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Ideas, Persuasion and Foreign Policy Analysis

The Creation of the Franco-German Youth Office

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Introduction

In this paper, I would like to make a modest contribution to the classical issue of the role of ideas in the policy process. As many authors put it, the debate is actually twofold. The first question is: do ideas matter? In other words, is a pure interest-centred approach of the policy process unrealistic? The second deals with their ontological nature and questions the analytical distinction between ideational and materialistic factors: are ideas “constitutive rules” that shape actors' interests, or do they causally explain part of the policy process? Carlsnaes is probably right asserting that “this debate is only at its beginning and will continue to be a focal point for critical discussion” (Carlsnaes 2002: 344). But since this debate affects both International Relations and Domestic Policy Analysis, one can argue that Foreign Policy Analysis is a good base to tackle this question.

My answer to the above questions is that political ideas do matter, and this because they contribute to shape the actors' interests. Each of these propositions - “ideas do matter” and “ideas shape the interest” - would of course deserve very substantial scrutiny. Nevertheless, I choose for economical reasons to focus this paper on the first one and content

myself to affirm that ideas are best understood as “constitutive rules”. In doing so, I am aware that I leave aside an important discussion about the ontological nature of ideas. Most of all, I am conscious that this unquestioned “constructivist” assumption is not neutral on the “do ideas matter?” field. But such a postulate appears less questionable if one considers, like Max Weber, that an interpretive sociology (which inspires many constructivist frameworks) also leads to a form of causal explanation (Weber 1995). Furthermore, I will argue later that I do not exclude that other theoretical lenses can contribute to enlighten my object.

I propose that the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993) associated with a theory of persuasion (Majone 1989; Risse 2000) gives a good understanding of some ideational logics at work in the policy process. Yet before I come to this conclusion, I will first present some key-aspects of my case-study: the creation of the Franco-German Youth Office, a bilateral cooperation programme launched in 1963 in order to promote the Franco-German rapprochement through mass youth exchanges¹. Those comments will then lead me to point out what I consider being a blind spot in International Relations constructivist literature: the micro level of analysis. Finally, I will come back to my thesis, namely the idea that the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) coupled with a theory of persuasion convincingly informs a way ideas shape foreign policies.

The ACF has been methodologically applied in different ways. Jenkins-Smith and St Clair choose and recommend a quantitative discourse analysis (Jenkins-Smith and St Clair 1993). I personally privilege a rather interpretive/comprehensive methodology based on the Radaelli “policy narrative” notion (Radaelli 1999). Radaelli’s assumption is that public policies embedded in “belief systems” take the form of policy narratives i.e. “causal stories [which] have a beginning, a middle, and occasionally even a moral conclusion. In narratives, events are presented in a coherent plot that suggests one course of action instead of another” (Radaelli 1999: 99). For my thesis, I therefore collected a corpus of political speeches and articles written by the political elites in charge of the policy I investigate. I completed this corpus with the testimonies some of these actors left in oral public archives as well as a couple of interviews. I then built several analytical narrative categories based on the four following questions: what is the actor’s understanding of the Franco-German history, of the next country, of the current Franco-German relationship, and of its future. Given the nature of the political programme, I added a fifth question relating to the perception of young people.

¹ My Ph D deals with the creation of the FGYO and its implementation until now. It started in October 2002 under Yves Surel’s supervision.

Since speech is a social interaction, I separated the analysis of the discourses delivered during the action time and later. The comparison of the answers to these five questions revealed the existence of two “advocacy coalitions”, the coalition of the “pioneers of the Franco-German rapprochement” on the one hand, and the mass of the opposing elite on the other hand.

I have already presented my paper as a “modest” contribution to the idea/interest debate in FPA. A first argument towards this position is the theoretical level of analysis. As Fearon and Wendt wrote it, “rationalism and constructivism are most fruitfully viewed as analytical tools, rather than as metaphysical positions” (Fearon and Wendt 2002: 52). That means I do not look for a framework that would embrace and explain all of the policy process. I for instance do not challenge the assessment that interest-centred frameworks convincingly enlighten many political decisions, especially the last moment of the policy-making process. As I will show later, such frameworks are also very efficient in my case. But since the mainstream approaches highlight the importance of economic rationality, it seems perfectly legitimate to underline the partial power of explanation when analysing ideational factors. The second reason of this “modesty” is the empirical nature of the argumentation. It is based on the analysis of the genesis of a cultural cooperation programme: the Franco-German Youth Office. Although I hope my conclusions will have some applications beyond my case study, I personally have nothing to claim on that subject.

1/ Some preliminary comments about the case-study

In this section, I first present the cultural cooperation programme I investigate. I then argue that a widening of the chronological frame reveals that this policy is not only a set of concrete programmes and institutions but also a social construction. I finally point out that the policy had been formulated a couple of years after the war in an *a priori* very unfavourable context.

The Franco-German Youth Office programme was launched in 1963 in order to encourage the Franco-German rapprochement. It is legally an international organisation since one of its founding texts is the famous “Elysée Treaty” which de Gaulle and Adenauer signed in order to seal the Franco-German reconciliation. This programme still exists, although many commentators underline that it has lost much of its *raison d’être*, and its activities mainly consist in subsidizing youth exchanges. In concrete terms, the FGYO funds schools,

municipalities and associations that organize Franco-German youth meetings. A study of the early years of this policy reveals that it was much more than a common youth exchange programme given the extraordinary budgetary voluntarism that inspired the Founding-Fathers: during the first decade it received five times more money (40 million DM per year) than what both countries spent for youth exchange with the rest of the world. This strong governmental allocation allowed it develop into a mass youth-exchange policy (about 200 000 per year) without any equivalent. As a result, my problematic does not deal with the rather basic question “how came the idea that it could be easier to reach a rapprochement through the meeting of young people?” (a consideration that inspires every youth exchange programme). It is much more to understand the hidden basis of the budgetary voluntarism and of its concrete materialization: the mass exchange policy.

A rationalist approach of the genesis of the FGYO seems pertinent if one focuses on the negotiations that directly preceded the signing of the treaty. It then appears that some collective actors with fixed preferences saw in this project a means to maximize their utilities. For example, the cultural service of the French foreign ministry wanted to promote the French language in Germany. In the Federal Republic of Germany, education falls within the competence of the Länder, and the Quai d’Orsay’s efforts to reach a voluntarist agreement on the language question had been thwarted by the Länder’s preference for English and the inability of the federal government to force their hand. After several attempts, the French Foreign Office joined the youth-exchange programme coalition because it appeared it could support the teaching of the French language in Germany. Such rationalist logics were also at work on the German side. One important objective of the federal youth policy was the ideological control of young people in the Cold War context. In the early 1960’s, the German Democratic Republic launched a new seduction campaign towards the Western youth. The federal government strove to counter this offensive at several levels. The international level - and the Franco-German’s one in particular - seemed especially relevant because they did not arouse a strong suspicion of political instrumentalization. For this reason, the Ministry of All-German Questions also rallied the youth-exchange programme a couple of month before the signing of the treaty. In other words, those considerations centred on the strategic rationality of actors embedded in a given institutional frame clearly explain some aspects of the last-minute negotiations. But they do not provide a general understanding of the construction of the mass exchange policy principle.

According to Paul Sabatier, analysing policy change over “a decade or more” helps to focalise on the ideational logics at work in the policy process (Jenkins-Smith, Sabatier, 1993).

Following Majone's point that "a policy is an intellectual construct, an analytic category the contents of which must first be identified by the analyst" (Majone 1989: 147), I came to the conclusion that this mass exchange policy was supported by two main ideas: a cognitive matrix on the one hand setting that "France and Germany are/were hereditary enemies" and a normative algorithm on the other hand putting that "if France and Germany have indeed been fighting their whole history, then the only means to break the vicious circle of the Franco-German wars is to socialize a new generation of human beings"². Following Sabatier's indication this study deals with the construction of this social representation from 1945 to 1963.

I wrote above that the FGYO was launched in 1963. Empirical research reveals, however, that the relevant period of time is not the early 1960's. At that time, the Franco-German relationship had already taken a course that made the principle of such a young rapprochement policy uncontroversial. The policy had actually been formulated earlier, just after the war, while France was in charge of governing the South-Western part of Germany. The FGYO is indeed mainly the continuation of a less spectacular but nevertheless significant policy a sector of the French military administration developed from 1945 to 1955. At that time, some civil servants from the cultural sector of the military government cooperated with French and German private actors and organized numerous youth meetings on the German territory. This action did not have the programmatic importance in budgetary and numerical terms as the forthcoming FGYO policy. But it was also not the small and marginal policy that would have retrospectively found some symbolical importance. First, these political actors mainly focused on the leaders of the youth movement so that a surprisingly big number of the future French and German political elites got to know each other during those youth manifestations. Second, the link between this early rapprochement policy and the forthcoming FGYO is clearly assessed by several testimonies: "A dialogue that has never been interrupted started in Vlotho (an important youth meeting in March 1949). Without this dialogue, it would have been impossible to include the FGYO into the Franco-German Treaty" (Moreau 1981: 28).

The fact that the FGYO's policy had been actually formulated and (a first time) implemented during the period 1945-1955 deeply changes the problematic. Whereas the

² The social construction also relied on several more secondary assumptions such as the "youngest" argument that young people would naturally have a bigger ability to give up their prejudices and stereotypes (this belief has been deeply criticized since that time). But this point is not so relevant for our argumentation.

FGYO programme was adopted in 1963 in a non-controversial atmosphere given the positive turn the Franco-German relations had already taken, it was far from being the case 15 years earlier. The first young people exchange initiatives deeply contrasted with the more general French orientations in their occupation zone. As Martens put it, the French occupants indubitably did not leave the best memories in the regions under their control (Martens 1993). The French political elites' main objective was France's security. It was not supported by the assumption that the severity of the Versailles Treaty had hastened the collapse of the German Republic. The common understanding concerning the cause of the last war was on the contrary that France had not been hard enough in its German policy after WWI. At least until 1950, the watchwords of the French occupation policy were therefore deforestation, dismantling of the German economy, unification to France of the border-territories etc. From then on, the research question becomes the following: how could a rapprochement policy emerge whereas the core of the occupation policy prescribed the harshest treatment of the defeated enemy?

In the next section, I will try to show that the International relations literature is not very helpful in answering this question. Although perhaps due to the specificity of my case study, I will argue that it reveals a blind spot in IR conceptual frameworks.

2/ A blind spot in the IR literature

The blind spot I am referring to is the idea-centred micro-level of analysis. The constructivist approach in IR indeed mostly focuses on how global norms and identities shape the actors' interests. Yet the historical episode I investigate does not match this scenario: a couple of idealists played a key role in the formulation of the policy, whereas the "societal norms", i.e. the public opinion and the elites representations, prescribed the harshest treatment of the defeated enemy.

We have at our disposal a strong constructivist literature analysing from the macro level how norms and identities shape the actors' interests. Several studies on foreign aid, environmentalism, development and other subjects convincingly illustrated the effectiveness of social norms that are not reducible to the interests of powerful actors. In order to convince the most sceptical, Katzenstein went further and argued that even the very realist question of national security can be assumed to be socially constructed (Katzenstein 1996). According to

Finnemore and Sikkink, the constructivist focus on the macro level is a catching up effect : “In a discipline that denied the independent causal effects of norms, rules, and social structures of meaning generally, the first task for constructivist empirical research in IR was obviously to establish that norms (and other social structures) matter” (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001: 396). Be as it may, the Constructivists’ tropism in favour of global structures of meaning led to the contingent superimposition of two debates: the interest/ideas debate on the one hand, the agency/structure on the other hand. The success of March and Olsen’s dichotomy between the “logic of consequentialism” and the “logic of appropriateness” indeed clearly illustrates that the social structure is mostly the realm of constructivism whereas the agency became the sphere of strategic rationality’s frameworks (March and Olsen 1998). This superimposition has inspired very stimulating studies, but it also has left the micro processes of the policy formulation in obscurity.

Admittedly several scholars are interested in how the principal agent ideas influence the policy process. In a convincing article, Craig Parsons argues for example that the “community form” of European integration taken in the 1950’s (as opposed to intergovernmental or federal integration) is largely explainable referring to the ideas of a few political elites in the right place at the right time (Parsons 2002). But principal agent studies are poorer when they are meant to interpret the role of the individuals acting outside the decision-makings’ sphere. As Finnemore and Sikkink wrote, there are many people though “who dislike existing norms and rules in politics, (...) band together and try to change them [without having] levers of conventional power relative to those controlling existing structures (often the state or corporations)” (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001: 400). In other words, these frameworks do not inform us about the ideational interactions at stake in the policy formulation’s process. As I will put later, the analysis of the social construction of a policy is best tackled by idea-centred (domestic) policy analysis frameworks.

In the historical episode I investigate, a small number of individuals acting partly outside the decision sphere played a key role in shaping the common understanding that a youth exchange mass policy was desirable. As I wrote above, this group of people entailed some civil servants of the cultural sector of the French military administration and some private actors working in rapprochement Franco-German associations. Their high level of coordination led to the construction of a strong common identity which was fuelled by the feeling they were acting “counter-current”. When they were asked a couple of decades later about their motivations, they all referred to the humanistic, Christian and personalist values they shared. They also put forward a feeling of compassion concerning the misery of the

youth in the “Stunde null” (hour zero) Germany. They finally outlined a favourable image of Germany underlining that both countries shared the responsibility of the former Franco-German conflicts. In other words, they portrayed themselves as visionaries and pioneers of the rapprochement. Their narrative therefore raises the question of the weight of idealism in policy-making. But before we come to this point, we have to wonder whether their self-representation is credible.

Some authors wrote that the constructive initiatives of the cultural military administration were only meant to help the acceptance of the dismantling and exploitation policy. Although this thesis presents some convincing arguments, I consider that this line of reasoning cannot be pursued too far. If this rapprochement policy would have been a purely symbolical artefact, it would have taken the form of a political spectacle or it would have been at least publicized. Yet my research reveals that this was not the case: those actors, on the contrary, strove to hide their initiatives because they considered they did not match all of their hierarchies’ expectations. The post war chaos provided them a strong autonomy inside the French occupation subsystem: they did not have to account for every action; they also received a benevolent help from some personalities of the military government that provided the material support they needed. I therefore propose to have faith in them when they retrospectively explain that they were moved by a common understanding of the problem asserting that Germany was not the only responsible party of the Franco-German wars. I also argue that we have to believe them when they claim that they were inspired by some common values, in this case humanist, personalist and Christian ones. My point is therefore that we face a case study where some idealists curiously managed to implement a value-oriented programme whereas all other political elites were pursuing very different political objectives.

A good understanding of the social construction of the policy then requires a micro focus and a particular attention to the role of moral motivations. Despite all its merits, the IR literature does not take up this challenge since this twofold lens corresponds to one of its blind spots. In the next section, I argue that a detour via the domestic policy analysis frameworks is necessary if one wants to understand how policy narratives are formulated at the micro-level.

3/ The ACF and the logic of communication

The so called “cognitive frames” in (domestic) policy analysis have winningly highlighted the role of individuals in policy formulation. One of these frames - the “Advocacy Coalition Framework” - especially fits the FPAs’ programme. Although this framework clearly focuses on the role of cognition and learning, I argue, coming back to my case study, that it could convincingly explain a way idealist motivations can be transformed into concrete policies through a process of persuasion.

The “cognitive approach” in policy analysis is interested in the role of ideas in the domestic policy process. I wrote above that Majone soon pointed out that public policies can be fruitfully conceptualized as “an intellectual construct, an analytic category the contents of which must first be identified by the analyst” (Majone 1989: 147). As Surel put it (Surel 2000), several authors (here named cognitivists) have independently pursued this research programme further and claimed that public policies should be conceptualized as “référentiels” (Jobert and Müller 1987), “policy paradigms” (Hall 1997) or “belief systems” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). Unlike IR constructivist, those frameworks have paid a great attention to the role of individuals in the policy formulation. In each case, some key actors – called “médiateurs” in Jobert and Muller’s framework or “policy brokers” in Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith’s model – challenge the ideological controversies and strive “to find some reasonable compromise that will reduce intense conflict” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). Those individuals have in general at their disposal some institutional resources: in the French corporatist model for instance, they are generally unions’ leaders or senior civil servants. However, their main lever of action is rather ideational and comes from their ability to decode the evolution of the societal structures of meaning and present their solution as the only modern and suitable option.

Those models are also interesting because they went far in the consideration of non-materialistic motivations. They have indeed not only taken into account the role of norms and “cognitive matrices”, as IR scholars did, in the policy formulation. They went a step further and asserted that these “référentiels”, “paradigms” and “beliefs systems” also entail “values”, i.e. ontological beliefs or metaphysical principles about what is good, fair, beautiful etc. According to Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith the so called “deep core” of the beliefs systems functions as a dichotomic structure of meaning: it defines if the agent has an inclination to equality instead of liberty, altruism instead of individualism, post materialism vs economics

etc. Although the “cognitivist frameworks” do not really clarify the weight of these ontological matrices in the construction of the belief systems/paradigms/référentiels, they highlighted the importance of axiological motivations in the construction of policy narratives, a point that matches my empirical observations.

I wrote above that the Advocacy Coalition Framework better enlightens my case study than both other frameworks. My preference for this analytical tool does not come from the ACF core assessment that “public policies (or programmes) can be conceptualized in the same manner as beliefs systems, that is, as sets of values priorities and causal assumptions about how to realize them” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993: 16). On this point, i.e. the ontological nature of policies, every “cognitivist” model converges. Nor does my penchant for Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith’s framework comes from their definition of the advocacy coalitions: « AC are composed of people from various governmental and private organisations that both share a set of causal and normative beliefs and engage in a non-trivial degree of coordination over time » (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993: 120). Again, this conceptualization of the groups who coordinate in order to construct an appropriate representation is very appropriate, but not differential. The strongest argument for a use of the ACF in foreign policy analysis is the unit of analysis.

Whereas the “référentiel” and “paradigm” concepts lay on the very domestic notion of “policy sector”, the ACF assesses that the policy area where several “people and/or organisations interact regularly over periods of a decade or more” is best conceptualized as a “policy subsystem” (Sabatier 1999). Although the “subsystem” notion is closed to the policy sectors’, it first diverges from the latter in asserting that its boundaries are not fixed: as Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith put it, an common strategy actor consists in striving to include in the subsystem the actors that fit with one own’s beliefs and exclude the others. Second, it is a less restrictive notion since it does not postulate, as most sectoral approaches do, that public policies are monopolized by fixed corporatist actors. Related to a more general systemic theory, subsystems finally inform us that a given policy may be part of a more general (sub) system. One could for example easily hypothesize that the cultural cooperation programme I study can be conceived as a policy instrument of the entire Franco-German foreign policies. For all these reasons, I suggest the ACF conceptual tools are easier to handle at the international level than those associated to the référentiel or the paradigms frameworks.

Also this remark is not specific to foreign policies, the ACF and its subsystem notion also present a strong analytical power of explanation since it allows specifying the hierarchy of the explaining variables inside and outside the subsystem. As Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith

put it, “the basic argument of this framework is that, although policy-oriented learning is an important aspect of policy change and can often alter secondary aspects of a coalition's belief system, changes in the core aspects of a policy are usually the results of perturbations in non-cognitive factors external to the subsystem, such as macroeconomic conditions or the rise of a new systemic governing coalition” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993: 20). In other words, the ideational logics (learning for example) can find an expression at the policy instrument level but they are much more unlikely to change the most important objectives and representations of the governing coalition. This hypothesis lays on a well-assessed cognitive psychology assumption that “an actor (or coalition) will give up secondary aspects of a belief system before acknowledging weakness in the policy core” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993: 32).

My hypothesis is that the model is very accurate underlining that the “core policy” belief is very resistant to ideational logics. However, my empirical research suggests that learning is not the only vehicle of non-instrumental rationality. More precisely, my point is that classical learning misses the importance of communication in social life and therefore does not tell us how actors can learn from each other. Yet, as Majone put it, “the political and institutional development of a policy is always accompanied by a parallel intellectual process of debate and argument” (Majone 1989: 148). In a slightly different way, Risse presents communication as the third kind of social interaction operating in politics after economical rationality and rule-guided behaviour: “I claim that the processes of argumentation, deliberation, and persuasion constitute a distinct mode of social interaction to be differentiated from both strategic bargaining - the realm of rational choice - and rule guided behaviour - the realm of sociological institutionalism”(Risse 2000: 1).

Since Risse’s argumentation is based on Habermas’ theory of communicative action (Habermas 1987), he soon recognizes that we may not easily find in politics what the philosopher of the Frankfurt school calls an “ideal situation of speech”, i.e. (to sum up) a situation where every participant has an equal access to speech and is only driven by the force of the best argument. Risse claims however that some well-institutionalized arenas can/could open a window for political argumentation. He also points out that the logics of communication can pave the way to an intermediate form of action called “rhetorical action” where the actor is not prepared to give up his own ideas (i.e. is not willing to accept the force of the best argument) but nevertheless strives to modify the preferences of the others. The system would of course collapse if nobody is prepared to renounce their preferences. But Risse is rather optimistic: he considers that the logic of communication involves a kind of spill over dynamic: the person who enters an argumentation process is bound by his public

speech (he cannot contradict himself) and therefore driven to accept some argument. My research gives this rhetorical action's theory some empirical support.

I had left the presentation of my case-study with a non-answered question: how could a rapprochement policy emerge whereas the core of the occupation policy prescribed the harshest treatment of the defeated enemy? Translated in Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith terms, the question becomes how did some policy-brokers manage to break the opposition between the small idealist advocacy coalition and the realistic and security oriented French political elite? The first coalition's core beliefs were that Germany was not the only responsible of the Franco-German wars and that a rapprochement/reconciliation is morally suitable. They considered that a youth exchange policy was an appropriate policy instrument to reach this goal. The second advocacy coalition's core beliefs were on the contrary that Germany deserved no compassion and that the only legitimate political objective was France's security. As I wrote above, the advocates of this coalition gave priority to classical realistic policy instruments such as dismantling, territory unification etc.

Risse points out that a logic of communication explains a part of political life. On the other hand, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith put forth the hypothesis that "an actor (or coalition) will give up secondary aspects of a belief system before acknowledging weakness in the policy core" (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993: 32). Thus, I claim with empirical support that some policy-brokers of the first coalition succeeded to persuade the realistic coalition that a youth exchange policy would match their main political objective: France's security. After some first discrete rapprochement initiatives in the late 1940's, the "pioneers" indeed launched a press campaign advocating an ambitious youth exchange policy. This enterprise took the form of a rhetorical action: they did not exhibit their personal core beliefs (altruism, compassion with Germany) but relied on the other coalition's core assumption. According to Majone, this strategic use of language is very performing: "Participants marshal evidence in support of their proposals (...) and make arguments that appeal to the beliefs and values, as well as to the interests of broader constituencies"(Majone 1989: 148). Since the other coalition's core beliefs were that the only objective is France's security and that Germany is naturally and perpetually inclined to invade France, the militants of the Franco-German rapprochement developed the following argument: "if Germany is indeed naturally dangerous, then the only means to stop the endless expansionist German history is to socialize a whole generation of (German) human beings". The realistic coalition accepted this argument because, as Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith predict, it did not contradict its core beliefs. This policy narrative presenting education and socialization as a means to reinforce France's

security did support the first generation youth exchanges programme of the 1950's. It was reactivated in 1963 on a more bilateral basis stating that since the whole Franco-German history is an endless repetition of wars (the hereditary enemies' theory), then the only means to break up this vicious circle would be the socialization of a new generation (or a mass youth exchange policy).

Conclusion

I presented my paper in the introduction as a contribution to the issue of the role of ideas in the policy process. The empirical research revealed that the policy I investigate, the Franco-German Youth Office, was supported by a belief system asserting that it was necessary to launch a mass youth exchange policy if one wanted to break up the vicious circle of the Franco-German wars. It then appeared that this social representation had been actually constructed a couple of years before when the French were occupying a part of Germany. Curiously, some idealists managed at that time to implement a rapprochement programme, whereas the policy core prescribed the harshest treatment of the defeated enemy. Since the IR literature failed to enlighten this historical enigma, I turned to policy analysis and argued that the Advocacy Coalition Framework, coupled with a theory of persuasion, provides a good explanation. My thesis is that these militants succeeded in transforming their project into a concrete programme because they persuaded the political elites that this programme matched their political objectives.

In more general terms, this research supports the idea that power and material interests do not regulate the whole political field. Constructivist IR studies have pointed out that global or societal norms weigh on the policy process. Some policy analysis frameworks have in addition illustrated the importance of cognition and learning in policy formulation. My point is that ideas influence the policy making in a third way: Idealists, militants or more generally groups without strong material resources can weigh on the policy process through processes of argument, rhetoric and persuasion. They probably have little chance of changing the others' political objectives. But an agreement on the policy instrument level can produce a very concrete political programme. Most of all, my case study recalls that the link between the political objectives (France's security) and the policy instruments (mass youth exchange) can

be very loose. Consequently, the room for manoeuvre for rhetorical action is not as small as it may appear at first sight.

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