National, popular, or neither? Sovereignty in the Rassemblement National's Contestation of European Integration

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Abstract: Far right parties have been responsible for much of the politicisation of sovereignty at the European level. However, the far right's contestation of sovereignty presents a mixed picture of evolving positions and changing meanings associated with the term sovereignty. To study the dynamics of the far right's contestation of sovereignty, this chapter presents a diachronic analysis of how the French Rassemblement National defined sovereignty in party programmes produced between 1978 and 2019. It shows how internal party composition and knowledge of the EU, domestic political competition, and transnational factors pertaining to the evolution in the shape of the EU and the international political context, prompted the RN to redefine its approach to the relationship between sovereignty and the EU, and shift from supporting 'European autonomy' in the 1970s and early 1980s to opposing the EU on grounds of national and popular sovereignty from the end of the 1980s onwards.

Chapter Keywords: Rassemblement National; European Union; Popular Sovereignty; National Sovereignty; Far Right

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The return of debates on sovereignty to the centre stage of European politics has been a surprising feature of the last few years. Reclaimed in its national and popular forms by political parties of the Left and of the Right (Borriello & Brack, 2019; Heinisch, Werner, et al., 2020), and in its European form by European and EU leaders (Juncker, 2018; Macron, 2018), sovereignty has not only proven to be an extremely resilient concept, but also, one increasingly central to political contestation.

Far right parties have been responsible for much of the politicisation of the concept of sovereignty at the European level. Figuring amongst the staunchest critics of European integration (Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro, 2018; Marks & Wilson, 2000; Pirro & van Kessel, 2017), they have sought to present it as an unacceptable violation of national, and increasingly, popular sovereignty. However, it is also worth noting that far right parties have held varying positions on EU integration (Mudde, 2007), and some seemed to be willing, at least in the past, to consider some delegation of sovereignty as acceptable (Lorimer, 2020). In short, the far right's contestation of sovereignty presents a mixed picture of evolving positions and changing meanings associated with the term of sovereignty.

To study the dynamics of the far right's contestation of sovereignty, this chapter presents a diachronic analysis of how the French Rassemblement National (RN, previously,

Front National)[1] defined the concept of sovereignty in party programmes produced between 1978 and 2019. It shows how internal party composition and knowledge of the EU, domestic political competition, and transnational factors pertaining to the evolution in the shape of the EU and the international political context, prompted the RN to redefine its approach to the relationship between sovereignty and the EU, and shift from supporting 'European autonomy' in the 1970s and early 1980s to opposing the EU on grounds of national and popular sovereignty from the end of the 1980s onwards. The RN's shifting message on sovereignty, the chapter suggests, highlights the dynamic character of the contestation of sovereignty and the need to study it in a manner that captures such discursive evolutions.

The chapter proceeds as follows. It starts by reviewing the meanings of sovereignty and their use by far right parties, before introducing the paper's empirical approach. It then presents the analysis of the RN's evolving views on sovereignty. The conclusion summarises the findings and discusses their implications.

The meanings of sovereignty

Sovereignty is a form of ultimate authority over a political-legal system (Kalmo & Skinner, 2010, pp. 2–3; Loughlin & Tierney, 2018, p. 997), which is, in most cases, the nation-state. As such, it is generally connected with ideas of power, autonomy and the capacity to make final decisions. When it comes to identifying the locus of sovereignty, Brack, Coman and Crespy (2019) identify four main forms of sovereignty: national, supranational, parliamentary and popular sovereignty. *National sovereignty* can be regarded as the 'traditional' understanding of sovereignty as an attribute of the Westphalian State. According to this view, the defining

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[1] The Front National changed its name to Rassemblement National in 2018. Documents produced by the party before 2018 are cited following the original nomenclature.

quality of the state is that within its borders, it is the ultimate source of legal authority (internal sovereignty), while outside its borders, it is autonomous and not subject to foreign or external interference (external sovereignty*)*. National sovereignty is frequently underpinned by another form of sovereignty, namely, *popular sovereignty*. Popular sovereignty refers to the idea that the source of the State's autonomy is not the state itself, but 'the people' who authorise it to act on its behalf. In other words, national sovereignty requires popular authorisation, making citizens the 'ultimate law-making authority' with a right to 'give continuous feedback to decision-makers and to participate in the political process through the various available channels' (Brack et al., 2019, p. 824). Whereas national and popular sovereignty are the most notable forms of sovereignty, Brack, Coman and Crespy suggest that they are increasingly flanked by the notion of parliamentary sovereignty. *Parliamentary sovereignty* advocates for the ability of parliaments at national, regional and EU level to be involved in decision-making practices and political processes as representatives of the people. In this sense, the representative link established between voters and MPs or MEPs justifies the involvement of Parliaments in decision-making, rather than confining them to the realm of symbolic politics in a European Union which is frequently accused of favouring 'executive dominance' (Curtin, 2014).

If the previous forms of sovereignty were all located mainly (although not exclusively) at the national level, the final form of sovereignty the authors identify transcends the nation-state framework. *Supranational sovereignty* refers to the EU's ability to advance policies in the name of its MS in certain domains in which it holds competence. In these cases, the EU acquires external autonomy by negotiating on behalf of its members, and acquires a measure of internal authority by passing laws that will have primacy over national law (as established by the principle of the supremacy of EU law). While speaking of supranational sovereignty remains largely taboo, European sovereignty has recently been invoked by political actors such as

Emmanuel Macron and Jean-Claude Juncker as part of their views on what Europe should become (Juncker, 2018; Macron, 2018).

European integration affects and interacts with all these forms of sovereignty, frequently giving rise to conflicts between them. Far right parties have been amongst the political actors most keen to politicise these conflicts, mainly due to their ideological background (although, as others have argued, they also had good strategic reasons to politicise European integration Reungoat, 2015, p. 296). In fact, these parties' nationalist and, in many cases, populist ideology (Carter, 2018; Mudde, 2007), led them to criticise the EU's claims to supranational authority on grounds of both national and popular sovereignty. Their view of the nation as the main locus of politics led to suspicion towards the EU as a construction that demanded that sovereignty be 'pooled', hence potentially undermining the 'autonomy, unity and identity' of the nation (Halikiopoulou et al., 2012; Smith, 1999, p. 256). For the subset of the far right that combines nationalism and populism (Herman & Muldoon, 2019; Mudde, 2007; Rydgren, 2018, pp. 5–6), this dynamic was further compounded by the EU's complex relationship with (direct forms of) popular sovereignty. Populism, whether as ideology or as discourse, draws on a fundamental opposition between 'the (dispossessed) people' and 'the elite' and considers that politics should be the expression of the general and unmediated 'will of the people' (for definitions of populism, see e.g., Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2007, p. 23; Rovira Kaltwasser et al., 2017; Stanley, 2008). For far right populist actors, the EU then poses several issues. Most notably, as a system with many checks and balances, it limits the extent to which politics may be the direct expression of the 'will of the people.' In addition, lacking a European demos or strong channels for national popular legitimation, it can also be easily represented as an elitist construction with little relationship to the people it is supposed to represent.

While we know that far right parties have drawn on both popular and national sovereignty to criticise the EU, we know little about how the balance between these arguments

shifted over time, and how the far right's politicisation of the concept of sovereignty evolved in response to developments in domestic and international politics. However, there are good reasons to want to address these questions. First, as mentioned in the introduction, far right positions on the EU are more nuanced or ambivalent that commonly understood (Heinisch, McDonnell, et al., 2020; Lorimer, 2020; Pytlas, 2020), suggesting the need to understand how their views on sovereignty may have fed into these varying positions. Second, understanding the balance between arguments on national and popular sovereignty can provide a more accurate picture concerning the nature of political opposition to the EU on sovereignty grounds. Understanding how this plays out in the far right specifically is important because of their growing relevance in European political systems and their ability to influence mainstream actors (Bale, 2003; Herman & Muldoon, 2019). As such, understanding their views may provide us with cues concerning the future course of EU integration.

To address this gap, the remainder of this paper takes an empirical turn and analyses how the French Rassemblement National defined the concept of sovereignty, and how changes in its positions can be explained. The Rassemblement National is one of the most well-known ì right parties in Europe. The party was originally founded in 1972 with the aim of bringing together the different currents of the French far right (Camus, 1989). Placed under the charismatic leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen, in its first ten years of life the party struggled to gain relevance. The RN's first national-level success came in the European Parliament elections of 1984, when it reached 10% of the vote and elected its first MEPs. Ever since, the RN has been a force to be reckoned with. While historically the party has struggled to gain representation at the national level, following the 2022 legislative elections, it became the single biggest opposition party in the French Parliament. In recent years, the RN's positions on European integration have also firmly established it as one of the most Eurosceptic actors in Europe. Most notably, Marine Le Pen advocated for 'Frexit' in her 2012 and 2017 campaigns,

and although she has since abandoned this policy as too divisive, the RN remains broadly sceptical of the European construction.

The RN presents an ideal case study for several reasons. First, as one of the most long-standing representatives of the European far right, it enables the researcher to study the politicisation of sovereignty over a longer timeframe, providing a better understanding of how the politicisation of sovereignty has evolved along with changes in the process of integration and domestic political contexts. In addition, because the RN is both nationalist and populist, it may be expected to provide a view on the politicisation of both national and popular sovereignty. Finally, due to its documented influence on the political parties that came after it, the RN is considered by many to be an 'archetypal' far right party (Rydgren, 2007; Van Hauwaert, 2014; Vasilopoulou, 2018). Therefore, while it may not allow for generalisability, it may still be viewed as a critical case offering insights which may prove fruitful to the analysis of similar cases.

Empirically, the paper combines the qualitative study of the discourses on sovereignty presented by the RN in sixteen national and EU election manifestoes produced between 1979 and 2019[2] with the analysis of secondary literature on the RN to contextualise and explain its key findings. The analysis of party manifestoes allows to track the diachronic evolution of the RN's discourse on sovereignty. It focuses on EU sections of national manifestoes or the entirety of EU election manifestoes, looking specifically for how the party defined sovereignty (and cognate concepts such as autonomy and power), which form of sovereignty they tended to privilege (popular, national, parliamentary or supranational), how they conceived of the EU's relationship with sovereignty and the implications of these views on how they conceptualised an 'ideal' EU. Party manifestoes were considered as helpful documents in this context, as they

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[2] Documents for the 1972-1978 period were not available in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France's archives at the time of the fieldwork.

set out key positions which party members and candidates can then elaborate upon in interviews and speeches (Budge et al., 1987; McDonnell & Ondelli, 2020). Drawing on this analysis, the following section shows both how the RN's approach to sovereignty shifted over time, and why.

Defenders of European autonomy into guardians of national and popular sovereignty: the Rassemblement National's approach to sovereignty in European integration

The RN's politicisation of sovereignty followed a relatively straightforward path from minimal discussion of external national and supranational sovereignty, to sustained attacks against the EU in the name of national and, increasingly, popular sovereignty. The term sovereignty is remarkably absent from the RN's early documents, making its first appearance only in 1989. This does not entail that concerns about sovereignty were completely absent. In fact, if one looks at the 'functionally equivalent' (Stjernø, 2005) notions of liberty, autonomy, independence, and power, it does appear that the RN cared about sovereignty, although not in the way in which it began to approach it around the end of the decade. Early RN documents on European integration, in fact, are marked by a broadly supportive view of European integration in stark contrast with the positions for which the party is known today. Thus, the manifesto prepared for the 1979 EU elections (which the party eventually did not take part in) clearly stated that

> Menaced by the military and subversive imperialism of the
> USSR, subjected to the economic and cultural pressures of the USA,
> Europe is also internally undermined by a drop in birth rates,

immigration and shortages in the domains of energy and raw materials.

Its unity would improve its position in the world considerably […] It

would thus be able to reconquer an influence which has not ceased to

decline since the war of 1945. The current Europe of the Nine, with its

250 million inhabitants, constitutes a decisive step towards the

powerful confederation we wish for. (Front National, 1979)

Along with support for European collaboration, the party even showed a measure of support for supranational sovereignty, albeit only in specified areas. For example, the RN advocated early on for a common European defence, as well as for a common police force (Le Pen, 1984, p. 160). While this would happen in the context of a confederal Europe in which nation states would maintain sovereignty, it is nonetheless important to note the party's openness to shifting core aspects of state authority to the supranational level.

The RN's early support for European integration was based on the understanding of sovereignty as a primarily external attribute of the nation and of Europe. Rather than approaching the EU as a limit on domestic sovereignty, it viewed it as a way to retrieve autonomy from external influence and enhance France's and Europe's power in a world dominated by the USA and USSR. It also approached European unity as a form of protection against the latter. As Jean-Marie Le Pen put it in his 1984 programmatic book '*Les Français d'abord'*,

one can now accept the creation of a united Europe in front of

external threats. One never associates by natural reflex. When one

creates a society, it is because one does not have the means to act alone.

It is certain that the threat of Soviet Communism (and the dangers of

disintegration by subversion it entails) is also Europe's great chance. It

can allow it to define itself precisely against a certain form of danger.

(Le Pen, 1984, pp. 155–156)

Sustaining the RN's support of the EU as a potential bulwark against Soviet imperialism and as a means to retrieve power was the fact that in the early 1980s, the European construction was still largely in flux and less powerful than it became in the following years. Its influence on domestic sovereignty was limited, and it was still open to rather different interpretations of how it should evolve. As such, the EU appeared as a construction which could still be moulded to fit the party's image of it as a defence against foreign interference and a way for Europe to retrieve power in foreign policy. Additionally, since until the early 1990s the EU remained a mainly uncontested issue in public opinion (Hooghe & Marks, 2009), there were few strategic incentives for the RN to adopt a stronger oppositional stance.

The RN's pro-Europeanism was, however, short-lived. From the middle of the 1980s, the RN started a slow but secure shift towards opposition to the European Union. It is around this time that sovereignty makes it first appearance in RN manifestoes. The RN's 1989 EU election manifesto is a case in point. The manifesto covers several of the party's pet issues including immigration, security, opposition to (Brussels) bureaucracy and presents the RN's plan for a 'Europe of the Homelands' which would reject 'the transfer of the sovereignty of the French people to commissions of stateless bureaucrats' (Front National, 1989). While markedly more critical than in previous documents, the party's view of this Europe of the Homelands is still entwined in this manifesto with the idea of creating a 'powerful Europe' to 'cast another continent in the balance of continents.' Ideas of supranational power, in this sense, remained present but were firmly rooted within individual nations who chose to collaborate freely, and faded away in the following decade. The programme concludes with a message from Jean-Marie Le Pen to voters, in which he stresses how the RN will defend the idea of 'A French France in a European Europe. A Europe of freedoms against the supranational Brussels

bureaucracy. A Europe of the Homelands, respectful of the sovereignty and identity of the nations and of the peoples that form it'. The seeds of the RN's critique of EU integration were thus sown, and the party brought sovereignty front and centre in it, employing a discourse based on both national and popular sovereignty to oppose supranational sovereignty.

The RN's shift towards opposition to the EU on grounds of sovereignty can be explained by changes taking place both within the party and in the European Union (Lorimer, 2022). First, the introduction of the Single European Act marked the beginning of an increasingly close cooperation between European countries based on a primarily economic agenda. This development was at odds with the party's view that European collaboration should be guided by the aim of transforming Europe into an international power. For example, former party cadre Bruno Mégret criticised the Single European Act as an act which did nothing to remedy the absurdity of '350 million Europeans asking 230 million Americans to defend them from 270 million Soviets' (cited in Front National, 1989a, p. 59). This critique was entwined with the idea that by privileging economic cooperation, the EU did little to reinforce the common identity of Europeans and their sense of needing to unite against external dangers (Pichon, 1989; Front National, 1991). Within the party, the arrival of a group of more markedly Eurosceptic politicians such as Yvan Blot and Jean-Claude Martinez, as well as an increased knowledge (and scepticism) of European processes derived from having become part of the European Parliament, prompted a shift to more critical stances which crystalized into firm opposition during the campaign against the Maastricht Treaty (Reungoat, 2015a, pp. 228–229).

Developments in the international and domestic political context further contributed to the radicalisation of the RN's positions observed at this time. The demise of the Soviet Union also marked the demise of calls concerning the need for European unity in face of an external

threat.[3] Additionally, the emergence of popular opposition to the European Union (Goodliffe, 2012; Hooghe & Marks, 2009) gave the RN the opportunity to appeal to a new segment of the electorate with a radical anti-EU platform. In a context where mainstream actors were mainly favourable to European integration, opposing the EU became a way for the RN to differentiate itself from the mainstream and appeal to an increasingly Eurosceptic public. The radical nature of its platform also served to differentiate the RN from the other Eurosceptic actors that campaigned against the Maastricht Treaty, making its positions instantly recognisable (Reungoat, 2015).

Opposition to the European Union on grounds of national sovereignty appears as the most prominent form of sovereigntist contestation between the early 1990s and 2002 (although it remains present throughout). The RN's view of national sovereignty draws heavily on the concepts of external autonomy and domestic self-rule, and is defined as an essential attribute of an independent state. In the party's own words, it is 'to nations what freedom is to individuals. Without sovereignty, a people falls into dependency and servitude' and associated with the idea that 'nations should never have to be subject against their will to decisions taken by others' (Front National, 1993). It is considered, in short, as 'the collective form of liberty: the freedom of a people to decide of its own future' (Front National, 2002).

The European Union is perceived as a fundamental violation of several of these principles. The 1993 manifesto, for example, considered that through integration, 'The nation loses, finally, its independence and sovereignty. These essential notions, which have guided our princes for 1500 years […] have been forgotten. In practice, they have been trampled on by the European construction as conceived of by Brussels and the Maastricht Treaty' (Front

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[3] The RN's fear of the USSR did not survive its demise and the RN has since adopted a broadly positive approach to Russia. Even following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it did not return to advocating European unity against it but remained mostly moderate in its criticism of Russian president Vladimir Putin.

National, 1993). The reasons for this are succinctly presented in the 2004 EU election manifesto, which identified EU encroachment and supranationalisation as the root causes for this decline in sovereignty:

> The entire history of the European construction consists of depriving states of their sovereignty. First, because Europe has seen its areas of intervention grow more and more […]. Additionally, because the organization and functioning of the European institutions, as well as their decision-making modes, tend more and more to make the notion of a Nation-State disappear and to give power to the Brussels technocrats. (Front National, 2004)

Scepticism of shifting power to the supranational level is also entangled with a suspicion towards the European Union as a mere 'step' towards a globalist superstate. This point is well exemplified by the 2009 European Election manifesto, in which the party stresses that 'the French patriots of the Front National […] are resolutely against the fraud that consists, under this cover of cooperation, to build a super-state that will destroy their individual identities, their sovereignties, their liberties' (Front National, 2009, p. 4). Thus, while the RN does not necessarily exclude the possibility of European collaboration, it only accepts it to the extent that nations remain fully sovereign, and are under no circumstances forced to accept the decisions imposed by others. This is usually expressed though the advocacy of a 'Europe of the Nations', constructed around ad-hoc voluntary partnerships and bilateral agreements which leave sovereignty intact. It also entails demands to repatriate sovereignty in the domains in which it has been lost, a point presented in the 2017 manifesto which called for the need to 'Give France its national sovereignty back' by 'returning sovereignty (monetary, legislative, territorial, economic) to the French people' (Front National, 2017). A similar message pervaded

Marine Le Pen's 2022 presidential campaign, although Europe itself was strikingly absent from her 2022 presidential programme (Le Pen, 2022).

Whereas the RN's critique of the EU on grounds of national sovereignty dominated the 1990-2002 period and focused on national autonomy and self-rule, the last two decades have been marked by a growing focus on popular sovereignty and the notion that the EU is undemocratic and unresponsive to popular wishes.

Popular sovereignty did not initially appear as an unquestionable principle in the party's opposition to the European Union. The 1993 manifesto is the best illustration of this point, although similar arguments were repeated elsewhere (e.g., in a speech by Jean-Marie Le Pen commonly known as the Reims Oath: Le Pen, 1992). In the manifesto, the party appeared to pit national and popular sovereignty against one another, arguing that while the French people had approved the ratification of the Maastricht treaty 'through a referendum, by a small minority', 'for the Front National, which considers that the people itself does not have the right to give up on its sovereignty […] the treaty is illegitimate' (Front National, 1993).

Occasional references to popular sovereignty appeared in several later programmes. For example, the 2002 national programme stressed how 'The Nation is for all French people, the natural framework of their freedom and their sovereignty.' In a similar vein, the 2009 EU election manifesto advocated

> For a sovereign France in a democratic Europe – For the respect
> of the people's right to self-determination: we demand the organisation
> of referendums in all countries for all new treaties and all new
> memberships, and the respect of their results. […] Against the Lisbon
> Treaty, which is nothing but a re-transcription of the European

Constitution rejected by the French, Dutch and Irish! (Front National, 2009)

The growing relevance of popular sovereignty becomes however most visible following Marine Le Pen's arrival at the helm of the party. Two factors may help understand this shift. First, since the 2005 French referendum on the EU Constitution and the 2008 economic crisis, popular and party political disavowals of the EU became more frequent both on the left and on the right of the political spectrum, as did calls for more democracy at the European level (Chazel, 2023 this volume; Crespy & Rone, 2022; Reungoat, 2015). These calls created more space and credibility for narratives of 'the people' versus 'the EU'. Second, Marine Le Pen has dedicated much of her political career to 'de-demonising' the RN (Dézé, 2015; Ivaldi, 2016). References to popular sovereignty and democratic principles can therefore be understood as attempts to mainstream the party's message and make it more appealing.

The first of the party programmes put forward under Marine Le Pen's leadership illustrates well the growing relevance of concerns about popular sovereignty. The programme includes paragraphs discussing specifically the issues of 'Europe without its peoples' and 'Europe against its peoples' (Front National, 2012). It argues that the EU suffers from a democratic deficit because it ignores popular referendum results and because its institutions are dominated by unelected technocrats. Reinforcing the point on the EU's conflicted relationship with domestic referendums, the 2019 EU election manifesto for example accuses the EU of 'trampling the will of the people' and ignoring 'referendum disavowals' of its actions (Rassemblement National, 2019). Criticisms of the EU as the home of 'unelected technocrats' is also mentioned elsewhere. It builds primarily on long-standing attacks on the European Commission (a target of the party since at least the 1980s), but in recent years the party has extended its criticism to other bodies such as the European Central Bank.

As with national sovereignty, these views also inform what the party thinks an ideal EU would look like. In this sense, the 2012 programme advocates the need to 'break with a failing dogmatic European construction' through Article 50 and 'lay the foundation of a Europe that will respect popular sovereignties, national identities, languages and cultures, and that will be at the service of the peoples through concrete actions.' The 2019 EU election manifesto moderates those purposes in that it does not mention leaving the EU, but insists on the need to create a new 'Europe of the nations and of the citizens' founded on 'the defence of individual liberty, and therefore on democracy, and, at the state level, on sovereignty in the framework of loyal and fruitful collaborations' (Rassemblement National, 2019).

In sum, in addition to presenting the EU as a violation of national sovereignty and as a threat to the nation's survival, the RN has increasingly presented it as a body ignoring democratic principles as well. This has led the party to advocate for leaving the EU, or, at very least, transform it into a 'sovereignty-friendly' 'Europe of the Nations'.

One final point mentioning is that while for analytical purposes, narratives of national and popular sovereignty have been presented as more or less neatly separate here, they frequently overlap in the RN's message. Therefore, while both terms are employed, they may not be fully separate in the party's mind. For a party such as the RN, this may be down to the fact that 'the Nation' and 'the People' are conceived of as very similar entities: the 'people' the party refers to are always the 'nationals', making the two concepts difficult to fully disentangle. The two narratives, however, should be seen as mutually reinforcing. For example, when the party is attacking 'Brussels bureaucrats', it can make two separate points: on counts of national sovereignty, it can claim that they pose a problem because they 'impose' external laws on the nation, and contribute to the dissolution of the state; on counts of popular sovereignty it can attack them for being unelected and unaccountable. In short, drawing on both forms of

sovereignty provides the party with additional ammunition in its opposition to the EU, leading it to create a more comprehensive critique of it.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a diachronic analysis of the RN's definition of the concept of sovereignty. It showed how the party moved from barely speaking of sovereignty, to bringing it front and centre in its contestation of the EU. Its views on the relationship between sovereignty and the EU also changed: whereas in its early years, the RN saw it as a potential booster of national sovereignty and accepted a measure of supranational sovereignty, it shifted to viewing it as a threat to both national and popular sovereignty. These views informed the party's views on how far European collaboration could proceed, leading it to support a 'Europe of the Nations' which would leave sovereignty intact, while allowing European countries to work with one another where needed.

Throughout the analysis, the chapter has also sought to provide cues concerning how these shifts could be explained. It has highlighted how at different stages in the party's history, party dynamics, evolutions in the EU process itself and changes at the level of public opinion and party competition provided the motivating factors for positional shifts, leading the RN from supporting the EU as a foreign policy actor, to opposing it on grounds of first national and then popular sovereignty.

Although the relative weight of these explanatory factors was not assessed, they highlight the dynamic nature of a process in which meanings evolve over time and in response to context and evolutions in the EU itself. The EU, in fact, is a malleable construction (Flood, 2002), which may be interpreted in different ways and whose relationship with sovereignty may therefore be viewed differently depending on how one looks at it. As such, it is important

to study how these factors interact, and how they shape certain views of what is possible in European integration. These findings also suggest that the EU remains contested on grounds of both national and popular sovereignty. Conflicts between national and supranational sovereignty have not been replaced by ones between supranational and popular sovereignty. Rather, these conflicts have overlapped, creating an environment where mutually reinforcing conflicts of sovereignty coexist. These conflicts are likely to shape the future path of EU integration, as they can either restrain and diminish the space for supranational sovereignty, or force a counter-movement to reassess it. At a time in which the war in Ukraine is spurring further conversations concerning the EU's 'strategic autonomy', this represents a crucial area for further research, both for how sovereignty is understood and how actors such as far right parties contest it. Conflict, in short, can spur evolutions, but whether these changes will lead towards further integration or disintegration remains to be seen.

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