

# ISSA Proceedings 2014 - Euro: Past Arguments For The Contemporary Debate On European Currency

*Abstract:* My paper aims to investigate the debate on European currency and the connection between two different rhetorics: one emerged during the last French presidential election in 2012 and the other occurred during the transition from franc to euro in 1998-2002. My paper underlines that the contemporary crisis of the European monetary construction has been represented by some types of arguments emerged when euro was proposed, on 1998. I explore the relation between definition and argumentation.

*Keywords:* argumentation in discourse, definition, discourse analysis, euro, French language, presidential election.

## 1. *Introduction*

My contribution will first expose a short history of the European currency so as to underscore the principal and more recent steps of the euro. A place will be given to the confidence value of the European money which is one of the main items of the related debate. Later on, I will show two main characteristics of the corpora that I analysed: the discursive nature of the construction of the euro transition and the two different political and economical periods of time in France (2002 and 2012) covered by data in my hand. After this comment, I will introduce the theoretical framework of my analysis based on the idea of the argumentation as a call-back mechanism: some argumentative designations, used during the latest French presidential election linked to the euro crisis, recall the previous debate on euro. I will express and explain this circularity through some examples. I will then conclude looking at the semantic intersection between argumentation and lexicon.

## 2. *The European currency*

In December 1991, the European Council decided to shape an economic and monetary union in the Dutch city of Maastricht and later confirmed it in the

Treaty on European Union (the so-called Maastricht Treaty). Economic and monetary union brought the European Union (EU) one step further in its process of economic integration, which started in 1957 when it was founded. In 1998, the European Central Bank (ECB) was established and, six months later, the stage three of Economic and Monetary Union was launched. On 1 January 1999 the euro replaced the former European Currency Unit (ECU). Euro banknotes and coins began to circulate on 1 January 2002.

The monetary shift from national to European currency is part of contemporary history and of the construction of Europe, not only from a monetary point of view. Since the creation of the ECB in 1998 until the introduction of the euro in 2002, the European currency has been a political challenge, which had peoples to be first convinced, reassured and trained. This event, taken in the history of European integration, required two different but quite complementary efforts.

On the one hand, the protagonists of monetary integration of Europe pursued and built confidence, which is essential in making people comfortable with the new currency. I can consider national currencies, in fact, as symbols of national identities. Money thus embodies a range of cultural and memory references. The first problem with the new currency has been that euro is not immediately identifiable to a single nation: so, it needed bigger endeavors in order to enforce trust and identity. For these reasons, its “discursive” aspect, associated to its material presence[i], is relevant for my analysis.

On the other hand, European citizens from the first eleven member countries have permanently changed an age-old practice: the use and, therefore, the name of their national currency. In France, this change sounded even more complicated by the etymological triad “Franc-France-Français” (Franc-France-French) which was at stake. We will see now how important is the time factor conceived as a sort of link between the present and the past argumentations.

### *3. The corpus*

#### *3.1 Subject of the discourse*

From our perspective, the study of the euro cannot be separated from the speeches that had been produced and characterized its birth and launch. The transition to the euro in terms of its discursive construction means to examine the role of language. More specifically, it means to analyse the emergence of events

related to memory, culture and history of a given society. The construction of the monetary Europe went through the use of language. Moreover, its existence, until 1 January 2002, was linked to the discourse of economic and political actors who either supported or opposed to its launch. Nowadays, the debate related to the European monetary union is deeply linked with the topics that have been used during its launch: political and monetary sovereignty, supranational bank (ECB), national and European identities, etc.

During the first period, from 1998 to 2002, the major aim of the euro defenders analysed was to build confidence on Euro: his creation, launch and arrival occupied, from a discursive and media point of view, an important period of time giving rise to mass production and circulation of discourse. In a similar way, the euro opponents tried to destroy the arrival of the new currency by emphasizing the lacks of the new currency. Both positions had to develop a discourse which had largely preceded the arrival of the euro. With reference to the studies of Sitri, we can consider the transition to the euro as an *objet de discours* (subject of the discourse) which reveals aspects of traceability in history:

*l'objet de discours est conçu ici comme une entité constitutivement discursive, et non pas psychologique ou cognitive: constitué de discours et dans le discours - discours où il naît et se développe mais aussi discours dont il garde la mémoire - il est par là-même pris dans la matérialité de la langue* (Sitri, 2003, p. 39).**[ii]**

In 2012, during the French presidential election, political speakers recovered some arguments used ten years before. The members of the political parties as well as the argumentative recycle were in fact the same; sometimes candidates in 2012 election simply used same arguments of the past confirming the memorial value of these arguments.

### 3.2 *The French context*

Two issues pushed Jacques Chirac to request a new ballot in June 1997: on the one hand, European targets, including introduction of the euro and, on the other, different positions within the government. The victory of the left coalition (PS, PC, Left Radicals, Greens) inaugurated the period of the third political cohabitation with Lionel Jospin as Prime Minister. The presidential election took place between April 21 and May 5. In the first round, Jean-Marie Le Pen was positioned behind Jacques Chirac and before Lionel Jospin who suddenly announced his withdrawal from political life. On May 5, Jacques Chirac was re-elected President for five

years. During the government of Lionel Jospin, there have been three ministers of Economics: Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Christian Sautter and Laurent Fabius. On January 1, 2002 the euro officially began circulating.

The tenth birthday of the European currency in 2012 has been characterised by a strong financial and political crisis which reinforced the opponents of the euro project. During the French presidential election, the first round ended with the selection of François Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy. Hollande won the second round. The candidates' discourses had to face up the financial topic of the crisis of the euro mostly because of the lower political legitimacy of the monetary Europe. The tenth anniversary of the euro and the argumentative strategies used during the presidential election make this period of time particularly interesting for my research.

In 2012, the presidential election permitted me to investigate the debate on European currency within the electoral discourse of the French candidates. Therefore, my choice emphasizes the time factor of the discursive event 'euro' and highlights the abundance of media production, following the notion of *moment discursif* (discursive moment) elaborated by Moirand (2007) which means:

*étudier la circulation des mots, des formulations et des dire, en particulier la façon dont "ça " parle, "ça" circule d'un article à un autre, d'une émission à une autre, d'un genre à un autre, d'un média à un autre. Mais si l'on s'interroge sur la façon dont ils circulent autant que sur ce qu'ils "disent", c'est parce qu'on s'interroge également, au-delà de la traçabilité des mots, des formulations et des dire, que l'on vise, sur la mémoire, le rappel et l'oubli des dire qui sont produits, ou transmis, par les médias.* (Moirand, 2007, pp. 4-5).**[iii]**

Although the two moments analysed have produced different amount of speeches on euro and the European challenges are varied from 2002 to 2012, I consider the political event of presidential election and the evolutive progression of euro as relevant subjects in order to build a comparative study.

#### 4. *Argumentation in discourse*

In regards of the theoretical framework, my study investigates the arguments in discourse by casting light on the processes that users implement. Namely, the discourse can be considered as the concrete result of the statement in context.

My methodological approach addresses the debate on the euro as a game of positioning, a dialogic process and a resistance to challenge. As quoted by Plantin,

*L'argumentation est la confrontation, sur un mode polémique ou coopératif, d'un discours et d'un contre-discours orientés par une même question.* (Plantin, 1996, p. 72).**[iv]**

The issue (*question*) mentioned by Plantin corresponds, in my case study, with the acceptance or refusal of the euro. The two periods of time analysed and the speakers involved in the debate produce discourses with an argumentative *visée* or purpose as stated by Ruth Amossy:

*la simple transmission d'un point de vue sur les choses, qui n'entend pas expressement modifier les positions de l'allocutaire [dimension argumentative], ne se confond pas avec l'entreprise de persuasion soutenue par une intention consciente et offrant des stratégies programmées à cet effet [visée argumentative]* (Amossy, 2009, p. 33).**[v]**

Both in 2012 and in 2002 the speakers analysed had to persuade their audience of the political position they occupied in supporting or opposing euro. In 2002, speakers were involved in the monetary transition; in 2012, the financial crisis of euro and European monetary construction pushed candidates to express their position on euro. Therefore, we need the context in which discourses are produced in order to understand their creation and use and for this reason I consider argumentation dialogical and rich of intertextual and interdiscursive elements.

#### 4.1 *Definition and argumentation*

We need now to highlight two kinds of arguments which play their role on the notion of definition. On the one hand, the argument by definition concerns the concepts as such with specific distinguishing features (such as legal definitions).**[vi]** It is sometimes called argument by essence. On the other hand, the argumentative definition recaps a significant amount of data that clearly expresses the speaker's position.**[vii]** Through this kind of argument one can recognize opponents and their replies as well as express his/her own position, inferring so the dialectic value of the argument. Following Plantin,

*la définition argumentative consiste à définir un terme de telle sorte que la*

*définition exprime une prise de position, favorable ou défavorable, vis-à-vis de l'objet défini* (Plantin, 1996, pp. 53-54).**[viii]**

Far from being comparable to the argument by definition or to the argumentative definition, I think that the adjectival designations assigned to the euro summarize two opposed political positions and involve different interdiscursive references. Given that, any argumentative analysis should question the words used by speakers, as Plantin remembers in 1996:

*la présence structurante du discours de l'un dans le discours de l'autre est à la base de l'hétérogénéité du discours argumentatif apparemment le plus monologique* (Plantin, 1996, p. 75).**[ix]**

The corpora analyzed are, in fact, made by monological speeches which maintain an argumentative mechanism which links past and present by linking one corpus to the other. Moreover, as stated by Robrieux,

*certains termes du vocabulaire politique fournissent sans doute les meilleurs exemples d'imprécisions sémantiques due à leur charge affective et aux connotations qui s'y rattachent* (Robrieux, 2007, p. 149).**[x]**

I want to underline that speakers use evaluative terms in order to drive the comprehension of their audience and, on the other hand, in order to clarify the meaning that they assign to a word. We cannot talk about definition based on etymology or dictionary definition but I argue that the lexical and semantic choices made by the speakers analysed reveal consensual or debatable reactions. As pointed by Amossy in 2009:

*le mot est à prendre aussi bien dans le cadre de l'interaction [...] que des rapports consensuels ou polémiques qu'il entretient avec les autres mots du discours dans un espace où les énonciations se croisent et se répondent* (Amossy, 2009, p. 158).**[xi]**

In order to explain this specific perspective, I will present two different pair of adjectives which summarize similar argumentative positions.

##### 5. "Single" or "common" currency

The first set of examples is linked to the difference between two adjectives referred to currency: "single" and "common." During the launch of the euro, the

European currency went through a sort of 'definitional step' which led to the use of the word "euro". From the 1960s until the early 2000s, the value of the currency name has been the subject of debate among Member States of the European Union. The adjectives associated with the euro (e.g. "community", "parallel", "common" and "single" currency) reported thus fundamental passages in European history, economics and politics. They photograph explicitly different visions of Europe. Until the December 1995, when the name was chosen, **[xii]** each European official document took explicit position by choosing one term instead of another.

For example, the quotations from the opponents, determined against economical "supranationality" of the euro, defended the "common" currency and not the "single" currency. On the other hand, the contemporary debate on European currency regenerates past arguments associated with the issue of supranationality and financial reliability of the euro. Indeed, the political programs of the French candidates to the presidential election of 2012 contained the topic *la sortie de l'euro* (the withdrawal from the euro) linked to the financial crisis of the PIIGS countries (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain). The lack of economic solidarity among the members of EU as well as the increasing method of austerity enforced by the ECB renew the debate on euro in 2012.

The following examples are organised as a double track which confirms the cyclic nature of the argumentation even within the same political party, as for example the National Front. Marine Le Pen, current leader of the party, uses the expression *monnaie commune* (common currency) and *monnaie unique* (single currency) as his father, former leader of the party, did more than ten years before:

*Nous envisageons la possibilité de conserver l'euro monnaie commune [...] ça n'aurait pas les inconvénients qu'à la monnaie unique [...] la possibilité de conserver une monnaie commune ce que nous rejetons, contestons formellement c'est cette monnaie unique.* (M. Le Pen, 27/11/2011). **[xiii]**

*Oui à une monnaie commune, symbole de la coopération fraternelle des Européens. Mais alors franchement, très franchement, non, mille fois non, à la monnaie unique."* (J.-M. Le Pen, 1/05/1998). **[xiv]**

Even if the political context of the French presidential election of 2012 has

changed, the use of the adjectives “common” and “single” revitalised the former debate of 1998. The circularity of these argumentative signals is useful to the persuasive aim of the speakers. In other words, they exploit some of the most common arguments of the past against euro to concentrate their speeches and to underline the interdiscursive value of their political position.

The same mechanism is stated within another couple of examples linked to the Citizens’ Movement, a party guided by J.-P. Chevènement :

*une mutation si possible harmonisée de l’euro qui de monnaie unique pourrait devenir monnaie commune* (Chevènement, 24/06/2011).**[xv]**

The speaker postulates the need to switch from a single currency to a common one. He is using the same couple of adjectives of the past, as reported in the following example:

*S’agissant de l’euro, aujourd’hui monnaie commune, je m’interroge sur le fait de savoir s’il ne serait pas raisonnable d’y regarder à deux fois avant de plonger, le 1er janvier 2002, dans la monnaie unique* (Chevènement, 21/05/2000).**[xvi]**

Here I want to emphasize the role played by a problematic link between the ideas of single and common currency. As mentioned above, the single euro is, according to the Marine and Jean-Marie Le Pen, the currency of the capital markets and ECB while the common currency could become a slogan for cooperation between European countries. In other words, a common currency means to them an exchange other than financial transactions.

Other contemporary political French speakers enrich the adjectival meaning of “common” and “single” by adding other adjectives, as Jean-Luc Mélenchon did in 2011:

*la France devra œuvrer au renforcement de la coopération monétaire en proposant le passage du SME à la “monnaie commune européenne” (et non plus “monnaie unique”)* (Mélenchon, 10/04/2011).**[xvii]**

The speakers of 2012 regenerate the previous debate of 1998-2002 by using the definitional contrast between “common” and “single.” The use of dictionary in this case has not great interest: what is really important is to take into account the political interdiscourse which can better define the value of the words “single” or

“common.”

## 6. “Strong” or “weak” euro

A second topic which summarizes another argumentative value refers to the strength or the weakness of the euro. On the one hand, the strength of the euro against the dollar is assigned to different degrees: behind the dollar, at the same level of importance, or in a contrast to it. This comparison is taken by opponents to the euro as a scale of “monetary subordination” against the dollar. Both can be measured only in relationship with the dollar and, occasionally, with the yen. Fabius explained this concept in 2001:

*l’euro est à la fois un symbole politique majeur de l’Europe qui se construit, un gage de paix, un pôle de force face au dollar et demain sans doute face à une monnaie ou à un panier de monnaies asiatiques (Fabius, 23/01/2001).***[xviii]**

According to its supporters, euro embodies the European alternative to the dollar and the yen and it is presented as the currency of the first world power. Therefore, if one refers to the opponents to the euro, it is considered as a subaltern currency compared to the dollar. From an argumentative point of view, the lexical selection of the adjective “strong” or “weak” implies that two visions of the euro project are subsumed: on the one hand, a currency which can defend Europe from financial crisis, unemployment, increase in the price of consumer goods; on the other, the second vision of euro is linked to the idea that a money cannot survive outside a state, as De Villiers argued in 2001:

*Si l’euro est si faible aujourd’hui, c’est non seulement parce que les banquiers ne s’entendent pas entre eux sur la baisse des taux d’intérêt, mais que derrière cela, une monnaie qui n’est pas adossée à un Etat, un peuple, une nation, n’a pas de chance de survivre autrement que comme une monnaie faible (De Villiers, 7/04/2001).***[xix]**

I think that the topic of the euro strength or weakness can be analysed by using the previous argumentative protocol. In other words, we can extrapolate the argumentative inference of each quotation through the interdiscursive relation existing between the single adjective and the persuasive aim of the speaker. As we may read in the following quotation, the strength and the weakness of euro are related to the dollar :

*La faiblesse de l’euro fait couler beaucoup d’encre, mais le MDC l’ayant souhaitée*

*ne la déplore pas. Nous l'avions posé comme une des conditions de possibilité de l'euro, avec l'inclusion des pays d'Europe du Sud. Un euro large devait immanquablement contribuer à ce qu'il fût faible. [...]*

*Depuis deux ans, ce qui se passe montre clairement que la faiblesse de l'euro n'est que l'envers de la force du dollar. En effet, il suffirait d'un dollar faible pour des raisons décidées par le trésor américain (ce fut le cas au début de la décennie 90) pour que l'euro remonte. Ce n'est pas nous qui décidons, en dernier ressort, de la force ou de la faiblesse de l'euro. Cette faiblesse révèle surtout l'inconsistance de l'idée politique qui sous-tend le projet de l'euro (Chevènement, 21/05/2000).[xx]*

The opposition to euro expressed by Chevènement is linked to the political inadequacy of the project of the monetary Union. On the contrary, during the past French presidential election, some candidates used these adjectives in order to renew the opposition between euro and franc, as Sarkozy did in 2012:

*Si nous sortions de l'euro pour revenir au franc, nous devrions rembourser notre dette en monnaie forte avec une monnaie faible (Sarkozy, 29/03/2012).[xxi]*

The use of the adjectives “strong” or “weak” are then linked to the political context in which they are used. In short, the semantic referent within the speech of Sarkozy is completely opposite to the trop forte (too strong) within Marine le Pen's quotation:

*le problème majeur de l'euro c'est que c'est une monnaie beaucoup trop forte pour notre économie (M. Le Pen, 27/11/2011).[xxii]*

The positive semantic charge of the adjective “strong” (the euro according to Sarkozy) becomes a negative semantic shift for the argumentative aim of the speaker (the euro according to M. Le Pen). The leader of the National Front prompts for a sort of monetary equality between euro and franc. The argumentative purpose of the speakers analysed needs to be redefined on a regular basis and adapted to the political context and position of the candidate.

## *7. Conclusion*

In conclusion, I want to highlight two main points of my paper. First of all, the study of a discursive object as the euro requires special attention to the periods of time analysed and to the selected speakers. The periods of time and the speakers

in my paper are linked insofar as they condense chronological differences but very close political and economic issues. Moreover, even if the speakers produce monologic speeches, at the same time they mobilize other discourses pronounced before their single utterance.

Secondly, from a theoretical point of view, I assume that I cannot use the argumentative typology based on the definition and I think that the argumentative analysis does not investigate the lexicon itself. Though, I think that the lexical selection operated by a speaker makes possible her/him to guide and model her/him the argumentation. As stated by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca,

*Parfois le choix d'un terme sera destiné à servir d'indice, indice de distinction, de familiarité ou de simplicité. Parfois il servira plus directement à l'argumentation, en situant l'objet du discours dans une catégorie mieux que ne le ferait l'usage du synonyme* (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2008, p. 201).**[xxiii]**

The adjectives “common” and “single”, “strong” or “weak” represent a choice I made to explain my analysis, but the two corpora present many other possible “couples” which testify that a public debate can generate circular argumentative strategies.

## NOTES

**i.** In 2002, notes and coins of the euro showed an iconographic message of ‘subtraction.’ In other words, images and templates chosen by the ECB will leave no room for heated debates. On the one hand, the representation of monumental works of different architectural styles demonstrated the desire to build a strong and sustainable image of eternity. On the other hand, the notes and coins ‘empty’ of architectural images left a space of ‘non-recognition’ among citizens within the euro area. As explained by Carbonnier (1998), the images printed on the notes and coins represent sovereignty.

**ii.** “The subject of discourse is considered here as a constitutively discursive entity, not psychological nor cognitive. Since it is produced by speeches and within the speech – where it was born, developed and memorized – it is thereby rooted in the materiality of language.” (All the following translations from French to English are by the author).

**iii.** “Studying the movement of words, formulations, and sayings, particularly how ‘it’ speaks, ‘it’ flows from one article to another, from one issue to another, from one genre to another, from one medium to another. But if we ask ourselves about

how they circulate as much as what they 'say', it is because we are also asking about the recall and the oblivion of sayings produced and transmitted by media, beyond the traceability of the words, formulations and sayings."

**iv.** "The argumentation is the confrontation - either on a controversial or on a cooperative manner - of a speech and an opposite speech oriented by the same issue."

**v.** "the mere transmission of a point of view on things - which expressly does not intend to change the positions of the addressee [argumentative dimension] - needs to be not confused with the will of persuasion supported by the conscious intention and strategies programmed for this purpose [argumentative purpose]."

**vi.** As an argument by definition we propose the following article of the Madrid European Council (december 1995): "the specific name euro will be used instead of the generic term 'ecu' used by the treaty to refer to the european currency unit."

**vii.** We propose two conflicting examples of argumentative definitions: "L'euro est une victoire de l'Europe" (Euro is a victory for Europe - Chirac, 31/12/2001) and "L'euro, c'est le vol de la démocratie" (Euro is the theft of democracy - Pasqua, 02/01/2002).

**viii.** "The argumentative definition is made in order to define a term so that the definition expresses a position, favourable or unfavourable, related with the object defined."

**ix.** "The structuring presence of someone's speech in the speech of others is the basis of the heterogeneity of the argumentative discourse, even in the apparently most monological discourse."

**x.** "Certain terms in the political vocabulary probably provide the best examples of semantic inaccuracies due to their emotional charge and connotations which are attached to it."

**xi.** "The word needs to be taken in the context both of the interaction [...] and of consensual or controversal relationships that it has with other words of the discourse in a space where enunciations/utterances cross and reply to themselves".

**xii.** The debate on the name of the European currency was resolved during the Economic Council of Madrid in 1995 where the European currency was finally called "euro." The point 2 of the final resolution stressed the importance of the name of the new European currency.

**xiii.** "We envision the possibility of keeping the euro as a common currency [...] it would not have the disadvantages that the single currency has [...] the possibility

to preserve a common currency, what we reject formally it is this single currency.”

**xiv.** “Yes to a common currency, a symbol of fraternal cooperation of Europeans. But then frankly, quite frankly, no, a thousand times no to the single currency.”

**xv.** “A possible harmonized mutation of the euro which will become, from single currency, common currency.”

**xvi.** “Speaking about euro as a common currency today, I wonder whether it would be unreasonable to think twice before diving in the single currency on 1 January 2002.”

**xvii.** “France must work to strengthen monetary cooperation by proposing the passage of the EMS to the ‘common European currency’ (rather than ‘single currency’).”

**xviii.** “Euro is a major political symbol of Europe that we are making: a promise of peace, a pole of strength against the dollar and, tomorrow, maybe, against asian currency or against a bunch of asian currencies.”

**xix.** “If the euro is so weak today is not only because bankers do not agree among themselves on the lower interest rates, but also because, behind that, a currency which is not supported by a state, a people, a nation has no chance to survive except as a weak currency.”

**xx.** “The weakness of the euro spilled much ink, but the MDC do not regret it. We had set it as a condition of possibility of the euro, with the inclusion of southern European countries. A large euro would inevitably contribute to his weakness [...] For two years, what is happening clearly shows that the weakness of the euro is only the other side of a strong dollar. Indeed, a dollar weak for reasons decided by the United States Treasury (as was the case at the beginning of the 90s) would be enough to let the euro rise. We do not decide, eventually, about the strength or weakness of the euro. This weakness mostly reveals the inconsistency of the political idea behind the euro project.”

**xxi.** “If we leave the euro back to the franc, we should pay back our debt in a strong currency with a weak currency.”

**xxii.** “The major problem with the euro is that it is a far too strong currency for our economy.”

**xxiii.** “Sometimes the choice of a term is intended to serve as an index, index of distinction, familiarity and simplicity. Sometimes it will serve more directly the argumentation, placing the object of discourse in a better category than it would have been the use of a synonym.”

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