sector since the 1980s have shown that these Europeanization processes represented a major challenge to the incumbent operator (Electricité de France, or EDF), to governmental parties and their discourse on market liberalization and, last but not least, to the French higher civil service, the system of “Grands Corps” and the trade unions (mainly the Confédération Générale du Travail, or CGT) (e.g. Cole 1999, Cole and Drake 2000, Easing and Jabko 2001, Van den Hoven and Froschauer 2004, Humphrey and Padgett 2006). Finally, it is also commonly agreed that French policy-makers have pursued a “dirigiste” industrial policy during the whole liberalization process by protecting EDF in its domestic market while, at the same time, favouring its exports and engineering its acquisition of foreign electricity companies. The close relationships between elected politicians, technocratic elites and the chief executives of EDF enabled this traditional and neo-mercantilist French strategy of establishing EDF as a ‘national champion’ on the European electricity market.

While we generally agree with these general arguments, we further argue that the liberalization of the electricity market pursued by the European institutions led to four paradoxes in France. First, the effort to transpose European directives has induced a clarification of the public service mandate in the electricity

sector; until that moment, its vague definition largely contributed to its quasi sacrosanct status. Moreover, we must also note the request by many eligible clients to get back to regulated rates, a practice seemingly incompatible with the European Commission's strategy of price competition. Second, while the initial European impulse was to break down national monopolies and introduce competition with foreign operators, we can observe that control over the French market remains in French groups' hands, currently EDF and, probably, Suez-Gaz de France (GDF) in the near future. One can further note the emergence of a European oligopoly with these two French companies as ranking among the top three European operators. Third, the recent shift towards the partial privatization of EDF, and probably of GDF too, is certainly one of the key transformations of the electricity sector in France. Such an indirect impact of the European liberalization process is rather paradoxical as the EU has formally no legal power to regulate the ownership of market operators. Finally, while the current regulatory framework of the French electricity sector has formally changed, the same political and administrative French elites are still in control of the new regulatory agencies. Overall, these four paradoxes indicate that the Europeanization process of the French electricity sector may result in a fully accomplished French industrial policy, guided by the choices of successive governments of both the right and left. As suggested by Howarth in this special issue of JEPP, such an industrial policy was successfully conducted by a "strategic-enabling French state".

This research note starts by presenting a short overview of the European liberalization directives and their transposition into French law and, then, discusses these four paradoxes.

Liberalization of the French electricity sector: an overview

Three successive European directives have established a strategy for opening the electricity market in Europe and have successively been transposed into French law. In 1990, the European Community first proposed a basic set of rules for transmitting electricity across national borders. This first Council Directive (90/547/EC), which was adopted as a result of France's initiative, prohibited one country from interfering with the free circulation of electricity between two other countries. At that time, French interests coincided perfectly with this directive as EDF's electricity production surplus was ready to reach export markets (Eising and Jabko 2001:750; Van den Hoven and Froschauer 2004:1088).

Directive 96/92/EC then opened, after several years of dispute over its content, the electricity market to high-volume consumers by introducing third-party access to the national electricity grid. This second directive was the result of an inter-governmental compromise between France and Germany. It was directly negotiated between French President Chirac and German Chancellor Kohl, who were at odds over the degree of openness needed for electricity markets. The German government wanted a rapid and broad liberalization hoping to strongly increase the degree of competitiveness of German industry, a likely result of the opening of the electricity market. German industries were strongly lobbying in this direction, emphasizing the unfavourable price differential between them and their French competitors. Furthermore, this liberalization would have weakened the control exerted by municipalities which very active in the

sector (30% of the supply to end-users via the “Stadtwerke”); interestingly, municipalities are often controlled by the Social Democrats and Greens. In contrast, the French government wanted to maintain a limited liberalization of the market in order to preserve the EDF-model (in place since 1946) that it deemed satisfactory, particularly in terms of its price levels in comparison with the rest of Europe (especially in comparison to Germany). Furthermore, it wished to keep its advantages in regards to its technological expertise and its nuclear industry, as well as to be able to continue to support a policy of regional solidarity. This position, however, became more and more isolated within the EU and the French government agreed to start opening its market in hope to profit from EDF’s competitiveness which resulted from French nuclear program.

Directive 96/92/EC was “à la carte” (Eising and Jabko, 2001:745) and can be seen, in the end, as a compromise between French and German objectives, with leaders of both countries more preoccupied with national rather than European objectives. The Directive confined itself to setting general shared set of rules, leaving the practicality of implementation up to each state, as well as a deadline, 10 February 1999, by which the transposition into the national law should be completed. The process of transposing this Directive faced the greatest challenges in France because of its historical attachment to the values and principles of public service (visible once again during the social upheavals of November and December 1995¹), the strong position of the incumbent operator (EDF), and the high degree of public satisfaction with the existing service². Throughout the Directive’s drafting process, successive governments³ and EDF’s chief executives maintained the position that “there will be no directive, and if there is one, it will not call into question our organizational principles and way of functioning”⁴. However, following the Franco-German compromise of 1996, the Minister for Industry was forced to radically alter his position in order to justify France’s support for gradual liberalization and asked EDF’s chief executive to endorse his new position⁵.

In this context, both the Juppé (right) government and the subsequent Jospin (left) government were confronted with the difficult and potentially explosive nature of the Directive’s transposition into French law. The strikes of November and December 1995 clearly demonstrated that the public sector unions (and in particular the CGT, markedly dominant at EDF) had the capability to mobilize popular support against the liberalization and privatization of French public services as well as to paralyse the whole country if necessary. Another difficulty facing the Jospin government laid in the composition of the government itself, the “gauche plurielle”, consisting in a mixture of Socialists, Communists, Radicals, Greens and the

¹ This social movement was rooted in the transport, energy and communication sectors of the public service in France, as well as Belgium, Luxemburg, Italy, Germany and Spain.

² In all of the polls carried out in France, the percentage of those polled that identified themselves as either satisfied or very satisfied with the EDF ranged from 85 to 93 percent.

³ There was a left-wing government until 1993, then two successive ones from the right - from 1993 to 1995 (Balladur) and from 1995 to 1997 (Juppé).

⁴ For example, Christian Stoffaes, a director at EDF argued that the “public service combined Republican values, the legacy of Colbertism and the fonction publique” (Cole 1999:168).

⁵ However, Thatcher (1997: 158) notes that the “Mandil Report” of 1994 already suggested introducing some competition in the French electricity and gas sectors. The Ministry of Finance also wanted to end EDF monopoly (Eising and Jabko, 2001:754).

Citizen's Movement. The government was torn between the Communist Party, strongly opposed to the liberalization of the electricity sector, and the environmentalists, for whom EDF incarnated the nuclear programme and the necessity of its demise. Cole (2001:25) underlines that "the desire to placate the Communist coalition partner strengthened Jospin's determination to postpone liberalizing electricity markets in 1999 and to defend the state electricity conglomerate EDF-GDF. Not only was EDF-GDF a symbol of the social-Colbertist conception of the French public service, the CGT trade union, traditionally close to the Communist party, occupied a powerful position within the firm's work council".

As a matter of fact, the delays in transposing Directive 96/92/EC into French law resulted from the consultative process the Jospin government had launched. The socialist Prime Minister adopted a pragmatic approach of "left-wing realism" (Cole and Drake, 2000:32-36) and developed a new "communicative discourse", which was clearly absent under Prime Ministers Balladur and Juppé, in order to legitimate and justify a neo-liberal policy programme based on an open and market-oriented economy (Schmidt 2001:256). Thus, Jospin's liberalization and privatization policies were defined as a genuine industrial policy that also took social considerations into account (Levy 2000:342).

In the spring of 1998, the Jospin government decided to launch a public debate on the topic of "modernizing and developing the public electricity utilities" in order to gradually reach a compromise between the key actors (i.e. the members of the "gauche plurielle" and the unions, particularly the CGT), or at the very least to avoid a major social conflict. The government published a widely distributed white paper and commissioned a member of the French parliament to meet every actors wishing to express themselves on the future regulation of the electricity system. The parliamentary debate on the proposed French bill (in the spring of 1999 in the National Assembly and in October in the Senate) was the setting for a concerted search for solutions. This debate led to the passing of the proposed bill "relating to the modernization and development of the 'public service' electricity" after a first reading in the National Assembly in March 1999 with the abstention of a large majority of the Communist parliamentary group. Due to a busy parliamentary agenda, the final vote on the law did not take place until 10 February 2000, one year after the transposition deadline. The European Commission clearly understood the reasoning behind the French strategy of holding a debate and the time that it required in the face of a potential major social conflict.

Finally, Directive 2003/55/EC set July 2007 as the deadline for the completion of the electricity market liberalization in regards to both industrial and individual consumers. The Raffarin (right) government partly transposed these European rules into French law in August 2004. This very short implementation delay is not really surprising as the this third directive is perfectly compatible with the actual economic position of EDF: it had purchased foreign electricity companies since the onset of the liberalization process and was now ready to play a major role in the European market (Van den Hoven and Froschauer, 2004:1089).

On the basis of this historical overview, one might jump to the conclusion that the implementation of EU directives led, with a fair amount of resistance, to a gradual victory of EU-enforced liberalization. While it is true that the previous “EDF model” (Wiéviorka and Trinh 1989) has been significantly transformed since 1996, this transformation, however, did not produce all the results expected by the EU. On the contrary, the European liberalization of the electricity sector led to four paradoxes in France, to which we will now turn.

French “service public”: a myth becomes reality

The “EDF model” consisted of a very specific form of integration and cohesion. It was, first of all, a national institution that had a virtual monopoly – holding a total monopoly for transportation and up to 95% of the production and distribution of electricity in France. EDF was an industrial and commercial firm entirely owned by the state (until Fall 2005 when 15% of EDF’s capital was opened up to the market). The public service goals of the company seemed so obvious that the 1946 law on nationalization barely referred to them⁶.

The liberalization process forced the French authorities to define, for the first time, in a piece of legislation a precise description of the mandate and obligations of public service in the electricity sector. Since the nationalization of the electricity sector in 1946, EDF was understood by all actors as being part of the “service public” despite never having been clearly defined as such⁷. This characterization of the sector was widely accepted although the terms of the mandate were never precisely delineated. Thus, we can pinpoint to a first paradox as clarity in the public service obligations precisely resulted from the European liberalization process.

The 10 February 2000 law defined the public service mandate in five articles. The law refers to energy policy, social cohesion, universal access to electricity as a basic need, a respect for the environment, the principles of equality, continuity and adaptability, as well as those of security, quality, affordability and, finally, to economic, social and energy-related efficiency. New issues were included under the auspices of the public service, the law indeed specified for the first time a requirement for “the cross-subsidization of rates across all geographic regions”, as well as the requirement that “the rates for domestic consumers take into account the essential need for electricity and thus establish a special rate of ‘basic needs product’ for consumers whose family income is lower than a certain minima”. Furthermore, the law stipulated, “that any expenses attributable to the public service mandate assigned to the producers of electricity should be fully compensated” and established a series of procedures to that effect.

Finally, we must draw attention to the fact that the Raffarin government adopted a law “pertaining to the public service for electricity and gas and for electric and gas companies” on 9 August 2004 to

⁶ Article 2 indicates that: “Until the effective implementation of distribution services, the responsibility for and functioning of the public distribution service will be provided by the national service.”

⁷ For a succinct presentation of the French concept of “service public” see Schmidt (1998) and Cole (1999).

transpose the latest European Directive (2003/55/EC). This law introduced a liberalization for all clients by 1 July 2007 and reproduced the key elements of the law from 2000, including “the cross-subsidization of rates across all geographic regions, the harmonization of these rates for gas and the equalization of rates for use of the public distribution network”, thus imposing requirements that would be incompatible with an entire freedom of choice of providers for each consumer.

Competition: a tale of two national champions

The history of the electricity sector is often presented as a stage upon which the French actors move to protect and promote the interests of EDF in France and in Europe with everything that being a “national champion” like EDF entails financially, socially and symbolically (Cohen 2005). For example, Bartle (1999:374) argues that the internationalization of EDF is motivated by the enhancement of France’s economic interest in a mercantilist style. In the same vein, Thatcher (2007a) suggests that French policy-makers followed a strategy of creating a European or international champion by promoting the expansion of direct exports, the takeover of foreign companies and the creation of alliances with other operators; in parallel, the French policy actively supported EDF by limiting domestic reform and protecting its own national market.

However, we cannot deny the concrete effects of the opening to competition on the French electricity market⁸. In fact, 30% of industrial clients have changed their providers since 2000; in other words, they have left EDF. For professionals, who were eligible to change providers as of 1 July 2004, approximately 50% of the market, or over 600,000 consumers, withdrew from regulated rates to allow for competition (cf. Observatoire des marchés de l’électricité et du gaz, 4ème trimestre 2006, Commission de régulation de l’énergie). Interestingly, a vast majority of these consumers is now interested to return to regulated rates due to the large increases in price that took place in the open market. (cf. *Le Monde*, 6 mai 2006, 13 décembre 2006, 13 janvier 2007)⁹.

. The argument supporting that EDF strategic posture as a national and international champion was an essential element in the French strategy towards the liberalization of the electricity sector is definitely plausible. However, a more complex hypothesis may be formulated in order to take into account more empirical elements than previously done by other studies. This hypothesis does not limit itself to adequate French interests to those of EDF, but rather extends the scope of these interests to a second large electric and energy player, the Suez Group. Indeed, all of the steps taken in France since 2000 have contributed to promoting the existence of this second French group, and this until the merger project between Suez and GDF that was announced in February 2006 by the de Villepin government. Convinced that it would truly need to open the French market, the public authorities, acting out of an “economic patriotism”, encouraged

⁸ Similarly, other French public service sectors also underwent important changes (see, for example, Héritier 2002 for more on the railways and telecommunications sector).

⁹ See also the position of the “Union des industries utilisatrices d’énergie” (www.uniden.fr)

the development of the Suez group, already strongly present in the sector through its majority ownership in the Belgian company Electrabel, rather than leaving room for foreign companies to take a significant share of the French market. Therefore, the Suez group was given the responsibility by the left-wing government (1997-2002) to manage the Compagnie nationale du Rhône (with the hydroelectric revenues that this entailed), as well as the power stations that had belonged to the national railways. We should also add that, in the tradition of French elites, the Suez group hired a technical consultants coming from the cabinet of the Minister for Industry, responsible for the transposition law of 10 February 2000, and this shortly after this law was finally adopted. From the perspectives of the leaders of the Minister of the Economy and Industry, this strategy also provided the means to limit the influence of EDF and its president, François Roussely, who, given his close relationship to the Prime Minister¹⁰, had the tendency to bypass them.

At the same time, the question of the future of GDF remained. Since the nationalization of 1946, the company shared its distribution services and personnel with EDF. One obvious strategy would have been to reinforce this cooperation and there were suggestions that EDF and GDF should merge given the growing technical and economic synergies developing between the two industries (electricity and gas). The idea of a merger was rejected in 2000 as it contradicted the strategy of actually opening the market, thus beginning a process of severing the historical links between the two companies. However, it quickly became obvious that GDF was too small a company to remain independent within the restructuring of the energy sector. An initial plan in 2000-2001 was proposed to combine GDF with the petro-gas group Total-Fina-Elf, which would have created a link between the production and distribution of gas. This plan was rejected in part because the activities of the two groups were so different and because the merger did not bring together any activities in the electricity sector. From that point on, the idea of cooperation between GDF and Suez-Tractebel became more and more obvious as the logical course of action. The process was accelerated in February 2006 in response to the proposal of the Italian energy company Enel to purchase Suez, once again motivated by “economic patriotism”.

If this fusion is successfully completed after the next presidential and legislative elections (May-June 2007), a second French group, Suez-GDF, would thus join EDF and the German company EON in the club of the three largest European energy groups. The French policy goal would thus seem to obtain two of the three or four major energy players that would likely become the European oligopoly for the coming years. Howarth (2007 - see his article in this special issue) interprets the merger between GDF and Suez, which was engineered by the government, as a clear manifestation of the traditional “dirigisme” that has been the basis of French politics for decades. In one word, the second paradox is that French groups still dominate the French electricity sector and, beyond, expand their market shares in other European countries, while the European institutions intended to break down national monopolies.

¹⁰ François Roussely, who came from the Ministry of Defence, was designated at the head of EDF by Prime Minister Jospin without the agreement of the Minister of the Economy and Industry.

Privatization: an indirect impact of liberalization

In response to the liberalization of the electricity market, an incumbent operator can obviously only lose market share and is thus forced, as an economic actor looking to guarantee its survival and further development, to diversify its activities and develop its exports (propelling EDF to become the leading exporter of electricity in Europe), and, furthermore, to expand its activities to neighbouring countries in order to offset its loss of market share within the country by gains obtained abroad. EDF has thus pursued a strategy of mergers and acquisitions as opportunities presented themselves in Europe, as is illustrated by examples in the UK (in 2002 with the acquisition of London Electricity) then in Germany (acquisition of 35% of EnBW's capital in 2001, a share raised to 46% in 2002) and in Italy (progressive acquisition of Edison from 2004 to 2006).

At the same time, the introduction of competition created a profound cultural shift within EDF in terms of its organization, managerial techniques and sales strategies. The state also lost its legitimacy as the sole shareholder and leader of a company that had become a European, if not global, operator; it thus could no longer legitimately claim to solely define EDF's strategy for its development outside the national territory. This fact led to requests for reciprocity of treatment, which led logically to a change in the status of the organization. The Raffarin government thus adopted on 19 August 2004 the transformation of EDF, as well as GDF, from a commercial and industrial, yet public, institution, into a publicly registered company or "société anonyme". This also contributed to further the process of privatization, despite the law which indicated that the state will maintain its participation up to 70% of the capital¹¹.

This law will probably be modified in 2007, in regards to the specific articles concerning GDF, when it will become evident that this 70% threshold impedes the merger between GDF and Suez because of their respective values on the market.

To this day, this process of privatisation can be seen as one of the most important in the current dynamics of liberalization and opening to economic competition initiated some 10 years ago and, strikingly, that were neither part of any explicit goals articulated by the EU nor were belonging to the EU's competence in the domain¹². Yet, the process engaged at the European level to break down national monopolies led to a dynamics seeing each national operator intervening in other countries, most notably by acquiring participations in other companies in order to compensate for domestic loss due to this process. We can thus witness an Europeanization of the actors of the electricity sector, leading to demands of reciprocity and to the progressive demise of the national public ownership over this sector.

¹¹ We may recall that a 1996 law guaranteed that the state would remain the majority shareholder of France Télécom. Successive opening of France Télécom's capital from 1997 then on and changes in the law in 2003 led the French state to becoming a minority shareholder as of September 2004. As of the end of 2006, the French state maintains its participation in France Télécom at 18%.

¹² Article 295 of the Treaty enshrines the neutrality of the EU in regards to the ownership of operators in each member states.

Regulatory Framework: revisting old friends

During the decades preceding the liberalization process, relations between the state and EDF were by all appearances strongly unbalanced. Under the guise of the state's power to give direction and control, we observed from an early stage a situation of political dominance and administrative oversight that included regulating budgets, investments, rates, markets, and so on. The administrative and political public authorities therefore saw EDF as an instrument in support to France's economic and industrial policy, even to be used, without any actual connection to EDF's public service mandate, to finance particular projects or in response to temporary policy situations. Moreover, The state had the tendency to levy increasing taxes on the company in order to cover public deficits (Esing and Jabko, 2001 :752-753).

As a counterpoint to this behaviour, EDF's chief executives capitalized on their technical and economic expertise in certain domains, such as the nuclear programme. This capitalization and the fetishism behind their faith in their own path to economic growth and societal progress convinced many French decision makers to the point it gave them a decisive advantage over key policy decisions, such as the adoption of the nuclear programme in 1973 by an inter-ministerial council without consulting the Parliament. EDF's chief executives were thus able not only to control the definition of the content of the general interest but also the limits and constraints on public service (Bauby 1994).

As a result of these actors' interactions and the dominant ideas of the times, the institutional structure of EDF, like for most large, national public services, was strongly centralized and hierarchical, with the few "grand corps" of bureaucrats playing an almost hegemonic role (particularly, the "polytechniciens", the "X-Mines" or the "X-Ponts et Chaussées"). The consumers were mostly neglected and local municipalities, who generally held the licensing power over production, often were marginalized.

The French law of 2000 established a new regulatory framework, that should have provided a way out from the complicity between political elites and EDF technocrats. As a matter of fact, the liberalization of the electricity sector represented a major challenge to the French system of "grands corps" (Cohen 1998). The law instituted a Commission for the Regulation of Electricity (CRE) that was primarily responsible for regulating the third party access to the network, as well as having links to the Conseil de la Concurrence, which monitored anticompetitive practices.

It is worth noting that this new institutional game was not primarily characterised by the establishment of consultative institutions, at the regional and national level, which, in the end, do not seem to potentially have much impact and are already considered as mere counter-measures to the process of liberalization. Indeed, it can be said that this new institutional game is characterised by two key elements. On the one had, we can note the weakening of ministerial role, barely conserving legal initiative on a "law for energy direction" that will identify the main strategies for long-term investments in production. On the other hand, we can note the growing power of the CRE in light of the former monopole in expertise that

EDF held. For instance, Jean Syrota, a French “nucleocrat” the head of the DIGEC (“Direction générale du gaz, de l’électricité et du charbon” within the ministry), and then CEO of COGEMA, a nuclear waste recycling company (Van den Hoven and Froschauer 2004: 1094), was named president of the newly instituted CRE. This can be interpreted as a form of revenge for the humiliations that EDF’s chief executives inflicted to administrative agencies for years.

It should be noted, however, that the CRE took quite a bit of time to develop its own internal expertise, which had been until then the exclusive domain of EDF. In this respect, Cole and Drake (2000:29-30) argues that the liberalization process initiated by the EU might have led to a weakening of the “grands corps” and of “sectoral corporatism” in France. However, as Thatcher (2007a, in this special issue) clearly shows, the technocrats continue to dominate the CRE. As of January 2007, 2 out of the 7 members of the CRE were “énarques”, 1 was from “Pont et Chaussées”, 2 from Sciences PO Paris, 2 from engineering “grandes écoles”, and among them 5 have been cabinet directors of a minister or member of a ministerial cabinet. Thus, the technocratic elites continue to maintain their power.

Once again, there seems to be a gap between the initial intent to move beyond the state’s control of the electricity sector in order to foster independent agencies overlooking the fair application of instituted rules, and the actual regulation which is markedly characterised by the domination of the same technocratic elites as before as well as the overwhelming importance of national characteristics.

Conclusion

10 years after its participation in the European process of liberalization of the electricity sector, the situation in France is characterised by the consolidation of a certain number of objectives related to the public service, the strengthening of two essentially French economic groups among other key actors of the European oligopoly, the commitment to a process of privatisation of EDF, as well as the domination of technocratic elites. All these current characteristics either are not part of the European objectives inscribed in the three Directives we discussed or they are completely opposite to the latter’s.

The four paradoxes we highlighted can help us to comprehend what the European Commission noted in relation to dysfunctions in both the gas and electricity markets¹³: Indeed, as the Commission’s evaluation noted: “First, in many Member States markets in both sectors remain concentrated, creating scope for incumbent operators to influence prices. Second, many wholesale markets are illiquid either due to long term contracts (gas) or because companies are active both in production and in the retail market, limiting the need for wholesale markets (electricity). There is also insufficient unbundling of network and supply activities. Third, barriers to cross-border supply prevent the development of integrated EU energy markets. Finally, a lack of transparency benefits incumbents and undermines the position of new entrants”.

¹³ Evaluation of the Performance of Network Industries Providing Services of General Economic Interest - 2005 Report - SEC(2005) 1781.

Beyond the four paradoxes presented in this research note, the empirical elements we discussed call for a reevaluation of the explanatory power of previous studies as the latter have not paid a systematic attention to the current characteristics of the French situation. While this research note still lacks any form of explanatory model, it nonetheless underlines the particular features of the French situation in regards to the Europeanization process in the electricity sector. What is left to do, then, is to think through this particularity – is it a sectorial, a French, or even a European specificity? –, and which, or if any, theoretical framework can best explain it.

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