Editorial Introduction

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In the previous issue of *French Politics*, vol. 8, no. 2, we published the first part of a symposium that was organised by Didier Georgakakis from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Strasbourg. In this issue, we publish the second part. Comprising four more papers, together the six contributions constitute a remarkably coherent suite of papers and collectively they provide a genuine challenge to dominant interpretations of the study of politics generally and EU politics in particular.

In the first part of the symposium, Didier Georgakakis provided an analysis of the biographies and careers of top-ranking officials and members of the European Commission, demonstrating that there is an increasing sociological gap between Commissioners and their civil servants. For their part, Willy Beauvallet and Sébastien Michon examined the biographies of MEPs, showing that they occupy positions of leadership within the institution by acquiring specialised political resources. In this issue, Marine de Lassalle presents a study of local EU policy officers in France, charting the rise of a new group of specialists with specific skills and competences but whose penetration varies both within the national territory and between Member States. Cécile Robert examines the expert groups that provide consultative services for the EU. The article finds that the members of these groups share certain common features, but that, as a whole, they form a surprisingly heterogeneous set of actors. Audrey Pageaut provides a study of the members of the European Round Table of Industrialists. Contrary to popular and academic wisdom, the members of this elite organisation share fewer biographical commonalities than is usually assumed. However, she argues that the membership of this club provides its own social, political and symbolic capital that reinforces the elite nature of the organisation and that helps to unify the initially disparate set of members. Finally, Frédéric Lebaron focuses on the biographies of the members of the main decision-making committees of the world's top central banks. He argues that there are similarities between the profiles of the members of the ECB and the US Federal Reserve that set them apart from, for example, members of the Bank of Japan and to the People's Bank of China. In addition, he argues that there are also subtle differences between individuals in the ECB and the US Federal Reserve and that these differences help, in part, to explain variations in monetary policy adopted by the two institutions.

With only one of the six papers having a substantive focus on France, why, it may reasonably be asked, are these papers appearing in *French Politics*? The answer lies squarely in the original rationale for the creation of the journal and the ongoing objectives that we, as editors, have set ourselves. The journal was created, in part, on the basis of the perceived need for a space that would allow both ‘outside-in’ and ‘inside-out’ accounts of French politics. That is to say, the journal encouraged, and continues to encourage, papers that take general theories and apply them to the French case either in isolation or in comparison with other cases. These papers are ‘outside-in’ accounts both in the sense that the theories are usually generated separately from any reference to the French case and in the sense that their application is certainly not restricted to France. In addition, the journal also aimed to provide a forum by which French approaches to the study of political life would have the opportunity to reach a wider academic audience. We felt, and continue to feel, that the study of politics is not an exercise that should be limited by national boundaries. We believe that there are genuinely French approaches to the study of politics and that such approaches should have the opportunity to ‘travel’. The general application of French methods constitutes what we term ‘inside-out’ accounts of political life.

As we approach the ninth year of the journal, we feel that we have been relatively successful in promoting ‘outside-in’ accounts of French politics. Whether in the study of elections, political behaviour generally, public policy or political institutions, the journal has encouraged theory-driven research with a substantive French component. However, reflecting on the content of previous editions of the journal, we felt that we had been less successful in promoting ‘inside-out’ accounts. The publication of the symposium organised by Didier Georgakakis is an attempt to address this perceived imbalance.

All of the contributions to the symposium challenge the dominant institutionalist accounts of political life and, specifically, the dominant accounts of the study of the EU institutions. Working within a general sociological framework and inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, the six papers in the symposium adopt a ‘prosopographical’ approach. That is to say, they study particular groups on the basis of in-depth biographical information. This approach is always data rich and can be combined with various statistical techniques. Here, for example, both the Beauvallet and Michon paper from the previous issue and the Lebaron paper from this issue use Multiple Correspondence Analysis to tease out the similarities and differences between the members of a particular group and between the members of that group and other groups. Aside from the fact that the contributions to the symposium are working within a specific Bourdieusian tradition, these papers can be situated in a more general French approach with its emphasis on political sociology and its study of the characteristics of particular elites. That said, there is nothing

intrinsically French about either this approach generally or the prosopographical approach in particular. They can be applied to the study of any group anywhere. The contributions to this symposium aim to show that the prosopographical approach can be applied to EU-level groups and that such an approach has a certain explanatory power. Whether or not such an account is successful in challenging institutionalist interpretations of political life is an open question. Whatever the answer, we are delighted, as editors, to be able to publish such a stimulating and cohesive set of papers in the journal.

Andrew Appleton
Washington State University,
USA
E-mail: appleton@wsu.edu

Robert Elgie
Dublin City University,
Ireland
E-mail: robert.elgie@dcu.ie