This research deals with the phenomenon of cohabitation and more precisely its relationship to the evolution of the competitive dynamics ruling the French party system under the Vth Republic.

AIM
Since I hold that cohabitation has been misunderstood and misedvaluated when solely seen a governance issue, the aim of this research is threefold: (1) to reconfigure and reassess this phenomenon; (2) to present its accurate role within the distortions of the competitive dynamics of the party system and (3) to uncover what these distortions mean in reality for the regime of the Vth Republic (its tripartization and the successful infiltration by the Front National).

METHODS
In this explanatory single case study, I use a so-called "soft rational approach" (Linz) to analyze the behavioural strategies of the actors. To complement this strategic approach I conduct a historical perspective presenting the origin and the evolution of the competitive mechanics of the party system throughout the IIIrd, IVth and Vth Republics.

I also propose a new model for understanding the competitive mechanics of the French party system. This model will not use the traditional Sartorian empirical indicators considered inefficient because of their lack of predictive value. Instead, I will offer what I call four necessary parameters (depth of participation; degree of stickiness; quality of response; potency of sanction) and the trade-offs between them, which all constitute the true structure of competitive interactions inside a party system.

RESULTS
Cohabitation is not so much an issue about the adequate governance of power but the screen used to mask the deeper problems of a regime unable to cope with changes within electoral competition. I contend that in reality the reduction of the presidential mandate during cohabitation sees the capitis diminutio of the Prime Minister who actually should not confront, nor be understood as challenging the prerogatives of the President.

Cohabitation is the indication of deep distortions in the way the electoral majorities currently perform. It is actually masking the rise of an artificial "logic of concentration" which slowly replaces the traditional dynamics of "majoritarianisation" of the system.

Cohabitation masks the true failure of the dynamic of bi-polarization (a left versus a right) while setting an intense movement of competition displayed by more ephemeral players. This movement gives way to less "real" competition because it results instead in the neutralization (or hindrance) of the actions of "relevant" and "presidential" parties.

This process leads to the progressive tripartization of the party system, with currently the Socialist party on the left; the UMP (previously RPR) on the right and the FN, which sees its strategy of infiltration succeeding.

The FN is an unavoidable structural actor of the French party system that almost solely drives the competitive dynamics within the party system of the Vth Republic.

MAIN SOURCES
The primary sources of this research were: electoral polls, constitutional reviews, speeches, newspapers' editorials all complemented with the relevant scientific literature on party system and electoral competition.

Avainsanat-Nyckelord-Keywords
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