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► **To cite this version:**

Angela Pistoia, Olivier Rey. Multiple solutions to the supercritical Bahri-Coron's problem in pierced domains. *Advances in Differential Equations*, 2006, 11 (6), pp.647-666. hal-00935395

**HAL Id: hal-00935395**

**<https://hal.science/hal-00935395v1>**

Submitted on 30 Jan 2014

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# Multiplicity of solutions to the supercritical Bahri-Coron's problem in pierced domains \*

ANGELA PISTOIA<sup>†</sup> and OLIVIER REY<sup>‡</sup>

## Abstract

We consider the supercritical Dirichlet problem

$$(P_\varepsilon) \quad -\Delta u = u^{\frac{N+2}{N-2}+\varepsilon} \text{ in } \Omega, \quad u > 0 \text{ in } \Omega, \quad u = 0 \text{ on } \partial\Omega$$

where  $N \geq 3$ ,  $\varepsilon > 0$  and  $\Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^N$  is a smooth bounded domain with a small hole of radius  $d$ . When  $\Omega$  has some symmetries, we show that  $(P_\varepsilon)$  has an arbitrary number of solutions for  $\varepsilon$  and  $d$  small enough. When  $\Omega$  has no symmetries, we prove the existence, for  $d$  small enough, of solutions blowing up at two or three points close to the hole as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero.

## 1 Introduction

We consider the problem

$$-\Delta u = u^q \text{ in } \Omega, \quad u > 0 \text{ in } \Omega, \quad u = 0 \text{ on } \partial\Omega, \quad (1.1)$$

where  $N \geq 3$ ,  $q > 1$  and  $\Omega$  is a smooth and bounded domain in  $\mathbb{R}^N$ .

In the subcritical case, i.e.  $q < \frac{N+2}{N-2}$ , problem (1.1) has a solution for any domain  $\Omega$ . In the critical case, i.e.  $q = \frac{N+2}{N-2}$ , Pohozaev's identity (see [20]) shows that (1.1) has no solution when  $\Omega$  is starshaped, whereas Kazdan and

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\*The first author is supported by M.U.R.S.T., project "Metodi variazionali e topologici nello studio di fenomeni non lineari".

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Warner [12] proved the existence of a radial solution on annular domains. Later, Coron [7] proved that (1.1) has a solution when  $\Omega$  has a small hole. Such a result was greatly extended by Bahri and Coron [3], showing that the nontriviality of some homology group of  $\Omega$  ensures the existence of a solution. However, this sufficient topological condition is not necessary for solvability of (1.1), as examples show ([8], [11], [18]). In the supercritical case, i.e.  $q > \frac{N+2}{N-2}$ , the condition appears to be neither necessary [14], nor sufficient, at least as  $q > \frac{N+1}{N-3}$  [19].

The present paper is concerned with the slightly supercritical case,  $q = \frac{N+2}{N-2} + \varepsilon$ , where  $\varepsilon$  is a small positive parameter. We are interested in finding solutions to (1.1) which blow up at some points of  $\Omega$  as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero, in the following sense. We consider, for  $\lambda > 0$  and  $\xi \in \mathbb{R}^N$ , the functions

$$U_{\lambda,\xi}(x) = \alpha_N \frac{\lambda^{\frac{N-2}{2}}}{(\lambda^2 + |x - \xi|^2)^{\frac{N-2}{2}}} \quad x \in \mathbb{R}^N, \quad \alpha_N = [N(N-2)]^{\frac{N-2}{4}}$$

which are the only positive solutions to the equation  $-\Delta U = U^{\frac{N+2}{N-2}}$  in  $\mathbb{R}^N$  ([1], [6], [23]) and the projections  $P_\Omega U_{\lambda,\xi}$  of  $U_{\lambda,\xi}$  onto  $H_0^1(\Omega)$ , i.e.

$$\Delta P U_{\lambda,\xi} = \Delta U_{\lambda,\xi} \text{ in } \Omega, \quad P U_{\lambda,\xi} = 0 \text{ on } \partial\Omega.$$

These functions are, as  $\lambda$  goes to zero, approximate solutions to (1.1) in the critical case. Denoting  $(P_\varepsilon)$  problem (1.1) with  $q = \frac{N+2}{N-2} + \varepsilon$ , we set:

**Definition 1.1.** *Let  $k \in \mathbb{N}^*$  and  $u_\varepsilon$  be a solution to  $(P_\varepsilon)$ . We say that  $(u_\varepsilon)_\varepsilon$  blows up at  $k$  points  $\xi_1, \dots, \xi_k$  of  $\Omega$ ,  $\xi_i \neq \xi_j$  for  $i \neq j$ , as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero, if and only if there exist positive parameters  $\lambda_{1\varepsilon}, \dots, \lambda_{k\varepsilon}$  and points  $\xi_{1\varepsilon}, \dots, \xi_{k\varepsilon}$  in  $\Omega$  such that*

$$u_\varepsilon - \sum_{i=1}^k P U_{\lambda_{i\varepsilon}, \xi_{i\varepsilon}} \rightarrow 0 \text{ as } \varepsilon \rightarrow 0$$

*in  $H_0^1(\Omega)$  and  $C^1(\Omega \setminus \bigcup_{i=1}^k B(\xi_i, a))$ , for any  $a > 0$ .*

In the slightly subcritical case, i.e.  $q = \frac{N+2}{N-2} - \varepsilon$ , it was proved that such solutions do exist [4]. In particular it is always true, whatever  $\Omega$  may be, for  $k = 1$ . (Some examples of domains with solutions blowing up at several points are given in [17].) When  $q = \frac{N+2}{N-2} + \varepsilon$ , the situation turns out to be different. In particular, solutions blowing up at a single point never exist [5]. However, Del Pino, Felmer and Musso [9] proved the existence of solutions blowing up at two points, provided that  $\Omega$  satisfies some topological

assumption - for example,  $\Omega$  has a small hole. (See also [13] for a simplified assumption when  $N = 3$ .) Existence of a large number of solutions to  $(P_\varepsilon)$  was found when  $\Omega$  is a symmetric annulus [10] or a symmetric annulus with a “channel” [14] (making the domain contractible): for such domains  $\Omega$ , there exists an integer  $k(\Omega)$  such that for any  $k \geq k(\Omega)$ , problem  $(P_\varepsilon)$  has, for  $\varepsilon$  small enough, a solution which blows up at  $k$  points as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero. (We note that  $k$  may need to be chosen very large to obtain a  $k$ -peaked solution.) The aim of this paper is to resume the study of the problem in order to obtain existence and multiplicity results which improve the previous ones, both in the symmetric and the nonsymmetric cases.

In Section 2, we consider a symmetric domain with a small hole. Namely, writing  $x \in \mathbb{R}^N$  as  $x = (x', x'')$ , with  $x' \in \mathbb{R}^2$  and  $x'' \in \mathbb{R}^{N-2}$ , we assume that

- (i)  $\Omega$  is rotationally invariant with respect to  $x'$ , i.e. if  $(x', x'') \in \Omega$ , then  $(Ax', x'') \in \Omega$  for any central rotation  $A$  of the  $x'$ -plane.
- (ii)  $\Omega$  is symmetric with respect to  $x_j$ ,  $3 \leq j \leq N$ , i.e., for any  $j = 3, \dots, N$ ,  $(x', x_3, \dots, x_j, \dots, x_N) \in \Omega$  implies that  $(x', x_3, \dots, -x_j, \dots, x_N) \in \Omega$ .
- (iii)  $\Omega$  contains a ball centered in zero, i.e. there exists  $a > 0$  such that  $B(0, a) \subset \Omega$ .

For  $\delta \in (0, a)$ , we set

$$\Omega_\delta = \{x \in \Omega : |x| > \delta\}$$

and we consider  $(P_\varepsilon)$  with  $\Omega = \Omega_\delta$ . We prove:

**Theorem 1.1.** *Let  $\Omega = \Omega_\delta$ . For any  $k \geq 2$ , there exists  $\delta_k > 0$  such that for any  $\delta \in (0, \delta_k)$ ,  $(P_\varepsilon)$  has, for  $\varepsilon$  small enough, a solution which blows up at  $k$  points in  $\Omega_\delta$  as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero.*

**Corollary 1.1.** *Let  $\Omega = \Omega_\delta$ . For any  $h \geq 1$ , there exists  $\delta_h > 0$  such that for any  $\delta \in (0, \delta_h)$ ,  $(P_\varepsilon)$  has, for  $\varepsilon$  small enough,  $h$  (rotationally) distinct solutions which blow up at two, three,  $\dots$ ,  $h+1$  points respectively as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero.*

In the critical case, a small hole generates the existence of a solution to (1.1) - see [7], [22]. As such a solution is topologically nontrivial, i.e. induces some difference of topology between the level sets of a functional associated to the problem, this solution continues for  $\varepsilon$  small enough. This provides us

with an additional solution to  $(P_\varepsilon)$  on  $\Omega_\delta$ , which goes to a solution to  $(P_0)$  as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero.

In Section 3, we consider a domain with both a small hole and a small “channel”, making it contractible. Namely, for  $0 < \delta < R$  and  $\sigma > 0$  we set

$$\Omega_{\delta,\sigma} = \left\{ x \in \mathbb{R}^N : \delta < |x| < R, \left( \sum_{i=1}^{N-1} x_i^2 \right)^{1/2} > \sigma x_N \right\}$$

and similarly to Theorem 1.1 we prove:

**Theorem 1.2.** *Let  $\Omega = \Omega_{\delta,\sigma}$ . For any  $k \geq 2$ , there exist  $\delta_k > 0$ ,  $\sigma_k > 0$ , such that for any  $\delta \in (0, \delta_k)$  and  $\sigma \in (0, \sigma_k)$ ,  $(P_\varepsilon)$  has, for  $\varepsilon$  small enough, a solution which blows up at  $k$  points in  $\Omega_{\delta,\sigma}$  as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero.*

**Corollary 1.2.** *Let  $\Omega = \Omega_{\delta,\sigma}$ . For any  $h \geq 1$ , there exist  $\delta_h > 0$ ,  $\sigma_h > 0$ , such that for any  $\delta \in (0, \delta_h)$  and  $\sigma \in (0, \sigma_h)$ ,  $(P_\varepsilon)$  has, for  $\varepsilon$  small enough,  $h$  (rotationally) distinct solutions which blow up at two, three,  $\dots$ ,  $h + 1$  points respectively as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero.*

In Section 4, we drop any symmetry assumption and just consider a domain with a small hole. Namely,  $\Omega$  being a smooth bounded domain in  $\mathbb{R}^N$ , we may assume, up to a translation, that  $\Omega$  contains some ball  $B(0, r)$ ,  $r > 0$ . Then, for  $d \in (0, r)$ , we set

$$\Omega_d = \{x \in \Omega : |x| > d\}$$

and we first look for a solution blowing up at two points as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero. As already stated, existence of such a solution has been proved in [9]. We obtain additional informations:

**Theorem 1.3.** *Let  $\Omega = \Omega_d$ . There exists  $d_0 > 0$  such that for any  $d \in (0, d_0)$ ,  $(P_\varepsilon)$  has, for  $\varepsilon$  small enough, a solution which blows up at two points  $\xi_1$  and  $\xi_2$  in  $\Omega_d$  as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero. Moreover  $|\xi_i| \sim r_0 d$  and  $\xi_2 = -\xi_1 + o(d)$  as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero, where  $r_0 > 1$  is the unique solution in  $(1, \infty)$  of*

$$\frac{1}{2^{N-1} r_0^N} = \frac{1}{(r_0^2 - 1)^{N-1}} + \frac{1}{(r_0^2 + 1)^{N-1}}.$$

We also look for solutions blowing up at three points, and we obtain a result of the same kind - see Theorem 4.4. Such a result is of qualitative importance, as it shows that the two peaks solutions are not the only blowing up solutions existing. Whereas single peak solutions do not exist, solutions with three peaks or more may be exhibited, without any symmetry

assumptions on the domain (the method that we use extends to the study of solutions blowing up at  $k$  points, for any  $k \geq 2$ ). Such kind of results was expected, but had never been proved because of technical obstacles.

Actually, using a rescaling, we obtain that the nonsymmetric case is asymptotically equivalent, as the hole radius goes to zero, to the symmetric one. Then, we are left with proving that peaked solutions in the symmetric case are stable through  $C^1$ -perturbations. We study this general stability, and check that it is satisfied in the cases we are interested in.

Before turning to the proofs of the results, we introduce some notation. A domain  $\Omega$  being given, we denote by  $G_\Omega$  the Green's function of the negative Laplacian in  $\Omega$  with Dirichlet boundary conditions, i.e.

$$-\Delta G_\Omega(\cdot, \xi) = a_N \delta_\xi \text{ in } \Omega, \quad G_\Omega(\cdot, \xi) = 0 \text{ in } \partial\Omega$$

with  $a_N = ((N-2)\text{meas}(S^{N-1}))^{-1}$ ,  $S^{N-1}$  being the  $(N-1)$ -dimensional unit sphere, and by  $H_\Omega$  its regular part, i.e.

$$H_\Omega(x, \xi) = \frac{1}{|x - \xi|^{N-2}} - G_\Omega(x, \xi), \quad (x, \xi) \in \Omega \times \Omega.$$

We also define the Robin function as

$$R_\Omega(x) = H(x, x), \quad x \in \Omega.$$

We point out that, as a consequence of the maximum principle

$$P_\Omega U_{\lambda, \xi}(x) = U_{\lambda, \xi}(x) - \alpha_N \lambda^{\frac{N-2}{2}} H_\Omega(x, \xi) + O\left(\lambda^{\frac{N+2}{2}} (\text{dist}(\xi, \partial\Omega))^{-N}\right).$$

Such an expansion introduces us to the role that Green's function and its regular part play in that kind of problems (see e.g. [2], [21]), and in the following arguments.

## 2 Proof of Theorem 1.1

According to assumptions (i), (ii), (iii) in the previous section, let  $k \geq 2$  be fixed and  $R > 0$  such that  $(x', \theta'') \in \Omega_\delta$  if and only if  $\delta < |x'| < R$ .

Step 1 – Reduction of the problem to a finite dimensional one.

Problem (1.1) has a variational structure. Indeed, defining the functional

$$J(u) = \frac{1}{2} \int_{\Omega} |\nabla u|^2 - \frac{1}{q+1} \int_{\Omega} (u_+)^{q+1}, \quad u \in H_0^1(\Omega) \cap L^{q+1}(\Omega)$$

the strong maximum principle ensures that the critical points  $u \neq 0$  of  $J$  are solutions of the problem. The method initially developed in [2], [21] for  $q = \frac{N+2}{N-2}$ , consists in looking for solutions written as

$$u_\varepsilon = \alpha_N \sum_{i=1}^k P_\Omega U_{\lambda_i, \xi_i} + v_\varepsilon$$

where  $v_\varepsilon$  is orthogonal for the  $H_0^1$ -scalar product to the derivatives of  $P_\Omega U_{\lambda_i, \xi_i}$  with respect to the parameters  $\lambda_i, \xi_i$ , and assumed to be small in  $H_0^1$ -norm. (It is shown that  $\lambda = (\lambda_1, \dots, \lambda_k)$ ,  $\xi = (\xi_1, \dots, \xi_k)$  and  $v_\varepsilon$  build a good local parametrization of  $H_0^1(\Omega)$ .) Then, once  $v_\varepsilon(\lambda, \xi)$  is found such that  $\frac{\partial J}{\partial v}(\lambda, \xi, v_\varepsilon(\lambda, \xi)) = 0$ , the initial problem reduces to a finite dimensional one involving  $\lambda$  and  $\xi$  parameters only.

Such a method was adapted in [9], using weighted Hölder spaces, to the supercritical case  $q = \frac{N+2}{N-2} + \varepsilon$ . According to [9] the problem reduces, for  $\varepsilon$  small enough, to finding critical points of a finite dimensional functional written as

$$\tilde{J}(\Lambda, \xi) = \frac{1}{2} \left( \sum_{i=1}^k R_\Omega(\xi_i) \Lambda_i^2 - \sum_{\substack{i,j=1 \\ i \neq j}}^k G_\Omega(\xi_i, \xi_j) \Lambda_i \Lambda_j \right) + \sum_{i=1}^k \ln \Lambda_i + \varphi_\varepsilon(\Lambda, \xi)$$

where  $\lambda = c_N \varepsilon^{\frac{1}{N-2}} \Lambda$  ( $c_N$  is a positive constant depending on  $N$  only), and  $\varphi_\varepsilon$  goes to zero in  $C_{loc}^1((\mathbb{R}_+^*)^k \times (\Omega_\delta^k \setminus D))$  as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero, with  $D = \{\xi \in (\mathbb{R}^N)^k : \xi_i = \xi_j \text{ for some } i \neq j\}$ . As a consequence, defining

$$\Psi(\Lambda, \xi) = \frac{1}{2} \left( \sum_{i=1}^k R_\Omega(\xi_i) \Lambda_i^2 - \sum_{\substack{i,j=1 \\ i \neq j}}^k G_\Omega(\xi_i, \xi_j) \Lambda_i \Lambda_j \right) + \sum_{i=1}^k \ln \Lambda_i$$

stable critical points of  $\Psi$  (i.e. critical points which are stable under small  $C^1$ -perturbations) such that  $\xi_i \neq \xi_j$  for  $i \neq j$ , provide us with solutions to  $(P_\varepsilon)$ . Now, taking also into account the symmetries of the domain  $\Omega_\delta$ , we can look, as in [10], [14], for critical points  $(\Lambda, \xi)$  of  $\Psi$  such that

$$\Lambda_i = \Lambda, \quad \xi_i(\rho) = \left( \rho \cos \frac{2\pi(i-1)}{k}, \rho \sin \frac{2\pi(i-1)}{k}, 0'' \right), \quad 1 \leq i \leq k \quad (2.2)$$

with  $\rho \in (\delta, R)$ . Then, we are left with the two variables function  $\psi_\delta : \mathbb{R}_+^* \times (\delta, R) \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  defined as

$$\psi_\delta(\Lambda, \rho) = k \left( \frac{\Lambda^2}{2} \gamma_\delta(\rho) + \ln \Lambda \right)$$

with

$$\gamma_\delta(\rho) = R_{\Omega_\delta}(\xi_1(\rho)) - \sum_{i=2}^k G_{\Omega_\delta}(\xi_1(\rho), \xi_i(\rho)).$$

Step 2 – For  $\delta$  small enough,  $\psi_\delta$  has a stable critical point.

This will conclude the proof of Theorem 1.1. We perform the change of variables

$$r = \frac{\rho}{\delta}, \quad \mu = \frac{\Lambda}{\delta^{\frac{N-2}{2}}}$$

and we define the function  $\phi_\delta : \mathbb{R}_+^* \times (1, R/\delta) \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  as

$$\phi_\delta(\mu, r) = \psi_\delta(\Lambda, \rho) - k \frac{N-2}{2} \ln \delta = k \left( \frac{\mu^2}{2} \Gamma_\delta(r) + \ln \mu \right)$$

with

$$\Gamma_\delta(r) = \delta^{N-2} \gamma_\delta(\delta r) = R_{\Omega_\delta/\delta}(\xi_1(r)) - \sum_{i=2}^k G_{\Omega_\delta/\delta}(\xi_1(r), \xi_i(r)).$$

Obviously,  $(\mu, r)$  is a stable critical point of  $\phi_\delta$  if and only if  $(\delta^{\frac{N-2}{2}} \mu, \delta r)$  is a stable critical point of  $\psi_\delta$ . Setting

$$E = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^N : |x| > 1\}$$

we remark that  $\Omega_\delta/\delta \subset E$  and  $\Omega_\delta/\delta$  goes to  $E$  as  $\delta$  goes to zero, i.e. for any compact set  $K \subset E$ , there exists  $\delta_K > 0$  such that for any  $\delta \in (0, \delta_K)$ ,  $K \subset \Omega_\delta/\delta$ . Moreover, it is easily checked, using the maximum principle, that  $R_{\Omega_\delta/\delta}(x) = H_{\Omega_\delta/\delta}(x, x)$  goes to  $R_E(x) = H_E(x, x)$  in  $C_{loc}^1(E)$  and  $G_{\Omega_\delta/\delta}(x, y)$  goes to  $G_E(x, y)$  in  $C_{loc}^1(E^2 \setminus \Delta)$  as  $\delta$  goes to zero, where  $\Delta$  is the diagonal of  $E^2$ , i.e.  $\Delta = \{(x, y) \in E^2 : x = y\}$ . Therefore,  $\phi_\delta$  goes to  $\phi_E$  in  $C_{loc}^1(\mathbb{R}_+^* \times (1, \infty))$ , where  $\phi_E : \mathbb{R}_+^* \times (1, \infty) \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  is defined as

$$\phi_E(\mu, r) = k \left( \frac{\mu^2}{2} \Gamma_E(r) + \ln \mu \right)$$

with

$$\Gamma_E(r) = R_E(\xi_1(r)) - \sum_{i=2}^k G_E(\xi_1(r), \xi_i(r)).$$

Then, the only thing that remains to be proved is that  $\phi_E$  has a stable critical point. We have

$$R_E(\xi) = \frac{1}{(|\xi|^2 - 1)^{N-2}}, \quad G_E(\xi, \zeta) = \frac{1}{|\xi - \zeta|^{N-2}} - \frac{1}{\left| |\zeta| \xi - \frac{\zeta}{|\zeta|} \right|^{N-2}}. \quad (2.3)$$



Consequently

$$\begin{aligned} \Gamma_E(r) = & \frac{1}{(r^2 - 1)^{N-2}} - \sum_{i=1}^{k-1} \frac{1}{2^{\frac{N-2}{2}} r^{N-2} \left(1 - \cos \frac{2\pi i}{k}\right)^{\frac{N-2}{2}}} \\ & + \sum_{i=1}^{k-1} \frac{1}{\left(r^4 + 1 - 2r^2 \cos \frac{2\pi i}{k}\right)^{\frac{N-2}{2}}}. \end{aligned} \quad (2.4)$$

Clearly,  $\lim_{r \rightarrow 1^+} \Gamma_E(r) = +\infty$  and  $\lim_{r \rightarrow +\infty} r^{N-2} \Gamma_E(r) = l < 0$ . Moreover, the cancellation of  $\Gamma_E(r)$  implies that  $\Gamma'_E(r) < 0$ . Indeed

$$\begin{aligned} \Gamma'_E(r) = & -(N-2) \left[ \frac{2r}{(r^2 - 1)^{N-1}} - \sum_{i=1}^{k-1} \frac{1}{2^{\frac{N-2}{2}} r^{N-1} \left(1 - \cos \frac{2\pi i}{k}\right)^{\frac{N-2}{2}}} \right. \\ & \left. + \sum_{i=1}^{k-1} \frac{2r \left(r^2 - \cos \frac{2\pi i}{k}\right)}{\left(r^4 + 1 - 2r^2 \cos \frac{2\pi i}{k}\right)^{\frac{N}{2}}} \right] \end{aligned} \quad (2.5)$$

whence, in view of (2.4), if  $\Gamma_E(r) = 0$

$$\Gamma'_E(r) = -(N-2) \left[ \frac{r^2 + 1}{r(r^2 - 1)^{N-1}} + \sum_{i=1}^{k-1} \frac{r^4 - 1}{r \left(r^4 + 1 - 2r^2 \cos \frac{2\pi i}{k}\right)^{\frac{N}{2}}} \right] < 0.$$

Then, there exists a unique  $r^* \in (1, \infty)$  such that  $\Gamma_E(r^*) = 0$ .  $\Gamma_E(r) < 0$  for  $r > r^*$ , and there is some  $r_0 > r^*$  which is a global minimum of  $\phi_E$  in  $(1, \infty)$  and a isolated critical point because of analyticity. On the other hand, for any  $r > r^*$ , there exists a unique  $\mu = \mu(r) = (-\Gamma_E(r))^{-1/2}$  such that  $\frac{\partial \phi_E}{\partial \mu}(\mu(r), r) = 0$ . Moreover,  $\frac{\partial^2 \phi_E}{\partial \mu \partial r}(\mu(r), r) = 0$  and  $\frac{\partial^2 \phi_E}{\partial \mu^2}(\mu(r), r) = 2k\Gamma_E(r) < 0$ . Therefore, a standard linking argument shows that  $(\mu(r_0), r_0)$  is a critical point of  $\phi_E$  which is stable under  $C^1$ -perturbations. This concludes the proof of Theorem 1.1.

### 3 Proof of Theorem 1.2

Let  $k \geq 2$  be fixed and  $R > 0$  such that  $(x', 0'') \in \Omega_{\delta, \sigma}$  if and only if  $\delta < |x'| < R$ .

Step 1 – Reduction of the problem to a finite dimensional one.

We argue exactly as in the previous section. The only change is that the symmetry with respect to  $x_N$  being lost, we have to set, instead of (2.2)

$$\xi(\rho, \tau) = \left( \rho \cos \frac{2\pi(i-1)}{k}, \rho \sin \frac{2\pi(i-1)}{k}, 0, \dots, 0, \tau \right), \quad 1 \leq i \leq k \quad (3.6)$$

with

$$(\rho, \tau) \in S_{\delta, \sigma} = \{(\rho, \tau) \in \mathbb{R}_+^* \times \mathbb{R} : \delta^2 < \rho^2 + \tau^2 < R, \rho > \sigma\tau\}.$$

Then we have to consider, instead of  $\psi_\delta$ , a three variables function  $\psi_{\delta, \sigma} : \mathbb{R}_+^* \times S_{\delta, \sigma} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  defined as

$$\psi_{\delta, \sigma}(\Lambda, \rho, \tau) = k \left( \frac{\Lambda^2}{2} \gamma_{\delta, \sigma}(\rho, \tau) + \ln \Lambda \right)$$

and

$$\gamma_{\delta, \sigma}(\rho, \tau) = R_{\Omega_{\delta, \sigma}}(\xi_1(\rho, \tau)) - \sum_{i=2}^k G_{\Omega_{\delta, \sigma}}(\xi_1(\rho, \tau), \xi_i(\rho, \tau)).$$

Step 2 – For  $\delta$  and  $\sigma$  small enough,  $\psi_{\delta, \sigma}$  has a stable critical point.

We perform, as previously, a change of variables

$$r = \frac{\rho}{\delta}, \quad t = \frac{\tau}{\delta}, \quad \mu = \frac{\Lambda}{\delta^{\frac{N-2}{2}}}$$

and we define the function  $\phi_{\delta, \sigma} : \Sigma_{\delta, \sigma} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  as

$$\phi_{\delta, \sigma}(\mu, r, t) = \psi_{\delta, \sigma}(\Lambda, \rho, \tau) - k \frac{N-2}{2} \ln \delta = k \left( \frac{\mu^2}{2} \Gamma_{\delta, \sigma}(r, t) + \ln \mu \right)$$

with  $\Gamma_{\delta, \sigma}(r, t) = \delta^{N-2} \gamma_{\delta, \sigma}(\delta r, \delta t)$ , i.e.

$$\Gamma_{\delta, \sigma}(r, t) = R_{\Omega_{\delta, \sigma}/\delta}(\xi_1(r, t)) - \sum_{i=2}^k G_{\Omega_{\delta, \sigma}/\delta}(\xi_1(r, t), \xi_i(r, t))$$

and

$$\Sigma_{\delta, \sigma} = \left\{ (r, t) \in \mathbb{R}_+^* \times \mathbb{R} : 1 < r^2 + t^2 < \frac{R}{\delta^2}, r > \sigma t \right\}.$$

Of course  $(\mu, r, t)$  is a stable critical point of  $\phi_{\delta, \sigma}$  if and only if  $(\delta^{\frac{N-2}{2}} \mu, \delta r, \delta t)$  is a stable critical point of  $\psi_{\delta, \sigma}$ . Setting

$$E^* = E \setminus \{(0, \dots, 0, x_N) : x_N > 1\}, \quad E = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^N : |x| > 1\}$$

we remark that  $\Omega_{\delta,\sigma}/\delta \subset E^*$  and  $\Omega_{\delta,\sigma}/\delta$  goes to  $E^*$  as  $\delta$  and  $\sigma$  go to zero, i.e. for any compact set  $K \subset E^*$ , there exist  $\delta_K > 0$ ,  $\sigma_K > 0$  such that for any  $\delta \in (0, \delta_K)$  and  $\sigma \in (0, \sigma_K)$ ,  $K \subset \Omega_{\delta,\sigma}/\delta$ . Moreover, it is easily checked, using the maximum principle, that  $H_{\Omega_{\delta,\sigma}/\delta}(x, x)$  goes to  $H_E(x, x)$  in  $C_{loc}^1(E^*)$  and  $G_{\Omega_{\delta,\sigma}/\delta}(x, y)$  goes to  $G_E(x, y)$  in  $C_{loc}^1((E^*)^2 \setminus \Delta)$  as  $\delta$  and  $\sigma$  go to zero, where  $\Delta$  is the diagonal of  $(E^*)^2$ . Consequently,  $\phi_{\delta,\sigma}$  goes to  $\phi_{E^*}$  in  $C_{loc}^1(\mathbb{R}_+^* \times \Sigma_0)$ , where  $\phi_{E^*} : \mathbb{R}_+^* \times \Sigma_0 \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$  is defined as

$$\phi_{E^*}(\mu, r, t) = k \left( \frac{\mu^2}{2} \Gamma_{E^*}(r, t) + \ln \mu \right)$$

with

$$\Gamma_{E^*}(r, t) = R_E(\xi_1(r, t)) - \sum_{i=2}^k G_E(\xi_1(r, t), \xi_i(r, t)) \quad (3.7)$$

and

$$\Sigma_0 = \{(r, t) \in \mathbb{R}_+^* \times \mathbb{R} : 1 < r^2 + t^2\} \setminus \{(0, t) : t > 1\}.$$

In view of the previous arguments, Theorem 1.2 will follow from the existence of a stable critical point of  $\phi_{E^*}$ . From (2.3), (3.6) and (3.7), we deduce that

$$\begin{aligned} \Gamma_{E^*}(r, t) &= \frac{1}{(r^2 + t^2 - 1)^{N-2}} - \sum_{i=1}^{k-1} \frac{1}{2^{\frac{N-2}{2}} r^{N-2} (1 - \cos \frac{2\pi i}{k})^{\frac{N-2}{2}}} \\ &+ \sum_{i=1}^{k-1} \frac{1}{((r^2 + t^2)^2 + 1 - 2r^2 \cos \frac{2\pi i}{k} - 2t^2)^{\frac{N-2}{2}}}. \end{aligned}$$

We remark that for any  $r > 1$ , there exists a unique  $t(r)$  such that  $\frac{\partial \Gamma_{E^*}}{\partial t}(r, t(r)) = 0$ , i.e.  $t(r) = 0$ . Moreover,  $\Gamma_{E^*}(r, 0) = \max_{t \in \mathbb{R}} \Gamma_{E^*}(r, t)$ , and straightforward computations yield  $\frac{\partial^2 \Gamma_{E^*}}{\partial t^2}(r, 0) < 0$ ,  $\frac{\partial^2 \Gamma_{E^*}}{\partial t \partial r}(r, 0) = 0$ . We note that  $\Gamma_{E^*}(r, 0)$  coincides with  $\Gamma_E(r)$  in the previous section. Then, let  $r_0$  be a global minimum of  $\Gamma_{E^*}(r, 0)$  for  $r \in (1, \infty)$ , and  $\mu(r_0) = (-\Gamma_{E^*}(r_0))^{-1/2}$ .  $(\mu(r_0), r_0, 0)$  is a critical point of  $\phi_{E^*}$ , and

$$\phi_{E^*}''(\mu(r_0), r_0, 0) = k \begin{pmatrix} 2\Gamma_E(r_0) & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & \frac{(\mu(r_0))^2}{2} \Gamma_E''(r_0) & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & \frac{(\mu(r_0))^2}{2} \frac{\partial^2 \Gamma_{E^*}}{\partial t^2}(r_0, 0) \end{pmatrix}.$$

We know that  $\Gamma_E(r_0) < 0$ ,  $\frac{\partial^2 \Gamma_{E^*}}{\partial t^2}(r_0, 0) < 0$ , and  $\Gamma_E''(r_0) \geq 0$ . Even if  $\Gamma_E''(r_0) = 0$ , the fact that  $r_0$  is a minimum and an isolated critical point

of  $\Gamma_E(r)$  (and of  $r \mapsto \phi_{E^*}(\mu(r_0), r, 0)$  as well) would still ensure, through a standard linking argument, that  $(\mu(r_0), r_0, 0)$ , as a critical point of  $\phi_{E^*}$ , is stable under  $C^1$ -perturbations. This concludes the proof of Theorem 1.2.

## 4 The nonsymmetric case

The general argument.

In this last section, we drop the symmetry assumptions on the domain.  $\Omega$  being any smooth bounded domain in  $\mathbb{R}^N$ , that we may assume, up to a translation, contains a ball  $B(0, R)$  for some  $R > 0$ , we set, for  $0 < d < R$

$$\Omega_d = \{x \in \Omega : |x| > d\}$$

i.e.  $\Omega_d = \Omega \setminus \overline{B(0, d)}$ . We consider  $(P_\varepsilon)$  in  $\Omega_d$  and, as previously, we look for a solution blowing up at  $k$  points as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero,  $k \geq 2$ . According to Section 1, we know that the problem may be reduced to finding, for  $\varepsilon$  small enough, a critical point of

$$\tilde{J}(\Lambda, \xi) = \frac{1}{2} \left( \sum_{i=1}^k R_{\Omega_d}(\xi_i) \Lambda_i^2 - \sum_{\substack{i,j=1 \\ i \neq j}}^k G_{\Omega_d}(\xi_i, \xi_j) \Lambda_i \Lambda_j \right) + \sum_{i=1}^k \ln \Lambda_i + \varphi_{\Omega_d, \varepsilon}(\Lambda, \xi)$$

in  $\Sigma = (\mathbb{R}_+^*)^k \times (\Omega_d^k \setminus D)$ , with  $D = \{\xi \in (\mathbb{R}^N)^k : \xi_i = \xi_j \text{ for some } i \neq j\}$ ,  $\varphi_{\Omega_d, \varepsilon}(\Lambda, \xi)$  going to zero in  $C_{loc}^1(\Sigma)$ . We consider, as previously, the main part in  $\tilde{J}(\Lambda, \xi)$ , that is, we set

$$\psi(\Lambda, \xi) = \frac{1}{2} \left( \sum_{i=1}^k R_{\Omega_d}(\xi_i) \Lambda_i^2 - \sum_{\substack{i,j=1 \\ i \neq j}}^k G_{\Omega_d}(\xi_i, \xi_j) \Lambda_i \Lambda_j \right) + \sum_{i=1}^k \ln \Lambda_i$$

for  $(\Lambda, \xi) \in \Sigma$ . Through the rescaling

$$x_i = \frac{\xi_i}{d}, \quad \mu_i = \frac{\Lambda_i}{d^{\frac{N-2}{2}}}$$

we have

$$\psi(\Lambda, \xi) = \phi(\mu, x) + k \frac{N-2}{2} \ln d$$

with

$$\phi(\mu, x) = \frac{1}{2} \left( \sum_{i=1}^k R_{\Omega_d/d}(x_i) \mu_i^2 - \sum_{\substack{i,j=1 \\ i \neq j}}^k G_{\Omega_d/d}(x_i, x_j) \mu_i \mu_j \right) + \sum_{i=1}^k \ln \mu_i$$

as  $(\mu, x) \in (\mathbb{R}_+^*)^k \times ((\Omega_d/d)^k \setminus D)$ . We know that  $\Omega_d/d$  goes to  $E = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^N : |x| > 1\}$ ,  $H_{\Omega_d/d}$  goes to  $H_E$  in  $C_{loc}^1(E)$  and  $G_{\Omega_d/d}$  goes to  $G_E$  in  $C_{loc}^1(E^2 \setminus \Delta)$  as  $d$  goes to zero (we recall that  $\Delta$  is the diagonal of  $E^2$ ).

Let us consider the limit function

$$\phi_E(\mu, x) = \frac{1}{2} \left( \sum_{i=1}^k R_E(x_i) \mu_i^2 - \sum_{\substack{i,j=1 \\ i \neq j}}^k G_E(x_i, x_j) \mu_i \mu_j \right) + \sum_{i=1}^k \ln \mu_i. \quad (4.8)$$

As we saw, this function has a critical point  $(\mu^*, x^*)$  which may be written as

$$\begin{aligned} \mu_i^* &= (-\Gamma_E(r_0))^{-1/2} \\ x_i^* &= \left( r_0 \cos \frac{2\pi(i-1)}{k}, r_0 \sin \frac{2\pi(i-1)}{k}, 0, \dots, 0 \right), \quad 1 \leq i \leq k \end{aligned} \quad (4.9)$$

where  $r_0$  is a global minimizer of  $\Gamma_E(r)$  in  $(1, \infty)$ . Of course, this critical point is degenerate, since  $\phi_E$  is invariant under central rotations of  $E^k$ . Let  $\mathcal{M}$  be the manifold of critical points generated by these rotations, i.e.

$$\mathcal{M} = \{(\mu^*, \mathcal{R}x^*) : \mathcal{R} \text{ is a central rotation of } E^k\}.$$

Let us assume that  $\phi_E''(\mu^*, x^*)$  is nondegenerate in the orthogonal subspace to  $T_{(\mu^*, x^*)}\mathcal{M}$  (the same is true at any  $(\mu, x) \in \mathcal{M}$ ). Then, a standard linking argument shows that a  $C^1$ -perturbation of  $\phi_E$  has a critical point in a neighborhood of  $\mathcal{M}$ . Whence, coming back to  $\tilde{\mathcal{J}}$ , the existence of  $d_0 > 0$  such that for any  $0 < d < d_0$ , there exists some  $\varepsilon_d > 0$  such that, for any  $0 < \varepsilon < \varepsilon_d$ ,  $\tilde{\mathcal{J}}$  has a critical point  $(\Lambda, \xi) = \left( d^{\frac{N-2}{2}} \mu, dx \right)$ , with the distance of  $(\mu, x)$  to  $\mathcal{M}$  going to zero as  $d$  and  $\varepsilon$  go to zero.

We remark that  $\dim \mathcal{M} = N - 1$  as  $k = 2$  ( $x^* = (x_1^*, -x_1^*)$  and  $x_1^*$  runs on a  $(N - 1)$ -sphere). As  $k \geq 3$ , the position of  $\mathcal{R}x^*$  is correctly defined by the orientation of the plane in which the  $x_i^*$ 's are, and by a central rotation in that plane. Therefore, for  $k \geq 3$ ,  $\dim \mathcal{M} = 2(N - 2) + 1 = 2N - 3$  ( $2(N - 2)$  is the dimension of the 2-Grassmanian in  $\mathbb{R}^N$ ). Finally, we can state the following general result:

**Proposition 4.1.** *Let  $k \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $k \geq 2$ ,  $\phi_E$  and  $(\mu^*, x^*)$  defined by (4.8) and (4.9). If*

$$\begin{aligned} \dim \text{Ker } \phi_E''(\mu^*, x^*) &= N - 1 & \text{as } k = 2 \\ \dim \text{Ker } \phi_E''(\mu^*, x^*) &= 2N - 3 & \text{as } k \geq 3, \end{aligned}$$

there exists  $d_0 > 0$  such that for any  $d \in (0, d_0)$ ,  $(P_\varepsilon)$  has, for  $\varepsilon$  small enough, a solution which blows up at  $k$  points  $\xi_1, \dots, \xi_k$  in  $\Omega_d$  as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero. Moreover, up to a central rotation,  $\xi/d$  goes to  $x^*$  as  $d$  and  $\varepsilon$  go to zero.

The case  $k = 2$ .

In view of Proposition 4.1, we just have to check, for proving Theorem 1.3, that  $\dim \text{Ker } \phi_E''(\mu^*, x^*) = N - 1$ . For the sake of simplicity, we write  $x = x_1^* = -x_2^*$ ,  $r = r_0$  where  $r_0 > 1$  solves  $\Gamma_E'(r_0) = 0$ , i.e.

$$\frac{1}{2^{N-1}r_0^N} = \frac{1}{(r_0^2 - 1)^{N-1}} + \frac{1}{(r_0^2 + 1)^{N-1}}. \quad (4.10)$$

Such an  $r_0$  is unique. Indeed, derivating (2.5) while  $\Gamma_E'(r) = 0$ , we obtain

$$\Gamma_E''(r) = 2(N-2) \left[ \frac{(N-2)r^2 + N}{(r^2 - 1)^N} + \frac{(N-2)r^2 + N}{(r^2 + 1)^N} \right] > 0$$

whence the unicity of the critical point in  $(1, \infty)$ . We also write  $\mu = \mu^* = (-\Gamma_E(r_0))^{-1/2}$ , i.e.

$$\mu = \left( \frac{1}{2^{N-2}r_0^{N-2}} - \frac{1}{(r_0^2 - 1)^{N-2}} - \frac{1}{(r_0^2 + 1)^{N-2}} \right)^{-1/2}. \quad (4.11)$$

Let  $(e_1, e_2, f_1, \dots, f_N, g_1, \dots, g_N)$  be the dual basis of the  $2N + 2$  variables  $(\mu_1, \mu_2, (x_1)_1, \dots, (x_1)_N, (x_2)_1, \dots, (x_2)_N)$ . According to the definition of  $\phi_E$  we compute

$$\phi_E''(\mu^*, x^*) = \begin{pmatrix} A & B & C & \cdot & \dots & \cdot & C & \cdot & \dots & \cdot \\ B & A & -C & \cdot & \dots & \cdot & -C & \cdot & \dots & \cdot \\ C & -C & D & \cdot & \dots & \cdot & E & \cdot & \dots & \cdot \\ \cdot & \cdot & \cdot & F & \dots & \cdot & \cdot & F & \dots & \cdot \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ \cdot & \cdot & \cdot & \cdot & \dots & F & \cdot & \cdot & \dots & F \\ C & -C & E & \cdot & \dots & \cdot & D & \cdot & \dots & \cdot \\ \cdot & \cdot & \cdot & F & \dots & \cdot & \cdot & F & \dots & \cdot \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ \cdot & \cdot & \cdot & \cdot & \dots & F & \cdot & \cdot & \dots & F \end{pmatrix} \quad (4.12)$$

where horizontal or vertical dots mean zeros, diagonal dots mean  $F$ , and,

taking account of (4.10) and (4.11)

$$\begin{aligned}
A &= R(x) - \frac{1}{\mu^2} = -\frac{1}{2^{N-2}r^{N-2}} + \frac{2}{(r^2-1)^{N-2}} + \frac{1}{(r^2+1)^{N-2}} \\
B &= -G(x, -x) = -\frac{1}{2^{N-2}r^{N-2}} + \frac{1}{(r^2+1)^{N-2}} \\
C &= \mu (R'_{f_1}(x) - G'_{f_1}(x, -x)) = -\mu G'_{g_1}(x, -x) \\
&= \mu G'_{f_1}(x, -x) = -\mu (R'_{g_1}(-x) - G'_{g_1}(x, -x)) \\
&= -(N-2)\mu \frac{r}{(r^2-1)^{N-1}} \\
D &= \frac{\mu^2}{2} (R''_{f_1 f_1}(x) - 2G''_{f_1 f_1}(x, -x)) \\
&= \frac{\mu^2}{2} (R''_{g_1 g_1}(-x) - 2G''_{g_1 g_1}(x, -x)) \\
&= \frac{N-2}{2} \mu^2 \left[ \frac{(3N-5)r^2 + (N+1)}{(r^2-1)^N} + \frac{(N-1)r^2 - (N-1)}{(r^2+1)^N} \right] \\
E &= -\mu^2 G''_{f_1 g_1}(x, -x) = -\mu^2 G''_{f_1 g_1}(x, -x) \\
&= \frac{N-2}{2} \mu^2 \left[ \frac{N-1}{(r^2-1)^{N-1}} + \frac{(-N+3)r^2 + (N+1)}{(r^2+1)^N} \right] \\
F &= \frac{\mu^2}{2} (R''_{f_i f_i}(x) - 2G''_{f_i f_i}(x, -x)) = -\mu^2 G''_{f_i g_i}(x, -x) \\
&= -\mu^2 G''_{f_i g_i}(x, -x) = \frac{\mu^2}{2} (R''_{g_i g_i}(-x) - 2G''_{g_i g_i}(x, -x)) \\
&= -\frac{N-2}{2} \mu^2 \left[ \frac{1}{(r^2-1)^{N-1}} + \frac{r^2-1}{(r^2+1)^N} \right], \quad 2 \leq i \leq N.
\end{aligned}$$

In view of (2.3), we used

$$\begin{aligned}
\frac{\partial R_E}{\partial \xi_i}(\xi) &= -2(N-2) \frac{\xi_i}{(|\xi|^2-1)^{N-1}} \\
\frac{\partial G_E}{\partial \xi_i}(\xi, \zeta) &= -(N-2) \left[ \frac{\xi_i - \zeta_i}{|\xi - \zeta|^{N-1}} - \frac{|\zeta|^2 \xi_i - \zeta_i}{\left| |\zeta| \xi - \frac{\zeta}{|\zeta|} \right|^N} \right]
\end{aligned} \tag{4.13}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
\frac{\partial R_E^2}{\partial \xi_i \partial \xi_j}(\xi) &= -2(N-2) \left[ \frac{\delta_{ij}}{(|\xi|^2 - 1)^{N-1}} - 2(N-1) \frac{\xi_i \xi_j}{(|\xi|^2 - 1)^N} \right] \\
\frac{\partial^2 G_E}{\partial \xi_i \partial \xi_j}(\xi, \zeta) &= -(N-2) \left[ \frac{\delta_{ij}}{|\xi - \zeta|^N} - N \frac{(\xi_i - \zeta_i)(\xi_j - \zeta_j)}{|\xi - \zeta|^{N+2}} \right. \\
&\quad \left. - \frac{|\zeta|^2 \delta_{ij}}{|\zeta| \left| \xi - \frac{\zeta}{|\zeta|} \right|^N} + N \frac{(|\zeta|^2 \xi_i - \zeta_i)(|\zeta|^2 \xi_j - \zeta_j)}{\left| \zeta \left| \xi - \frac{\zeta}{|\zeta|} \right| \right|^{N+2}} \right]
\end{aligned} \tag{4.14}$$

and

$$\begin{aligned}
\frac{\partial^2 G_E}{\partial \xi_i \partial \zeta_j}(\xi, \zeta) &= (N-2) \left[ \frac{\delta_{ij}}{|\xi - \zeta|^N} - N \frac{(\xi_i - \zeta_i)(\xi_j - \zeta_j)}{|\xi - \zeta|^{N+2}} \right. \\
&\quad \left. + \frac{2\xi_i \zeta_j - \delta_{ij}}{\left| \zeta \left| \xi - \frac{\zeta}{|\zeta|} \right| \right|^N} - N \frac{(|\zeta|^2 \xi_i - \zeta_i)(|\zeta|^2 \xi_j - \zeta_j)}{\left| \zeta \left| \xi - \frac{\zeta}{|\zeta|} \right| \right|^{N+2}} \right]
\end{aligned} \tag{4.15}$$

Considering (4.12), we find the  $2N$  following eigenvectors for  $\phi_E''(\mu^*, x^*)$ :

$$\begin{aligned}
&\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}(f_i - g_i), \quad 2 \leq i \leq N, \quad \text{with eigenvalue } 0 \\
&\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}(f_i + g_i), \quad 2 \leq i \leq N, \quad \text{with eigenvalue } 2F \\
&\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}(e_1 + e_2), \quad \text{with eigenvalue } A + B \\
&\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}(f_1 - g_1), \quad \text{with eigenvalue } D - E
\end{aligned}$$

and in the remaining orthonormal basis  $\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}(e_1 - e_2), \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}(f_1 + g_1), \phi_E''(\mu^*, x^*)$  writes as

$$\begin{pmatrix} A - B & 2C \\ 2C & D + E \end{pmatrix}.$$

It is easily checked that  $F < 0$ ,  $A + B < 0$  (because of (4.10)),  $D - E > 0$  and  $(A - B)(D + E) - 4C^2 > 0$ . Consequently

$$\dim \text{Ker } \phi_E''(\mu^*, x^*) = N - 1$$

and Theorem 1.2 follows from Proposition 4.1.

The case  $k \geq 3$ .



For the sake of simplicity, we limit ourselves to the case  $k = 3$ . The other cases may be treated in the same way, with additional computations. In view of Proposition 4.1, we have to compute the dimension of the kernel of  $\phi''_E(\mu^*, x^*)$ , where  $(\mu^*, x^*)$  is given by (4.9), where  $r_0 > 1$  solves  $\Gamma'_E(r_0) = 0$ , i.e.

$$\frac{1}{3^{\frac{N-2}{2}} r_0^N} = \frac{1}{(r_0^2 - 1)^{N-1}} + \frac{2r_0^2 + 1}{(r_0^4 + r_0^2 + 1)^{\frac{N}{2}}}. \quad (4.16)$$

As previously, such an  $r_0$  is unique. Indeed, derivating (2.5) we find, as  $\Gamma'_E(r) = 0$

$$\Gamma''_E(r) = 2(N-2) \left[ \frac{(N-2)r^2 + N}{(r^2 - 1)^N} + \frac{N(2r^2 + 1)(r^4 - 1)}{(r^4 + r^2 + 1)^{\frac{N+2}{2}}} \right] > 0$$

whence again the unicity of the critical point in  $(1, \infty)$ . We note also that, according to (2.5)

$$\Gamma'_E(2) < -(N-2) \left( \frac{1}{3^{N-1}} - \frac{1}{3^{\frac{N-2}{2}} 2^N} \right) < 0$$

implying that  $r_0 > 2$ . Furthermore  $\mu^* = (-\Gamma_E(r_0))^{-1/2}$ , i.e.

$$\mu^* = \left( \frac{2}{3^{\frac{N-2}{2}} r_0^{N-2}} - \frac{1}{(r_0^2 - 1)^{N-2}} - \frac{2}{(r_0^4 + r_0^2 + 1)^{\frac{N-2}{2}}} \right)^{-1/2}. \quad (4.17)$$

For the sake of simplicity, we write  $x^* = (x_1, x_2, x_3)$ ,  $r = r_0$  and  $\bar{r} = (r_0^4 + r_0^2 + 1)^{\frac{1}{4}}$ . Let  $(e_1, e_2, e_3, f_1, \dots, f_N, g_1, \dots, g_N, h_1, \dots, h_N)$  be the dual basis of the  $3N+3$  variables  $(\mu_1, \mu_2, \mu_3, (x_1)_1, \dots, (x_1)_N, (x_2)_1, \dots, (x_2)_N, (x_3)_1, \dots, (x_3)_N)$ . The subspaces  $\mathcal{E}_i = \text{Span}(f_i, g_i, h_i)$ ,  $3 \leq i \leq N$ , are stable for  $\phi''_E(\mu^*, x^*)$ , and

$$\phi''_E(\mu^*, x^*)|_{\mathcal{E}_i} = \alpha \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix}$$

with

$$\begin{aligned} \alpha &= \frac{\mu^{*2}}{2} (R''_{f_i f_i}(x_1) - 2G''_{f_i f_i}(x_1, x_2) - 2G''_{f_i f_i}(x_1, x_3)) \\ &= -\mu^{*2} G''_{f_i g_i}(x_1, x_2) = -\mu^{*2} G''_{f_i h_i}(x_1, x_3) \\ &= (N-2)\mu^{*2} \left[ \frac{2}{3^{\frac{N}{2}} r^N} - \frac{1}{(r^2 - 1)^{N-1}} - \frac{2r^2}{\bar{r}^{2N}} \right] < 0 \end{aligned}$$

using (4.14), (4.15) and (4.16). The eigenvalues of  $\phi_E''(\mu^*, x^*)|_{\mathcal{E}_i}$  are  $3\alpha$  with multiplicity 1, and 0 with multiplicity 2 - whence  $2(N-2)$  vectors in the kernel of  $\phi_E''(\mu^*, x^*)$ . Because of the symmetries of  $\phi_E$ , we know three additional eigenvectors:

$$\begin{aligned} u &= \frac{1}{\sqrt{3}}(e_1 + e_2 + e_3), \text{ with eigenvalue } \Gamma_E(r) < 0; \\ v &= \frac{1}{\sqrt{3}} \left[ f_1 + \left( -\frac{1}{2}g_1 + \frac{\sqrt{3}}{2}g_2 \right) + \left( -\frac{1}{2}h_1 - \frac{\sqrt{3}}{2}h_2 \right) \right], \\ &\quad \text{with eigenvalue } \frac{\mu^2}{2}\Gamma_E''(r) > 0; \\ w &= \frac{1}{\sqrt{3}} \left[ f_2 + \left( -\frac{\sqrt{3}}{2}g_1 - \frac{1}{2}g_2 \right) + \left( \frac{\sqrt{3}}{2}h_1 - \frac{1}{2}h_2 \right) \right], \\ &\quad \text{with eigenvalue } 0. \end{aligned}$$

Therefore, Proposition 4.1 will provide us with a solution to  $(P_\varepsilon)$  blowing up at three points as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero, if the restriction of  $\phi_E''(\mu^*, x^*)$  to the stable 6-dimensional orthogonal subspace  $\mathcal{E}$  to the  $\mathcal{E}_i$ 's,  $3 \leq i \leq N$ , and to  $u, v, w$ , is nondegenerate. As a basis of  $\mathcal{E}$ , we can take

$$\begin{aligned} k_1 &= \frac{\sqrt{2}}{\sqrt{3}} \left( e_1 - \frac{1}{2}e_2 - \frac{1}{2}e_3 \right) \\ k_2 &= \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} (e_2 - e_3) \\ k_3 &= \frac{1}{\sqrt{3}} (f_1 + g_1 + h_1) \\ k_4 &= \frac{1}{\sqrt{3}} (f_2 + g_2 + h_2) \\ k_5 &= \frac{1}{\sqrt{3}} \left[ f_1 + \left( -\frac{1}{2}g_1 - \frac{\sqrt{3}}{2}g_2 \right) + \left( -\frac{1}{2}h_1 + \frac{\sqrt{3}}{2}h_2 \right) \right] \\ k_6 &= \frac{1}{\sqrt{3}} \left[ f_2 + \left( \frac{\sqrt{3}}{2}g_1 - \frac{1}{2}g_2 \right) + \left( -\frac{\sqrt{3}}{2}h_1 - \frac{1}{2}h_2 \right) \right]. \end{aligned}$$

In this basis we have

$$\phi_E''(\mu^*, x^*)|_{\varepsilon} = \begin{pmatrix} A & 0 & B & 0 & C & 0 \\ 0 & A & 0 & B & 0 & -C \\ B & 0 & D & 0 & E & 0 \\ 0 & B & 0 & D & 0 & -E \\ C & 0 & E & 0 & F & 0 \\ 0 & -C & 0 & -E & 0 & F \end{pmatrix} \quad (4.18)$$

with

$$\begin{aligned} A &= \frac{2}{(r^2 - 1)^{N-2}} - \frac{1}{3^{\frac{N-2}{2}} r^{N-2}} + \frac{1}{\bar{r}^{2(N-2)}} \\ B &= -\frac{N-2}{\sqrt{2}} \mu^* r \left[ \frac{2}{(r^2 - 1)^{N-1}} + \frac{r^2 - 1}{\bar{r}^{2N}} \right] \\ C &= \frac{N-2}{\sqrt{2}} \mu^* r \left[ \frac{1}{(r^2 - 1)^{N-1}} - \frac{r^2 - 1}{\bar{r}^{2N}} \right] \\ D &= (N-2) \mu^{*2} \left[ \frac{(N-2)r^2 + 1}{(r^2 - 1)^N} - \frac{r^2 - 2}{\bar{r}^{2N}} + \frac{Nr^2(r^2 - 1)^2}{2\bar{r}^{2(N+2)}} \right] \\ E &= (N-2) \mu^{*2} \left[ \frac{(N-1)r^2}{(r^2 - 1)^N} + \frac{r^2}{\bar{r}^{2N}} + \frac{Nr^2(r^4 + r^2 - 2)}{2\bar{r}^{2(N+2)}} \right] \\ F &= \frac{N-2}{2} \mu^{*2} \left[ \frac{(N-2)r^2 + N}{(r^2 - 1)^N} - \frac{2(N-1)r^2 + N}{2\bar{r}^{2N}} + \frac{Nr^2(r^2 + 2)^2}{2\bar{r}^{2(N+2)}} \right]. \end{aligned} \quad (4.19)$$

For example

$$\begin{aligned} A &= k_1^t \cdot \phi_E''(\mu^*, x^*) \cdot k_1 \\ &= \frac{2}{3} \left[ \left( \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_1^2} - \frac{1}{2} \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_1 \partial \mu_2} - \frac{1}{2} \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_1 \partial \mu_3} \right) - \frac{1}{2} \left( \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_1 \partial \mu_2} - \frac{1}{2} \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_2^2} \right. \right. \\ &\quad \left. \left. - \frac{1}{2} \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_2 \partial \mu_3} \right) - \frac{1}{2} \left( \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_1 \partial \mu_3} - \frac{1}{2} \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_2 \partial \mu_3} - \frac{1}{2} \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_3^2} \right) \right]. \end{aligned}$$

We have

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_1^2} &= \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_2^2} = \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_3^2} = R(x_1) - \frac{1}{\mu^{*2}} \\ \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_1 \partial \mu_2} &= \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_1 \partial \mu_3} = \frac{\partial^2 \phi_E''}{\partial \mu_2 \partial \mu_3} = -G(x_1, x_2) \end{aligned}$$

whence the announced result, observing (2.3) and (4.9). The other quantities are obtained in the same way, using also (4.13), (4.14), (4.15) and (4.16).

All these quantities are strictly positive, except  $B$  which is strictly negative. Actually,  $B < 0$  and  $E > 0$  are trivial.  $C > 0$ ,  $D > 0$  and  $F > 0$  follow directly from the fact that, according to the definition of  $\bar{r}$ ,  $r^2 - 1 < \bar{r}^2$ . Lastly, we deduce from (4.16)

$$A = \frac{r^2 - 2}{(r^2 - 1)^{N-1}} - \frac{r^4 - 1}{\bar{r}^{2N}}.$$

Therefore,  $A > 0$  is equivalent to

$$(r^2 - 2)\bar{r}^{2N} > (r^2 + 1)(r^2 - 1)^N$$

or

$$\left(\frac{r^4 + r^2 + 1}{r^4 - 2r^2 + 1}\right)^{\frac{N}{2}} > \frac{r^2 + 1}{r^2 - 2} = 1 + \frac{3}{r^2 - 2}. \quad (4.20)$$

As  $(1 + X)^\alpha > 1 + \alpha X$  for  $X > 0$  and  $\alpha > 1$

$$\left(\frac{r^4 + r^2 + 1}{r^4 - 2r^2 + 1}\right)^{\frac{N}{2}} > 1 + \frac{N}{2} \frac{3r^2}{r^4 - 2r^2 + 1}$$

and, in view of (4.20),  $A > 0$  follows from the fact that (as  $r > 2$ )

$$\frac{N}{2} \frac{1}{r^2 - 2 + \frac{1}{r^2}} > \frac{1}{r^2 - 2} \quad \text{or} \quad (N - 2)(r^2 - 2) > \frac{2}{r^2}.$$

We note now that through suitable exchanges between lines and columns, we deduce from (4.18)

$$\det \phi''_E(\mu^*, x^*)|_{\mathcal{E}} = \begin{vmatrix} A & B & C & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ B & D & E & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ C & E & -F & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & A & B & -C \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & B & D & -E \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & -C & -E & F \end{vmatrix}$$

whence

$$\det \phi''_E(\mu^*, x^*)|_{\mathcal{E}} = \left[ A(DF - E^2) - (FB^2 + DC^2 - 2EBC) \right]^2$$

where  $A, B, C, D, E, F$  are defined by (4.16) and (4.19). Then, the nondegeneracy of  $\phi''_E(\mu^*, x^*)$  restricted to  $\mathcal{E}$  is equivalent to

$$A(DF - E^2) \neq FB^2 + DC^2 - 2EBC.$$

As  $C, D, E, F$  are strictly positive and  $B$  is strictly negative, the right hand side is strictly positive. As we have also  $A > 0$ , the inequality  $DF - E^2 < 0$  is sufficient to conclude. Considering that  $D, F$  are strictly positive, the result will follow from the two inequalities  $D < E$  and  $F < E$ . In view of (4.19),  $D < E$  is obvious and  $F < E$  is equivalent to

$$\frac{N}{(r^2 - 1)^{N-1}} + \frac{2Nr^2 + N}{2\bar{r}^{2N}} + \frac{Nr^2(r^4 - 2r^2 - 8)}{2\bar{r}^{2(N+2)}} > 0$$

As  $r^2 - 1 < \bar{r}^2$ , this inequality will be satisfied if

$$(4r^2 - 1)\bar{r}^4 + r^2(r^4 - 2r^2 - 8) = 5r^6 + r^4 - 5r^2 - 1 > 0$$

which is true since  $r > 1$ .

Collecting the previous informations, we know that the dimension of the kernel of  $\phi_E''(\mu^*, x^*)$  is exactly  $2N - 3$ . Then, in view of Proposition 4.1 we can state:

**Theorem 4.4.** *There exists  $d_0 > 0$  such that for any  $d \in (0, d_0)$ ,  $(P_\varepsilon)$  has, for  $\varepsilon$  small enough, a solution which blows up at three points  $\xi_1, \xi_2, \xi_3$  of  $\Omega_d$  as  $\varepsilon$  goes to zero. Moreover,  $|\xi_i| \sim r_0 d$  and there is a rotation  $\mathcal{R}$  in  $(\mathbb{R}^N)^3$ ,  $\mathcal{R}^3 = \text{id}$ , such that  $\xi_2 = \mathcal{R}\xi_1 + o(d)$  and  $\xi_3 = \mathcal{R}^2\xi_1 + o(d)$ .*

**Acknowledgements.** The authors are very grateful to the referee for pointing out several inaccuracies in the first version of the paper, the correction of which allowed to improve the formulation of the results.

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