

Abstract

The study aims at a better understanding of French foreign policy since the Second World War. The framework of analysis stems from the Project on comparative analysis of foreign policies in Europe (PAFE) at Trier University and is of a twofold nature: On the one hand, a traditional positivist analysis identifies typical patterns of behaviour. The results of this 'outside perspective' are specified by studies on security policy (Yugoslavian wars) and European affairs (negotiations on Economic and Monetary Union).

On the other hand, an inside perspective is provided by an identity-discourse approach. In a pre-study, French identity is endogenised with the help of two historical discourses (European Defence Community in the 1950s, Maastricht referendum in 1992). Here, three dominant discursive formations – representing the domestic foreign policy orientations – are generated: 'idealist', 'realist-European', and 'realist-autonomous'. In two extensive case studies (Kosovo, Uruguay-round), behaviour, identity and discourses are put together, illustrating how deadlocks as well as subsequent policy changes in French foreign policy are rhetorically legitimised and safeguarded.

The results of the study are finally condensed in a model which demonstrates France's problems with external challenges. It suggests that the stability of the French identity construction accounts for the continuity aspects of behaviour. Discontinuities and drastic policy changes which largely characterise French foreign policy behaviour can be analytically explained by discursive 're-alignments' between the three dominant discursive formations. On the discursive level, one way of successful 're-alignment' is through *referencing* – e.g. when the WTO in the GATT negotiations was transformed from a US-dominated threat to the French nation into a useful tool for arguing with the US on equal terms. Another way is *signifying* – as the re-interpretation of the Kosovo as belonging to 'Europe', as being 'our soil', and therefore demanding France's action, has shown.