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## **Article One: The 'Back Door' to National Politics: The French Greens and the 2009 European Parliament Elections<sup>1</sup>.**

### **Introduction**

The defining characteristic of the model of multi-level governance in the European Union (EU) is the shift of authority – from public to private actors and from the central state to sub-national authorities and supra-national institutions (Hooghe and Marks 2001). States no longer monopolise EU-level policy making, as authority is dispersed and shared by a large variety of actors at different levels. Democratic representation in the EU has also come to be dispersed across different sites, interconnected in various, formal and informal, ways in one ‘multi-level parliamentary field’ (Crum and Fossum 2009). Operating through this multi-level parliamentary field, national parliaments continue to play important roles in shaping and legitimising EU decision-making. This chapter demonstrates how the dynamics of multi-level democratic representation in Europe also re-enters decision-making at the national level by providing new political parties with access and influence.

As the different political arenas in Europe are interconnected, an actor’s access to power at the EU level of democratic representation may help it to access legislative and executive power at the national level. This does not happen directly through formal institutional arrangements, but rather indirectly through the mobilisation of political resources and the building of social relations with other actors in the field. It is the combined interactions and structures obtaining between the actors in the field that offer opportunities for new political parties. These interactions and structures are influenced by external changes in the institutional environment.

Specifically, European integration has changed the environment of national political actors. The EU as an emerging political field offers numerous resources, both material and immaterial, to political actors who connect to it (Kauppi 2005). Looking more closely at political parties, this environmental evolution does not impact all political parties in the same way. For the established, cartel parties (Katz and Mair 1995), it is not that crucial, since they already have numerous resources at the national level. However, for new and emerging parties, this environmental change can be very significant. Unlike cartel-parties, emerging parties suffer from resource scarcity at the national level. These actors seek to break into the political system, seeking to put new issues on the social and political agenda. For these marginal actors on the national stage, the multilevel context of the EU provides new opportunities. The emergence of the EP and the introduction of direct elections to the EP in 1979, represent important changes in the political parties’ environment. The

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<sup>1</sup> This article was published in Ben Crum and John Erik Fossum (2013) (eds) *Practices of Inter-Parliamentary Coordination in International Politics – The European Union and Beyond*. Colchester, ECPR Press: 161-174.

peripheral position of the EP in national politics generally makes it less attractive to dominant political elites at the national level (see Beauvallet and Michon in this volume). But EP elections provide a significant political opportunity for some actors, whether national represented or not. Emerging political parties can use EP elections as a new entry point into politics, in a similar way as the sub-national level is used in federal settings (see Deschouwer 2000, 2003). EP elections in turn can have significant implications for these parties' role and power in the national political field. The ensuing change in the national power structure then affects not only the new parties but the political system as a whole.

EP elections trigger a more pluralist representation at the national level and a more open structure of competition among closed national political systems (Mair 2006). Indirectly, EP elections open up closed political systems, such as bipartisan systems. This change towards a more pluralist structure of competition allows emerging parties access to national parliaments and governments, thus provides them with effective influence on decision making at the national level. This is not happening through a formal, institutional change, but rather through how the addition of a new layer of governance encourages 'bottom-up' dynamics through reconfiguring actors' incentives, strategies and practices.

Political scientists have overlooked this usage of EP elections as a significant entry point to politics for emerging parties, as well as the implications of this on the nature of the national political system. Scholars studying the influence of the European integration process on political parties generally found that it has only limited effects (see Pogunkte and al. 2007, Ladrech 2010). EP elections have mostly been analysed as 'second-order national elections' (see Reif and Schmitt 1980, Marsh 1998, Hix and Marsh 2007). In this model, EP elections are considered second-order in contrast to the 'first-order' national elections.

Some scholars have however pointed out that EP elections have particular importance to new and small parties. For instance, Simon Hix and Christopher Lord observe that 'European elections have also influenced the entry of new parties to the field of serious political contestation. The 1984 election was crucial to the rise of the Front National (FN) in France' (Hix and Lord, 1997: 90). However, how the emerging parties' role in EP elections feeds back on power relations within the national political system, and the nature of the national party system itself, remains under-researched.

This chapter offers an in-depth analysis of how EP elections open up closed political systems for emerging parties, taking the case of the Green party in France in the context of the 2009 EP elections. It is based upon a political sociology approach to European studies (see Kauppi 2005, Georgakakis 2008, Saurugger 2008, Mérand and Saurugger 2010, Favell and Guiraudon 2011, Zimmermann and Favell 2011). The sociological approach is useful in that it permits the analyst to

take fully into account the actors' strategies and practices. The empirical data consist of 10 semi-structured interviews with candidates of the French Greens to the 2009 EP elections, the party's MEPs, local party officials and electoral campaign staff, participant observations within the party's campaign team, numerous informal discussions with party staff and members.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I provide an overview of the French Greens' limited political resources at the national level and its relative success in EP elections. In the second section I analyse how the party seized the 2009 EP elections as a political opportunity to recruit external candidates from civil society. The third section analyses how its success in the 2009 EP elections enabled the party to modify its power relations in national politics. I finish with some concluding remarks.

### **The French Greens: weak at national level, good scores in EP elections**

France's political system is relatively closed and immobile, characterised by centripetal tendencies (Kitschelt 1986). French politics is dominated by two established, bureaucratised parties, a 'circumscribed cartel of political actors' (Kitschelt 1986: 67). The conservative party, *Union pour la Majorité Présidentielle* (UMP), was in power from 1995 until 2012, when the *Parti Socialiste* (PS) came back to power. The French bi-partisan system leaves little place for emerging political forces, protest movements and 'outsiders'. The inaccessibility of the existing political structure drove the French anti-nuclear movement of the 1970s to support independent candidates to presidential elections as early as 1974, and to officially found the French Green party, *Les Verts*, in 1984.

The French Greens are a small political party, relatively marginalised in French politics. They are often considered as too utopian and not credible (see Sainteny, 1987, 1997, 2000). The French Greens often used elections more as a platform to spread their ideas than as a means to get to power and influence decision-making.

The French Greens suffered from weak results in national elections. In fact, the party had no Members of Parliament (MPs) in France's two national parliaments, the National Assembly and the Senate, until as late as 1997.<sup>2</sup> In 2009 the party still had only three MPs out of 577 in the National Assembly, and only five Senators out of 343. In both chambers the Green representatives were affiliated with the PS, as they were not numerous enough to establish a political group of their own. In presidential elections the French Greens' fortunes have been quite poor, between 1 to 5 per cent of the votes (see table 1.1).

#### **Table 1.1: Green candidates in presidential elections in France (1974-2012)**

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<sup>2</sup> At the 1997 parliamentary elections the Greens joined the left bloc (*la gauche plurielle*) led by the PS. This cooperation enabled the Greens to obtain 6 MPs as well as the ministry of environment (1997-2002).

Elections' year	Candidate	% of the votes	Number of votes
1974	René Dumont	1.32	337 800
1981	Brice Lalonde	3.88	1 126 254
1988	Antoine Waechter	3.78	1 149 897
1995	Dominique Voynet	3.32	1 010 738
2002	Noël Mamère	5.25	1 495 724
2007	Dominique Voynet	1.57	576 666
2012	Eva Joly	2.31	828 345

Source : <http://www.france-politique.fr>; <http://www.interieur.gouv.fr>

The French Greens gained a certain stability of around 3 per cent in the three consecutive presidential elections, of 1981, 1988 and 1995, and an historical 5 per cent in the 2002 elections. But their results in the 2007 presidential elections came at an historical low, with only 1.57 per cent of the votes.

While the French Green party thus scores quite poorly in national elections, it obtains relatively good scores in EP elections (see table 1.2). In fact, the party obtained its first MEPs as early as 1989, seven years before it obtained its first MPs.

**Table 1.2: Green lists in EP elections (1979-2009)**

Elections' year	List	% of the votes	Number of votes	MEPs
1979	Europe Ecologie	4.39	888,134	0
1984	Les Verts	3.37	680,080	0
1989	Les Verts	10.59	1, 922,945	9
1994	Les Verts	2.95	574,806	0
1999	Les Verts	9.72	1, 715,450	9
2004	Les Verts	7.41	1, 271,394	6
2009	Europe Ecologie	16.28	2, 803,759	14

Source : <http://www.france-politique.fr>; <http://www.interieur.gouv.fr>

Still, even in EP elections, the French Greens' results have been quite unstable over the years. This can be explained by the dispersion of votes among different ecological lists. In the very first EP elections in 1979, an independent green list, *Europe Ecologie*, led by Mrs Solange Fernex, obtained almost 5 per cent of the votes. Five years later, in the 1984 EP elections, the ecological electorate was split between two lists: the official list of the newly founded Green party and an independent list led by Mr Brice Lalonde, who was a candidate in the 1981 presidential elections, where he obtained 4 per cent of the votes. Each list obtained only 3 per cent of the votes and no MEPs. But in the EP elections of 1989 the French Greens, united under the leadership of Mr Antoine Waechter, obtained a historical success in a national vote: 10 per cent of the votes and nine MEPs. However, this success was also not durable, as the French Greens failed to win seats in the EP in the following 1994 elections. Waechter had left the Green party a short time before that and ran for the EP elections separately, leading the list *Génération Ecologie*. Both ecological lists did not obtain any MEPs. In the 1999 EP elections the Green list was led by Mr Daniel Cohn-Bendit and again obtained 10 per cent of the votes and nine MEPs, the same results as ten years earlier. In the 2004 EP elections the Greens were once more facing a harsh competition on the ecological issue. For instance, an independent ecological list, CAP21, led by Mrs Corinne Lepage, a former Minister of the environment, obtained 3 per cent of the votes. In 2004 EP elections the greens obtained 7 per cent of the votes and six MEPs. The internal division within the political ecology movement was

often a disadvantage for the French Greens. However, when united, the French Greens achieved good results in EP elections, around 10 per cent of the votes. This was not the case in national elections.

### **Why such a gap between different levels of elections?**

How can we explain these great differences, throughout the years, of the same political party between these two levels of elections? The particular success of Green parties in EP elections is often explained by their secondary importance in relation to national elections. According to the 'second-order' model (Reif and Schmitt 1980), voters feel that there is less at stake and thus allow themselves to vote according to conviction. After all, the EP election outcomes do not determine the executive body at the European level and the EP itself and its legislative activities are largely unknown to the public. Therefore, in EP elections, voters can follow convictions and can take risks that they would not take at national elections where elections determine choice of leaders. This is a possible explanation for the success of the French Greens in EP elections.

But there are alternative explanations for the success of Green parties in EP elections that have nothing to do with the notion of 'second-order'. The first is the role of the environmental issue. Voters might actually vote for Green parties in EP elections because they are in favour of a common environmental policy at the European level (see Curtice 1989, Carruba and Timpone 2005, Hix and Marsh 2007, Hobolt, Spoon and Tilley 2008). The environmental issue might be an emerging 'European issue', perceived by the public as an issue which is better dealt with at the EU level than at the national one.

A second explanation for the success of the French Greens in EP elections is the electoral rule. The rule of EP elections in France is proportional representation (PR) in one round only, whereas the electoral rule generally used in France's presidential or parliamentary elections is a majority vote in two rounds. The latter majority vote system tends to favour the big parties and gives little possibility for small parties to obtain MPs. In line with the second-order model, French citizens often vote tactically in national elections, relying on rational utility calculations (*le vote utile*), to eliminate a specific opponent from the second round of elections. For instance, many Green voters tend to vote for the socialist candidates in majority elections in France but for Green ones in PR elections (Mayer and Perrineau 1992: 122-139).

Notably, in the first round of the presidential elections of 21 April 2002 Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of FN, the extreme right-wing party, moved up to the second round together with Jacques Chirac due to the large dispersion of votes among various left and centre candidates. French Green

voters tend to vote for the socialist candidate in the first round of elections in order to prevent a second '21 of April', which became a reference to the political power of the extreme right in France. In fact, the French Socialists explicitly use this possibility in their call to vote for their candidate in the first round of presidential elections. This tendency does not exist in EP elections, as a Green local official explains:

'When people vote according to their convictions, we have good scores [...] in presidential elections part of the Green electorate did not vote according to their beliefs but in relation to the second round [...] I think there is a vote of conviction in European elections. That is why the Greens always had good scores in these elections.' (interview 9).<sup>3</sup>

A third explanation to the French Greens' success in EP elections is generally low turnout combined with relatively high Green voter participation. Green voters seem to participate more in EP elections than the rest of the population. Citizens who take part in these elections are relatively supportive of the European integration process (see Blondel, Sinnott and Svensson 1997). Green voters in France are mainly young, educated, middle-class, with a high proportion of higher education diplomas (see Boy 1994, Faucher-King 2005: 187). A Green MEP described the traditional Green electorate as 'Bobos' (interview 10). This population tends to be in favour of the EU. Another Green MEP said that the low turnout in EP elections is an advantage to the Greens 'because our electorate is relatively mobilised, pro-European, and will vote. However, the others [...] the people who are undecided, if they vote, they will vote more easily for the big parties' (interview 11). The high participation in EP elections among Green voters together with the low turnout in the general population gives an important advantage to the Greens.

Finally, the French Greens' success in EP elections can be explained by the low salience of the left/right cleavage. This traditional cleavage is less dominant in EP elections than in other national elections in France. This dominance of the left/right cleavage in the French political debate tends to discredit the Greens. The Greens build their political legitimacy around the emerging, post-materialist cleavage of economy vs. nature: 'only the Greens correspond to a real European cleavage – opposing the 'all market' to the ecology – in which they clearly occupy one of the two poles' (Seiler 2005: 539). In EP elections there is enough room for new, emergent political issues to be raised. The Greens may therefore compete in these elections as legitimate political rivals. For all these reasons, the French Greens do relatively well in EP elections.

For the French Greens, EP elections are an important political opportunity to get good electoral results and to obtain seats in the EP. I will now demonstrate how the party seized the 2009 EP

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<sup>3</sup> All citations are translated from French by the author.



elections as a political opportunity to save the party in crisis and as an entry point to national politics.

### **Background of the 2009 EP elections**

In 2008, around a year before the EP elections, the French Greens were in a deep crisis. The party suffered from financial problems after the 2007 presidential campaign, which ended with catastrophic results – 1.57 per cent. They also suffered from lack of attractive national leadership and internal divisions. The divisions between different party currents were often visible to the public and contributed to the negative image of the party. At this point in time, after the 2007 presidential elections, two of the Greens' national leaders, Mr Yann Wehring, the party's national secretary, and Mr Jean-Luc Bennahmias, one of the Greens' MEPs since 2004, left the party in order to join the ranks of *Mouvement Démocratique* (MoDem), a centre party on the rise led by François Bayrou, who obtained 18 per cent of the votes in the 2007 presidential elections. In addition, the French Greens faced competition from renewed parties on the radical left, which also adopted environmental issues in their political agenda: the *Nouveau Parti Anti-capitaliste* (NPA) led by Olivier Besançon, who obtained 4 per cent of the votes in the 2007 presidential elections, and *Front de Gauche*, a new union between the French Communist party (PCF) and other small left parties and trade unions. Thus, one year before the EP elections, the general situation of the party looked quite gloomy.

However, in French civil society, Green issues were on the rise, receiving positive media coverage and legitimacy. This became particularly apparent in the *Grenelle de l'environnement*. In 2007, the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, launched a large-scale public dialogue between the government and ecological non-governmental organisations (NGOs), called the *Grenelle de l'environnement*. *Le Grenelle* was extensively covered by French national media, and was a moment of both glory and disappointment for the participating NGOs. The dialogue provided civil society actors with national media coverage, public recognition and legitimacy, as they were negotiating directly with the French government about its future legislation and policy stance on issues of environment protection. In the beginning of their negotiations with the government, civil society actors were rather satisfied and enthusiastic with their political influence, as a Green MP explains:

During the “Grenelle” the NGOs’ were very satisfied. Some propositions were adopted by the “Grenelle”, there was a kind of derision among civil society, saying “we don’t need a political partner anymore, we can discuss directly with the government”. (interview 13)

However, these actors were soon disappointed, as they noticed that the French government did not implement the negotiated recommendations, which were pushed aside by the economic crisis of 2008. As a Green MEP elected in 2009 puts it:

All of those who participated were very enthusiastic, very motivated, they were much engaged in the *Grenelle de l'environnement* [...] and then, well, it was a disappointment, to see that finally all the nice speeches, the nice promises of the government, did not end up with either real concrete measures or strong decisions which are necessary. So these people were disappointed to see that the negotiations with the government did not bring fruits. I think that also explains why they came into politics. (interview 11)

During the negotiations and working groups in the *Grenelle* the idea of a new ecological political offer came about. It was a kind of bilateral 'deal' between some representatives and spokespersons of large environmental NGOs and the Green party in crisis. These individuals launched a professional political career using the organisational resources of the Green party: the Greens offered these personalities high positions on their list to the coming EP elections, thus guaranteeing them good chances to become MEPs. In return, the party highlighted these external candidates as the leaders of a brand new political organisation, *Europe Ecologie*.

### **The Greens' strategy for the 2009 EP elections**

In the 2008 Summer University of the Greens in Toulouse, Daniel Cohn-Bendit proposed to 'open up' the party and to build a larger network of support. A Green local official comments:

Cohn-Bendit said we have to get out of the narrow framework of a party which failed in the presidential elections with the worst scores in ages [...] because Bové was a candidate, well, we were completely divided [...] so he said we have to bring together supporters beyond the Greens. (interview 12)

Indeed, to open up the party to new candidates and to attract new voters were the primary objectives of the 2009 EP elections' campaign. The French Greens ran for these elections with a new strategy and under a new name, *Europe Ecologie*. The French Greens' national leadership used the 2009 EP elections as an opportunity to launch a new political strategy. A key element of this strategy was the renovation of its political offer by recruitment of external candidates from civil society.

The list of *Europe Ecologie* for the 2009 EP elections was led by three national leaders: Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Eva Joly and José Bové. They were the best known candidates nationally, and became the symbols of political engagement and unity of the French ecologists. As a candidate to the EP explains: ‘Having strong personalities such as Cohn-Bendit, José Bové, Eva Joly, those are the most symbolic three, the most known in France, that goes a long way for many of our voters’ (interview 11). As a Green local official, who was coordinating the elections’ campaign in his city, explains (interview 9), the election result would largely depend on how the voters would perceive the three personalities leading the list, who have a national audience: Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Eva Joly and José Bové.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit is very familiar to the French public. Cohn-Bendit became famous for his role in the student revolt in Paris in May 1968 and was then expelled from France (*Dany le rouge*). Cohn-Bendit has a unique position, since he holds dual citizenship, both French and German, and constantly moves between these two national political arenas. He was a prominent leader of the German Greens and became vice-mayor of Frankfurt in 1989. He has been a Green MEP since 1994, and has in turns been elected to the EP in France or in Germany. Cohn-Bendit had led the list of the French Greens’ in the EP elections of 1999, which obtained 10 per cent of the votes. The personal charm and charisma of ‘Dany’ was a main factor of the French Greens’ success in the 1999 EP elections (see Boy 1999). Even though measuring the role of a leadership scientifically is a difficult task, Daniel Boy observes that ‘the oratory qualities of Cohn-Bendit, his capacity to speak in an “ordinary” language or even his informal clothing presentation probably attracted young voters, perhaps beyond the borders of political ecology’ (Boy 1999: 677). As a local Green politician puts it, discussing the different candidates on the list to the EP elections: ‘in any case the voters do not know these people, so they will see Cohn-Bendit and they will vote’ (interview 12). French voters seem to approve ‘Dany’, a charismatic leader who brings innovative fresh spirit into the traditional French political scene and enjoys positive coverage in national television. Cohn-Bendit played a decisive role in the creation of the new list. He helped to convince the party politicians to share eligible positions with external candidates and contributed to the reconciliation of the Greens’ internal conflicts. He also helped convincing civil society personalities to join this political adventure under his leadership.

Eva Joly was positioned after Cohn-Bendit in the constituency of the Paris region. As a magistrate, she is known in France for her judgements in the famous trial of the ELF scandal (*l’affaire ELF*) and her strong engagement against corruption in the highest political circles and tax havens. Born in Oslo, Norway, she moved to Paris when she was 20 years old. Like Cohn-Bendit, Joly moves between different national political fields: she has been a special advisor to the Norwegian government (2002-2005) and to the Icelandic government from 2009, following the

country's financial collapse. Joly launched her professional political career in France by joining the *Europe Ecologie* list for the 2009 EP elections, and later became the Green candidate for the 2012 presidential elections, which illustrates her strong position in the party.

José Bové became France's most famous farmer after his direct action against a McDonald's restaurant in 1999 as a symbolic act of resistance against Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) and the food industry, for which he served some time in prison. Since this event he is often present in French national media, and is considered a charismatic spokesman of the developing alternative global movement (Bourad 2011). Bové is a spokesperson of a farmers' NGO, *confédération paysanne*, and was a prominent figure in the campaign against the proposed European constitution in the 2005 referendum. However, his attempt to enter professional politics was unsuccessful so far: as an independent candidate in the 2007 presidential elections Bové obtained only 1 per cent of the votes. He was elected MEP in the 2009 EP elections.

Other civil society candidates were also positioned high on the list for the 2009 EP elections and were elected MEPs. MEP Yannick Jadot was the campaign director of *Greenpeace*, an economist who was engaged in international solidarity and north-south relations, especially towards the situation in Africa. MEP Sandrine Bélier was the director of *France Nature Environnement* (FNE), a national federation of French environmental NGOs. Before that, Bélier had been the regional director of *Alsace Nature*, a large regional NGO. Bélier is a specialist of environmental law and took part in the legislation of the European directive 'Natura 2000'. MEP Jean-Paul Basset was the spokesperson of *Fondation Nicolas Hulot*, a famous NGO in France founded by Mr Nicolas Hulot, a former television star and known in France for his public engagement in environmental protection. Hulot announced his candidature as an independent ecological candidate in the 2007 presidential elections, but eventually did not run. Basset's presence on the list permitted the party to use the name of Nicolas Hulot in their electoral campaign even though Hulot himself officially kept his distance to the new list. These civil society candidates enabled the Greens to present *Europe Ecologie* to the French public as a political organisation with much larger scope than the original Green party, *Les Verts*.

In their communication strategy to the 2009 EP elections, the Greens highlighted the external candidates from civil society and their widely respected reputations in non-partisan activities. The Greens used the labels of the NGOs that these candidates came from, NGOs that seemed to enjoy legitimacy among the French public, such as *Greenpeace*, *Confédération paysanne*, *France Nature Environnement* or *Fondation Nicolas Hulot*.

In contrast, the party's own politicians were less visible in the electoral campaign strategy. The party politicians who were elected MEPs in the 2009 EP elections were relatively unknown at the national level and had only little experience in politics. Hélène Flautre was the only incumbent

MEP, elected in 1999. Michèle Rivasi was the only former MP (1997-2002). The other elected MEPs among the party politicians - Pascal Canfin, Nicole Kiil-Nielsen, Catherine Grèze, Malika Benarab-Attou, and Karima Delli - had mostly been engaged in politics at the local level and were relatively unknown to the French public.

The French Greens used the 2009 EP elections in order to 'open up' a party in decline. They used these elections as an opportunity to recruit external candidates from civil society, and thus to improve the party's public image. Through the EP elections, the French Greens modified the power relations in national politics: both with their ecological rivals and with the socialist party (PS).

### **Modifying the power relations in national politics**

The Greens' strategy in the 2009 EP elections has led to an electoral success. *Europe Ecologie* obtained 16.28 per cent of the votes in the 2009 EP elections, or nearly three million voters. This meant 14 MEPs, the same number of seats as the PS. Subsequently, in the 2010 regional elections, the Greens continued using their new strategy. *Europe Ecologie* obtained 12.18 per cent of the votes in the first round, or nearly two and a half million votes.<sup>4</sup> The Greens doubled their power in the regional councils: They obtained 54 regional councillors, against only 24 in 2008 elections. *Les Verts*, officially founded in 1984, and *Europe Ecologie*, an *ad-hoc* list conceived to compete in the 2009 EP elections, were officially united to a 'new' party on November 2010, named *Europe Ecologie - Les Verts* (EELV). In fact, EELV is not a 'new' political party, but rather a transformation of an 'old' one (see Barnea and Rahat 2011). In the 2011 partial elections to the French Senate EELV obtained 11 Senators against only four incumbent Green Senators. These 11 MPs established an independent Green parliamentary group for the first time in French history.

The Greens' success in the 2009 EP elections, and other elections that followed, modified their power relations with their rivals in national politics. The aim of the Greens' strategy in the 2009 EP elections was to create a unified force of political ecology in France. According to one Green MEP, the aim of the EP elections was not the EP itself, but 'to appear, to translate politically, in elections, the movement that manifested itself in society' (interview 15). As this MEP puts it: 'The European elections were the first step. The second step is the regional elections' (interview 15).

The aim of the Greens' strategy and strong investment in the 2009 EP elections was not the party's particular interest in the European level of politics. The idea behind the new list for the EP elections was to launch a new party of political ecology which would be more attractive to voters than the Green party. A major difficulty of the French Greens throughout the years is the

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<sup>4</sup> See Ministère de l'Intérieur, 'Résultat des élections Régionales 2010' at: [http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/sections/a\\_votre\\_service/resultats-elections/RG2010/FE.html](http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/sections/a_votre_service/resultats-elections/RG2010/FE.html)

competition with other ecologists. Through their success in the 2009 EP elections, the French Greens brought rival ecologists to join the Greens. They have integrated other Green politicians, thus obtaining a kind of monopoly of legitimate representation of political ecology in French politics.

For instance, Mrs Corinne Lepage, a former Minister of the environment, created her own independent ecologist party, CAP21, but did not succeed in getting elected as an MEP in 2004. In the 2007 presidential elections she joined François Bayrou, the leader of MoDem, and was elected MEP in 2009 under the MoDem banner. However, Lepage left this party soon after the 2009 EP elections and joined *Europe Ecologie*. Another example is Antoine Waechter, a former leader of the Greens. Waechter had left the Greens in 1994 and created his own party, *Mouvement Ecologique Indépendant* (MEI). In the 1994 EP elections MEI competed with a separate list, *Génération Ecologie*. Both this and the Green list failed to obtain the necessary 5 per cent for getting seats in the EP. In the 2009 EP elections, Waechter ran again separately with his independent party, MEI, but was not elected MEP. Waechter joined *Europe Ecologie* soon afterwards, becoming a regional counsellor in Alsace in the 2010 regional elections. Both Mrs Lepage of CAP21 and Mr Waechter of MEI were ancient rivals of the Greens. Both joined *Europe Ecologie* in the aftermath of the 2009 EP elections.

The main message to the French public was that the new political offer, *Europe Ecologie*, was larger than the Green party, and goes beyond the traditional left-right cleavage, as both Lepage and Waechter had criticised the Greens for being too much of a left party. A member of the campaign staff for both the European and the regional elections in the Alsace region comments:

In Alsace we have an old ecological movement but it is very divided: there was the MEI, *Les Verts*, *Génération Ecologie* [...] today through *Europe Ecologie* the big tendencies that had divided political ecology in Alsace are disappearing. *Les Verts*, MEI, maybe CAP21, are coming closer through *Europe Ecologie*. (interview 16)

Nicolas Hulot, a prominent figure of political ecology in France, who had kept his distance from the Greens before the EP elections, officially joined EELV in April 2011. He was a candidate for the party's presidency investiture, but lost the internal primaries to MEP Eva Joly.

Even more notably, the French Greens used the EP elections in order to modify the power relations with the *Parti Socialiste* (PS). Daniel Cohn-Bendit had declared that the 2009 EP elections and the first round of the 2010 regional elections were a kind of electoral test of the power of political ecology *vis-à-vis* the PS.<sup>5</sup> Cohn-Bendit repeated this message in his closing speech at a

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<sup>5</sup> Television program 'à vous de juger', *France 2*, 17th September 2009.

large public meeting a few days before the regional elections of 2010: ‘After the European vote, with the regional elections, we have the possibility to deeply transform the political landscape in France’.<sup>6</sup>

The electoral results since 2009 EP elections served as a basis for the negotiations between the Greens and the Socialists. These negotiations were concluded in a signed agreement in November 2011 (see EELV-PS 2011). The two parties agreed on a common political programme for the years 2012-2017 in case of a Socialist government. But the first practical aspect of this agreement was the division of constituencies between the two parties for the 2012 parliamentary elections. This was an attempt to regulate the two parties’ competition: in 63 ‘reserved’ constituencies, the PS stands behind the Greens’ candidate, thus giving them a chance to win a seat in the National Assembly. This arrangement modified, *de facto*, the official electoral rule of majority vote in parliamentary elections in France. The division of the constituencies was a crucial factor in the Greens’ chances to obtain MPs in the 2012 parliamentary elections, due to the electoral rule in these elections - majority vote in two rounds in 577 constituencies. In the 2012 parliamentary elections, the party’s candidates obtained 5.46 per cent of the votes in the first round at national level, and moved up to the second round in 40 constituencies out of 557.<sup>7</sup> EELV obtained 18 MPs in the National Assembly, compared to only four incumbent MPs. For the first time in their history, the Greens have established an independent parliamentary group in the Bourbon Palace in Paris, as they passed the threshold of 15 MPs needed.

In addition, EELV obtained two ministries in the PS government, after François Hollande’s victory in the 2012 presidential elections. Pascal Canfin, elected MEP in 2009, became minister in charge of development, while Céline Duflot, who had been heavily engaged in the 2009 EP elections as the Greens’ general secretary, was nominated minister of territorial equality and housing.

## Conclusions

This chapter analysed EP elections as a ‘back door’ to politics for emerging parties, taking the case of the Green party in the bipartisan system of France. The French Greens suffer from weak political resources at the national level but this has not affected their standing in EP elections where they often obtain good results. As a result, EP elections are a political opportunity of primary importance for the party. The French Greens used the 2009 EP elections as an opportunity to save the party in crisis by adopting a new strategy, recruiting external candidates from civil society. This usage of the

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<sup>6</sup> Participant observation, Strasbourg, 8th March 2010.

<sup>7</sup> See Ministère de l’Intérieur, ‘Les résultats des élections’ at: <http://elections.interieur.gouv.fr/LG2012/FE.html>.

EP elections modified the party's power relations in the national politics in France, both with other Green politicians and with the Socialists.

Also in the aftermath of the EP elections, the PS, one of the two big parties in the French bipartisan system, made an *ad-hoc* bilateral arrangement with the Greens. This arrangement concerned both policy making at the national level and the electoral competition in the coming parliamentary elections. The actors' newly created institutional setting enabled the Greens to obtain representation in the national parliament and to establish an independent parliamentary group in both the Senate and the National Assembly. In general then the presence of the European Parliament facilitates the effective participation of a greater number of political parties in decision-making at the national level of politics. It not only offers a political platform at the supranational level but also provides emerging parties with a new venue to obtain influence at the national level.

This case-study demonstrates that the process of European integration has significant effects for relatively excluded parties at the national level. The direct elections to the EP provide an additional entry point to politics for emerging actors who seek to break into the national political system. Emerging parties, facing difficult institutional environments at the national level, seize the opportunity to break into the political system through EP elections. This chapter demonstrates the degree to which EP elections and national elections are *interconnected*. Success in EP elections has significant effects on the party's power structure in domestic politics. Without these elections, these actors might have disappeared as independent parties at the national level altogether.

Even more notably, EP elections as an additional entry-point to politics have effects beyond the emerging party in question. The chapter analysed how an emerging party's success in EP elections triggers a change in different actors' practices, including the most dominant ones nationally. Thus, indirectly, EP elections modify the nature of the political system as a whole. Success of emerging parties in EP elections gives momentum to a more pluralist representation and a more open structure of competition in relatively closed national political systems.

This is an indirect consequence of the multi-level character of the inter-parliamentary field in Europe. The EU level of democratic representation triggers a certain dynamics towards opening up bipartisan closed systems. In this more open multilevel political system, an emerging party can gain representation in the national parliament and the national government, and thus effectively influence decision-making at the national level. Hence, the multi-level parliamentary field does not only involve the inclusion of national parliaments in EU decision making. It also affects the inclusiveness of national decision-making and the opportunities for emerging parties to gain access to it. In the EU as a multi-level polity, states no longer monopolise EU-level policy making, but share their power with a variety of actors at different levels. In the same way, as part of a multi-level



parliamentary field, even dominant political parties in closed national political systems tend to lose their absolute monopoly, sharing their power with emerging political parties.

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