

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

The European Multi-level Party Systems:
Towards a Framework for Analysis

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European Forum

The European Forum was set up by the High Council of the EUI in 1992 with the mission of bringing together at the Institute for a given academic year a group of experts, under the supervision of annual scientific director(s), for researching a specific topic primarily of a comparative and interdisciplinary nature.

This Working Paper has been written in the context of the 1999-2000 European Forum programme on “Between Europe and the Nation State: the Reshaping of Interests, Identities and Political Representation” directed by Professors Stefano Bartolini (EUI, SPS Department), Thomas Risse (EUI, RSC/SPS Joint Chair) and Bo Stråth (EUI, RSC/HEC Joint Chair).

The Forum reflects on the domestic impact of European integration, studying the extent to which *Europeanisation* shapes the adaptation patterns, power redistribution, and shifting loyalties at the national level. The categories of ‘interest’ and ‘identity’ are at the core of the programme and a particular emphasis is given to the formation of new social identities, the redefinition of corporate interests, and the domestic changes in the forms of political representation.

ABSTRACT

The process of Europeanization must have an impact on domestic parties and party systems. In order to assess the type and extent of this impact, one needs a conceptual language able to deal with party behavior in complex and multi-layered polities. This paper asserts that the European Union might indeed be a very special and unique polity, but still displaying characteristics that can be found in existing polities. By exploring the literature on federalism, and on parties in federal polities in particular, we will not yet produce the conceptual language needed, but make an inventory of available insights and of the methodological problems in dealing with parties in a multi-layered context. The paper concludes with the presentation and a short discussion of what we believe to be the crucial dimensions of the concept of a ‘multi-level party system’

INTRODUCTION

The incremental creation of a European polity can not be a neutral phenomenon for political parties. The European level is a second or third level of political participation, contention and decision-making, and the presence and interaction of these levels account for new opportunities and constraints for political parties. That is the simple and straightforward assumption on which this paper wants to build. At first sight it is limited to Europe, and to the European Union in particular. We want to know what Europe is doing to the parties – both the national and regional parties and the emerging European parties – and what parties can do or will do if the process of European integration continues. Yet the answers to these questions have a wider relevance, especially because we want to use explicitly a comparative approach. We suggest that much can be learned from parties and party systems in existing multi-layered polities. Therefore we will explore the literature on parties in federal systems. The result of this excursion is a first and preliminary form of the concept of a ‘*multi-level party system*’. It should be useful for organizing the party research in the emerging European polity, but also for the formulation of research questions related to parties in just any multi-layered polity.

The ever-expanding literature on the past, present and future development of the European Union abounds with assertions of the fact that we are dealing with a unique phenomenon that is not easy to define, to describe or to analyze. Neither international relations theory nor insights on domestic politics seem to be able to fit the EU into their familiar language. Quite some attempts have been made though to grasp the real nature of the EU, often adopting the same creative search for neologisms that has characterized the framers of the European Treaties and of the multitude of European programs and policies.

Most of the EU-integration and EU-politics literature is furthermore a party-free zone. It deals with institutions, policies, programs, bargaining, negotiation and implementation, but very seldom or only marginally with political parties. That should however not be too surprising. If the EU-polity is of a very special kind, if it is a polity *sui generis*, one should not expect the development of party politics. Party politics, at least in the way we know it and define it for scientific analysis, is a phenomenon closely linked to the nation state. It is clearly associated with the process of boundary closure that characterized the development of the modern state (Bartolini 1998). The state and thus also the state level is the context within which the analysis of the origin of parties, of their ideological background and of their organizational forms has been staged (e.g. Duverger 1951; Lapalombara & Weiner 1966; Lipset & Rokkan 1967). The notion of a party system itself refers explicitly to the

interconnectedness of one set of parties within the territorial boundaries of a political system.

Thus if party politics does occur in the EU-polity, it will probably be of a very special and different kind, not to be grasped with the familiar theoretical and conceptual machinery of the classical party politics literature. One more reason to be doubtful about the development of normal or familiar party politics in the EU-polity is the fact that political parties in national states are today going through a process of deep change. That might not make them completely obsolete, but it calls at least for definitions and concepts that do not take for granted the model of the classical mass party (e.g. Katz & Mair 1993).

In the first part of the paper we will explain why we believe that the thesis of the uniqueness of the EU-polity is exaggerated. The political system as such might indeed be unique, but that goes for just any political system. Therefore we state that one can and should try to identify those characteristics of the EU-polity that can also be found in other polities. In the second part we will look at the political science literature on federal systems, and try to show that federal polities do have indeed quite some features that come very close to the ‘unique’ characteristics of the EU.

In the third part we summarize the findings about the way in which parties function in federal systems. Unfortunately and surprisingly there is not much to be found, but we will present some general insights that might be useful for the analysis of parties in the EU. In part four we will then summarize some findings of the literature on parties at the European level, and on parties in European countries being confronted with the presence of that European level. These findings illustrate very clearly the need for an analytic language that allows for thinking in multi-level terms for the study of political parties. In the fifth and final section of the paper we will then introduce this notion of the ‘multi-level party system’. The concept is new and needs much further elaboration. We will present a first sketch that looks very much like a research agenda or even a research catalogue¹.

IDENTIFYING THE ‘UNIQUE’ POLITY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

If we want to learn something from careful comparison of the EU with other polities, we need to know what we are looking for. We need some insights on the nature of the EU-polity, in order to start the search for matching cases. The literature on EU-integration does however not offer very solid reference points. The *acquis académique* (Chrysochoou 1996) consists of many approaches, definitions and competing perspectives. The number of labels that have so far been invented to define and describe the European thing is impressive. One

comes across terms like: pluralistic security community, regime, pooled sovereignty, *Zweckverband*, *Staatenverbund*, *civitas europea*, concordance system, *unvollendeter Bundesstaat*, federal union, quasi-state, regulatory state, post-modern state, multi-level governance, *condominio*, confederal consociation, composite state (Wessels 1997; Chrysochoou 1994; Tarrow 2000). It is interesting to note that the more recent labels often do include the word 'state', be it always qualified with an adjective to stress that we are not looking at a normal, i.e. at a nation-state or Westphalian state (Caporaso 1996). That is of course also related to the fact that the EU is a moving target, that it is a polity in the making. It has in the past gone through a number of incremental and more radical changes, and this process is not likely to stop in the near future. That keeps the debates about the nature of the EU very much alive and inconclusive.

The EU is thus not just a state, and it will most probably never be one. That seems to be a generally accepted idea. Does this mean that one should refrain from using classical political concepts to analyze it? They might indeed be misleading. Especially the scholars of the democratic legitimacy of the European Union often make that point (e.g. Hix 1998; Banchoff & Smith 1999). But must we really develop brand-new concepts and labels for analyzing EU-politics? Must we treat the EU as unique and thus incomparable? The point we want to carry home here is that this approach is not very fruitful. It goes too far in keeping the study of EU-politics out of the usual political science analysis, and it uses – though mostly in an implicit way – a very static and idealized concept of the state². The idea that one can indeed analyze the EU by way of comparison, by treating it to a certain extent as a 'domestic' polity, is of course not new (Scharpf 1988; Sbragia 1992; Hix 1994). We only want to develop it in a more explicit way, because it is important for our search of ideas to study political parties in the EU.

At first sight, we do indeed have a political system that is different, one in which domestic and intergovernmental politics are being combined, in which the boundaries between the two are being blurred. It is this strange and special evolution that has led to the proliferation of new terms to label the EU. It should however be possible to reduce the terminological complexity, not by adding one more and this time final and overarching label, but by identifying what exactly in the institutional architecture of the EU has urged its students to invent all these new labels. Of course the institutions are extremely complex. Their treaty base and the subsequent additions to the original treaties have produced a labyrinth of structures and procedures that do not resemble the familiar straightforward and more streamlined institutions of a national state. This complexity can however analytically be broken down in a number of more concrete, though not mutually exclusive characteristics. We present them very briefly, since they are well known and have been extensively dealt with in the

literature (we therefore leave out the otherwise very long lists of bibliographical references).

A first dimension is the – obvious but important – *multi-layered*³ character of the EU-polity. That is a direct consequence of its intergovernmental origin. The development of a regional policy has furthermore pulled the regional levels into the EU-polity as such, creating much more complex interactions, with quite some variety depending on the meaning and political institutions of the regions in the respective national member-states.

The second characteristic of the EU-polity is the *sectoral specificity* of the decision-making procedures. It is not possible to give a short answer to the question how decisions are made in the EU; unless one opts for the – correct – ‘it depends’. The origin of an output, the way in which it can be challenged, the actors engaged in the production and the way in which it is finally produced all vary, depending on what exactly is being dealt with. The ways in which outputs are implemented vary furthermore territorially (see also below). It is thus extremely difficult to explain in simple terms the ‘legislative’ and ‘executive’ processes of the EU, or to link them to certain institutions.

The third characteristic is the *overlapping of competencies*. This refers directly to the multi-layered aspect of the polity. Competencies are not neatly divided between the levels, between the Union, the member states and the regions. Instruments of different levels are being merged or ‘fused’ into a mixed system. There is no clear center of decision-making.

The structures and processes of the EU are clearly *not symmetrical*. That is a fourth dimension of its specificity. This asymmetry is both functional and territorial. The sectoral specificity mentioned above can also be called functional asymmetry. The lines going from decision-makers to citizens and back follow different paths depending on what exactly is on the agenda. The territorial asymmetry refers to the fact that things are done in a different way depending on where it is done. This is very obviously the case for policies in which not all the member states participate. The EU-speak has called this ‘varying geometries’. Territorial asymmetry also occurs – as was mentioned above – because the regional tier has a different meaning for and within the different member states. And of course variations in national political cultures lead to different ways in which the European policies are prepared, contested and implemented.

In the fifth place it is very often said, and increasingly so after the troublesome ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, that the European Union *lacks a ‘demos’*, an identifiable European ‘people’. The absence of a political community has far-reaching consequences for the degree in which or the way in

which the European polity can be democratic. It can not rely on the classical instruments of democratic legitimacy, since these are intimately linked to the nation-state, in which both the instruments and the very meaning of democratic legitimacy were developed.

The EU has not – at least at the central level – a *responsible party government*. That is number six. There is no core executive that is composed of and by parties and that needs to rely on the majority of the seats in an elected parliament. This is a point that is very crucial for us here, since it means that the EU lacks indeed the focal point of party politics in national polities. We will however somewhat qualify this assumption in the next part of the paper.

We are thus looking at a complex polity without a clearly identifiable population, with sector-specific, multi-layered and non-symmetrical processes of decision-making in mixed or fused institutions without a clear division of competencies and with no party government. That is a very special animal indeed. But how special is it? Can we find these features in other polities, in existing ‘normal’ state-type polities? We claim the answer is yes.

FEDERAL-TYPE POLITIES

The first and most obvious source of inspiration for comparison is the literature on federalism. If the EU comes close to existing polities, these must indeed also be multi-layered and complex, have multiple centers of participation, contention and decision-making. What then can the literature on federalism teach us about the EU and more specifically about the role to be played by political parties? The next paragraphs deal with the first of these two questions.

Federalism is unfortunately not a ready-made package. It is a fairly debated concept, even lacking a generally accepted definition. Some authors see federalism as just a higher degree of decentralization, while others defend the idea that one can indeed produce a classifying definition (Blondel 1990; Burgess & Gagnon 1993; Osaghae 1990). The literature is furthermore very biased. In the first place there is the huge dominance of the Anglo-American federations: USA, Canada and – to a lesser extent – Australia. Especially the USA serves as both the historical and the theoretical model. Yet the European tradition of federalism is quite different, and in a way that is extremely relevant for us. The formation of federal states in Europe (Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Belgium) is closely linked to the societal divisions, to the cleavages on which the political parties have been based (Hodge 1987).

In the second place the approach is generally very institutional, focussing mainly on the constitutional and formal rules rather than on the way in which the political game is played. Comparative analysis of federal-type polities is not

extremely well developed as a political science sub-discipline (a noticeable exception is Watts 1996). This leads especially to the underestimation of the degree in which competencies – however constitutionally neatly assigned to either the federal or the sub-state level – have in practice become increasingly intertwined, using a large variety of techniques. Usually Germany is cited as the typical case of *‘Politikverflechtung’*, because the joint-decision making there is an explicit constitutionally regulated device. But it is also very much present in the other federations, including the American where the increasing overlapping of competencies has been labeled ‘marble-cake federalism’.

Third the literature tends to concentrate on federations that came about through integration, i.e. on the older ones. The political dynamics that develop in federations that are the consequence of devolution have so far not received a lot of attention of the scholars of classical federalism. The very good reason for that is of course that if one adds countries like Belgium, Spain or eventually even the UK to the USA, Australia, Canada and Germany, the concept of federalism is in danger of being stretched way beyond its analytical capacities.

And finally the literature on federalism pays very little attention to political parties. Of course country studies do exist, but ready-made tools for the comparative analysis of political parties in federations are unfortunately not available. We can therefore not just jump from the literature on federalism to the EU or from one or more federal countries to the EU. We must opt for a more variable-oriented approach, seeing whether institutions and procedures that are displayed by federal-type states also occur in the EU (see also Sbragia 1992), in order to explore then how these features might account for some characteristics and changes of the party systems.

This variable-oriented approach is also what Chandler (1987) has used in one of the very few attempts to look for some systematic relations between federal institutions and political parties. He stresses the difference between a functional and a jurisdictional division of powers. In the latter the competencies tend to overlap, with the higher level issuing general principles that are implemented by the sub-states. Though the empirical evidence has a strong Canadian (and German) flavor, he does formulate some plausible hypotheses about the way in which parties get involved in the bargaining processes and about the relations between regional and federal elections (see also Wolinetz 1999a; 1999b).

Scharpf’s (1988) seminal article on the joint-decision trap takes this same approach. He wants to learn lessons from German federalism and European integration, by singling out a few crucial characteristics of both systems in order to analyze their effects. He is able to show very convincingly that when the

higher level depends on the direct participation of the lower level, and when the decision-making rule is consensus, the actors get caught in the joint-decision trap (see also Scharpf 1995, on Australian federalism).

Hix (1998) follows this same line. In building a typology of multi-level systems he picks as one of the dimensions this same cooperative (as contrasted to dual) characteristic of federal states, since this is comparable to the overlapping competencies in the EU-polity. Contrary to Scharpf, Hix looks explicitly at the way in which this might affect the parties and the party systems. He is able to show variations in turnout and in party cohesion.

Hix deliberately keeps the number of variables low, in order to get something meaningful out of a comparison of only a few cases. That is a methodologically very wise position. Without pressing for the simultaneous analysis of a significantly larger number of variables, we would however propose to explore whether other characteristics of federal-type states might not at some point, eventually one by one and depending on the other aspects of the research design, be entered into the picture. In doing so we try to reconstruct the list of 'typical' features of the EU that we identified above.

The multi-layered aspect of a federal polity is obvious. Important however is the way in which the levels are interconnected. A very minimal and merely classifying definition of a federal-type polity asserts the presence of two relatively autonomous levels of decision-making, and the incorporation of the lower level into the decision-making at the higher level (Osaghae 1990). This is indeed the case in federal states, but the way in which the lower level penetrates the higher level can take various institutional forms.

If one uses this definition in a narrow and formal-institutional way, the federal second house seems to be the place where typically the sub-states are present or represented and do play a role in the federal decision-making, especially if the bicameralism is strong, i.e. when its approval is needed for all or for most bills accepted by the first house of parliament. This institutional picture is however too narrow. Some second houses – like for instance the American Senate – do in fact not fulfil this function, while some federations without a proper Senate or with a very weak Senate (like Austria, Canada or Spain) do have institutions making the sub-states present at the federal level, even if the constitution does not provide for it. The Canadian and the Australian Prime Minister Conferences, or the Austrian *Landeshauptmännerkonferenz* fulfil this function, while in Spain the strong and intensive vertical relations between the central government and the regional executives do the same (Agranoff 1993). The German *Bundesrat* is a very special and even exceptional type of second house, since it allows for the direct presence of the Land Governments in

a powerful institution of the federal decision-making. This direct presence is as such not exceptional, but the fact that it is staged in the second house of the federal parliament is very relevant. We will see below that this might have direct consequences for the political parties.

In Spain the presence of regional parties in the central parliament, and especially the pivotal role they have at some times played, also provides for a regional presence at the federal level, at least for some of the regions. This is a form of incorporation that has no formal or informal institutional basis whatsoever. It is just the result of the presence of different party systems at the national and regional levels.

The number of sub-states is an important intervening variable, since it affects the form of the relations between the institutions in a federation. In existing federal-type polities this number varies between two (Belgium or the late Czechoslovak Republic) and 50. Two is a very special number, and can lead to extremely high tensions in clear-cut zero-sum games. The only decision-making technique available is consensus. That does however not teach us a lot about the EU. The current numbers here come closest to Germany, but might reach the Swiss level in the case of further enlargement. It seems that lower numbers (like 8 to 10) facilitate the development of horizontal intergovernmental relations, like the above-cited Prime Minister Conferences. Switzerland and the USA do not have them. Here we rather see vertical relations or eventually informal, varying and policy-specific alliances between sub-states.

Not only the form, but also the content of the interrelations is important. That is where the distribution of competencies enters the picture. The sharing of competencies can take two forms. When there is a functional division of powers, the higher level has the legislative power, while the implementation of the rules is mainly the competence of the lower level. That obliges the levels to cooperate. This type of division of power is prominently present in the German federation, but also in the European Union, where the implementation of the European regulation is largely left to the national states (or eventually to the regions, depending on their competence within the member state). In the case of a jurisdictional division of powers, both legislative and executive powers belong to the same level, and sharing of competencies can occur when the two levels have both received the right to legislate on the same matters. This sharing of competencies can be explicitly written down in the Constitution or can just be the result of historical evolutions and of a certain way to interpret the Constitution (Scharpf 1994). By now all federal states, including those with a Constitution that does provide for a very clear dual federalism (most notably the USA), have developed through a wide variety of techniques a strong intermingling of competencies. In some federations – like the USA or also

Australia – this is done without changing the constitution, and eventually with a little help from the Supreme Court, while in others – like Switzerland – it is done by constantly amending the constitution, up to the point at which it becomes almost unreadable. More recent federations, like Germany, have immediately explicitly put the sharing of competencies in the Constitution. This is in fact the federal-type feature that is most widely recognized as being also present in the European Union and as offering possible clues for comparative analysis (see above).

But there is much more. Very typical for a federal polity is that policy-making is sector-specific, exactly because of the distribution of competencies over different layers. There is not one single answer to the question how rules are produced and implemented. It depends. Some matters are dealt with exclusively by one level – the federal or the regional – while others can be shared. And they can be shared in two different ways. This complexity belongs to the very nature of a federal polity, and the same goes for the tensions and conflicts that it produces. The trajectories between political input and output are complex and variable. Political debate, representation, contention and decision-making take very peculiar forms in federal systems (Tuschhoff 1999). They display a very high number of principal-agent relationships, multiple entry-points, varying sets of choices for voters, parties and pressure groups. Governments act at the same time as principles (in intergovernmental relations) and as agents (in their relation with the citizens) within the same overall federal political system.

Differences between policy sectors are certainly not a unique and typical feature of federal systems. That goes without saying. But it is true that the federal logic, with its multi-layered institutions, adds to it. That is even more so when the federal institutions are asymmetrical. The latter deserves some attention, though the literature on federalism has not put it very high on the priority list (Keating 1998; 1999). Asymmetry is a very underestimated characteristic of federal states. Again the formal-institutional bias is to a certain extent to blame, since it does not see the asymmetry that is behind the perfectly symmetrical logic of the constitution. Asymmetry has at least three different dimensions (Watts 1996).

The first dimension is the formal-institutional. Some sub-states might have explicitly and willingly received more or less competencies. The autonomous regions of Spain are a very obvious example of this. Some capital districts in federal states, like Washington DC or Canberra also received explicitly a special status. The Belgium capital region of Brussels has the full status of a region, but was given special institutions aimed at the protection of the Dutch language minority in the city. There is also institutional asymmetry

when sub-states receive equal or equalized representation in one of the federal institutions. The number of seats in the Senate, or the weight of the vote in the European Council, or the overrepresentation of Scotland in the British House of Commons are all examples of asymmetry. This dimension is the most visible, although the equal representation is seldom recognized as asymmetry (it is e.g. by Keating 1998).

The second dimension is politically probably more important. It refers not to formally assigned competencies, but to policy-making. Even if the constitution gives a straightforward answer to the question ‘who can do what?’ the only correct answer for most policies in most federal states is once again ‘it depends’. It depends on what is being done (the sectoral variation) but also on where it is done. The historical evolution of federal states towards the sharing of competencies produces lots of asymmetry. Sub-states can accept federal programs and finances, or can opt out. They can decide to go further, or negotiate some rights to make their own policies. The Quebec pensions scheme, or more generally the varying statutes of the Spanish autonomous communities or of the Russian republics are obvious examples.

The third dimension of asymmetry refers to societal differences between the sub-states. Differences in size are important, and can eventually be taken into account in the formal institutions. Differences in economic performance are likely to affect the political game, and to foster debates about the financial equalization mechanism and principles. The most important however, at least for our purposes, are the (again in the federalist literature very much neglected) differences in the political composition of the sub-states. Almost independently of the other federal-type structures, different political majorities in different sub-states create tensions and complex bargaining relations, both between and within the substates. This is even more the case if local regional majorities are based on the mobilization of regional identities and eventually on demands for greater autonomy within the Union. Switzerland, Belgium or Spain are good examples of this, with parties engaging in federal politics without being present in all the substates.

Complexity, functional and territorial asymmetry and overlapping competencies: these are the ‘typical’ EU-characteristics that we have so far discovered in federal states. The mentioning of Switzerland and Belgium is a good link to the next feature: the absence of a European ‘people’. This is however a very slippery concept. It is especially very difficult to find the clear empirical indicators that can tell us whether the citizens living on the territory of a polity do indeed constitute a ‘people’. How much homogeneity is needed, and of what kind should it be? Comparing Europe with Germany, and discussing their legitimizing capacity, Scharpf writes: “Agreement between the states and

between the federal and state governments was, at least before German unification, greatly facilitated by three factors: by a relatively homogeneous political culture and nation-wide public opinion that was primarily interested in political issues at the federal level; by political parties, operating at both levels, whose competition served to discipline the pure pursuit of state interests; and by a high degree of economic and cultural homogeneity” (1994: 222). This is formulated in a relative way, as a matter of degree. But is there a critical threshold, and is the EU below it? And how about Canada, Switzerland, Belgium, Spain, Italy?

This problem is of course very closely related to the debate on the ‘democratic deficit’. If there is no demos, it is difficult to envisage a democracy (Chrysoschoou 1996; Norris 1997; Weale 1998). This point raises lots of questions and has produced already long and interesting debates about legitimacy and democracy and about the way in which the European Union might develop alternative roads to legitimacy (e.g. Banchoff & Smith 1999). For our purposes we can suffice to state again that the problems of legitimacy and accountability that are believed to be so typical for the strange EU-polity, do also occur in federal systems.

The relation between societal divisions and federal-type institutions has been fairly well analyzed, without however producing unambiguous statements about the degree in which federal structures appease or enhance societal divisions (Smith 1995; Coakley 1993; Horowitz 1985). On the one hand a federal structure diffuses authority, which avoids sub-group dominance and allows for minority representation. National minorities can be local majorities in a meaningful way. It offers multiple entry points for participation and contention. Yet federal structures, if built along the lines of societal differences, can also institutionalize and reinforce these differences (see e.g. Henderson 1995; Deschouwer 1999). The problems of responsibility and accountability in federal polities have so far not been at the center of academic research and debate. An interesting attempt has recently been made by Brzinski, Lancaster & Tuschhoff (1999), who do stress the fact that federal structures have important consequences for the forms and logic of political representation. They call it ‘compounded representation’. “To begin with, a principal faced with multiple agents faces the challenge to constantly track their records and make a judgment on their performance. While citizens may enjoy the multiple access points that federal systems offer they can also easily be overwhelmed and overloaded by the too many representatives whose actions require their attention. (...) Moreover, agents have better opportunities in federal systems to camouflage their accountability because they can shift the blame to other agents with whom they interact” (Tuschhoff 1999: 20). Federations are also able to live with and do

create themselves multiple, complex and sometimes overlapping identities, in which it is not possible to say exactly and once and forever who are the ‘people’.

The notion of responsible government, that also often appears in the EU democratic deficit debates (see also Schmitt & Thomassen 1999), is very difficult to apply in federal polities. It assumes that there is one clear political center, for which the competencies and political responsibilities are clear, so that the citizens can trace its activities and finally judge the government. If responsible government is furthermore to be responsible *party* government, the notion assumes that there is either one party or at least the same coalition governing at all levels. And if it is a coalition, it assumes that the citizens are able to see which party has been responsible for what. The notion of responsible (party) government is thus a very idealized type of government, that might eventually come close to the late Westminster majoritarian democracy, but that stands quite far from the political life in most states, unitary as well as federal.

Having said all this, we can come back once more to the central point we want to make: the EU is not a totally unique polity. It does have peculiar characteristics, but these are also to be found in other polities and in federal states in particular. There might surely be gradual differences, but the general mechanisms and their consequences are clearly recognizable and comparable.

FEDERALISM AND POLITICAL PARTIES

The aspects we have discussed so far should be very relevant for political parties. The functions they fulfill are very likely to be related to them. Parties are engaged in the recruitment of the political personnel, they participate in elections and seek governmental power, they mobilize the voters, refer to communities and identities, defend or contest the policies. If they govern, they engage in intergovernmental relations, both horizontally (between regions) and vertically (between region and federal level). Or to put it differently: political parties are one of the very important political actors that produce the linkages between the political institutions. Whereas in a unitary state the linkage function of parties can be mainly situated in the interaction between state and society (Lawson 1980), their role in federal polities is more complex. They have to adapt to the institutions, while their actions and the differences between levels also affect the way in which the federal institutions can function. One would expect that this special role of parties in federal polities has been extensively described and analyzed. Very surprisingly this is not the case. There is no conceptual language available to grasp the role of political parties in complex and multi-layered polities.

There are certainly a number of interesting and inspiring case studies on Germany (e.g. Lehmbruch 1976; Gabriel 1989; Jeffery 1999), Canada (Chandler 1987; Dyck 1996; Thorburn 1996), Switzerland (Girod 1964), Spain (Hamann 1999) or Belgium (Deschouwer 1997; 1999), but they are very much standing alone. There is some literature on voting behavior and on party identification (e.g. Cotter 1992; Uslander 1989; Stewart & Clarke 1998), and a very interesting special issue of *Publius* in 1989. Of course most analyses of parties and party systems in federal states do mention the federal logic and do tell something about the interaction between levels, but there is a striking absence of cross-references and thus no common language. In his handbook of the Swiss political system Kriesi (1995) spends only six pages in the chapter on parties to discuss the impact of federalism. In a recent account on party politics and territorial representation in Germany, Jeffery (1999) updates the work of Lehmbruch (1976). He produces a long, detailed, well-documented and very interesting account of party politics in Germany and of the interaction between the federal state and the *Länder*, but it is merely descriptive, even introducing different concepts and models per historical period.

It is thus – unfortunately – not possible to make immediate use of the conclusion that federal polities and the EU have some common characteristics that seem to be relevant for the analysis of political parties. There is a missing link. This can only partly be filled up by bringing together the bits and pieces that are scattered in the literature on federalism or on federal states. The following paragraphs summarize what is available in this respect.

The regional autonomy, whether it is strong or weak, allows for differentiation. That is a very obvious starting point. Power is not centralized and can therefore be shared. The federal opposition parties have opportunities for regional access to power. This diffusion of power is conducive for the legitimacy of the system, since minority groups have less chance to be totally excluded (Chandler 1987; Gabriel 1989; Hodge 1987; Lijphart 1984; 1999). There are more access points and thus more possibilities for opposing the central government. Parties at the local level can ‘run against Washington’ (Katz 1999). On the other hand the diffusion of power and of competencies in federal systems affects the representational role of parties, especially the governing parties, since responsibility can be diffused, the blame can be shifted (Gabriel 1989; Tuschhoff 1999).

The differentiation of levels also seems to allow for an easier entry of new parties. The lower level allows for experiments, both in the electoral competition and in government formation (Gabriel 1989). The German Greens started their political breakthrough at the Land level, and also entered the executive first at the lower level. The so far very young history of access to power of the new

right-wing populist parties seems to follow the same lines, with the Austrian FPÖ stepping in first at the Land level and then at the federal level. The French Front National also tried to use the regional level to force the traditional parties into new alliances. The PDS in Germany is another good example. If there are clear differences in the rules of the game (like the electoral law) between two levels, this also allows for experiments in terms of strategies and alliances (Bardi 1999; Rydon 1988). A federal structure thus lowers the barriers for new and alternative political parties (Chandler 1987).

Since two different games are being played, one at the federal and one at the regional level, one can expect an internal differentiation of the political parties, a relatively loose link between the regional and the federal sections. That is however not a general rule. It depends on the degree of autonomy of the regions, on the type of autonomy (see below) and also on the degree of asymmetry in the federation. If the regions are very different from each other, the regional games are very different and the parties have to allow internally for this variation (Hadley, Morass & Nick 1989; Hodge 1987). If the federation is more homogeneous, then the development of large catch-all parties, able to integrate the regional differences, is more likely (Chandler 1987). Though all these assumptions do sound very plausible, we have not found any comparative empirical data that might be able to support them.

In extreme cases of asymmetry, when in some regions one party clearly dominates the game, the federal logic gives that party a double role. It becomes then at the same time the regional governing party, linked to the regional electorate, and the party that can speak for the region in the horizontal and vertical intergovernmental relationships (Wolinetz 1999b). It is both agent and principal. The best example of this is probably the Party Québécois, but the Catalan CiU is (or was) also clearly playing this double role. Another good example is the Bavarian CSU.

This assumes that we are indeed looking at a federal system in which the governments and/or the levels are closely interconnected. If they are not, the regions and their governing parties do not have to engage in intergovernmental relations, and do only play the role of principal to a very limited extent. Much depends on the nature of the federal structures. If the levels are connected, if the competencies are to a certain extent overlapping, either jurisdictionally or functionally, the institutions become extremely relevant for the parties. Federal and intergovernmental politics are then party politics and vice versa (Lehmbruch 1976; Chandler 1987; Rydon 1988; Jeffery 1999). That is even more so if the regional level is directly incorporated in the federal decision-making, like in the German federation (Chandler 1987; Wolinetz 1999b). "It creates the possibility of federal-provincial relations being defined in partisan terms and provides

opposition forces with an incentive for using regional arenas as a means of challenging the legitimacy of an existing federal majority party or coalition” (Chandler 1987: 155).

If the two levels are closely connected, and especially if the regional level is present and necessary for federal decision-making, the regional level tends to lose its political autonomy. Regional elections become then relevant for the federal policy-making, and will also be framed in these terms. Regional elections get a meaning with reference to the higher level. They become federal mid-term elections (Wolinetz 1999b; Gabriel 1989; Jeffery 1999). Rydon (1988) makes, with reference to Australia, the interesting point that the proliferation of elections with relevance for the federal level leads to an increasing de-idedologization. Unpopular decisions are constantly being postponed.

These kinds of reasoning do implicitly or sometimes explicitly assume that there is in federations a ‘master level’ of politics, a level where there is more at stake. This same idea is of course prominent in the notion of ‘second order elections’. That label has been put forward by Reif (1980) in trying to understand the dynamics of European elections. Hix (1994) has tried to generalize it to other federal systems (by comparing the turnout at different levels), and also suggests that the presence of a master level is not necessary. He states that Switzerland has only second-order elections, because legislative elections are in general less relevant than referendums (see also Heath et.al. 1999 for a comparison of national, European and local elections in the UK, using the notion of second-order)

This short summary of the more or less comparative literature on parties in federal polities has shown that there is not a very solid ground to build on. The language is vague and very general, and it is not possible to come up with real testable hypotheses (the lower turnout for second-order left aside). The overview did of course not pay justice to the available detailed accounts of party politics in single federal countries. A further and deeper exploration of this literature might eventually be helpful, but it is not at all sure that this more inductive analysis would indeed produce testable hypotheses. One of the major problems of the comparative literature that we have reviewed is that it wants or tries to use the federal system itself as the unit of analysis. And that does not seem to work, not only because federal systems might all be fairly different and *sui generis*, but also because they display *internal variations*.

One has to take for granted that today all federal systems are asymmetrical, in all three meanings that we discussed above: institutional structures, policy-making and society (culture, economy, size, and party system). Looking at the system as a whole offers then a mixed picture, out of

which it is not possible to extract general statements. We may quote Chandler again: “In terms of party competition, a federal régime can be conducive either to multi-partism, to flexible catch-all parties, or to the rise of minor parties. Not all of these tendencies occur together. Moreover, regionally one may observe counter-effects such as one-party dominance within certain provinces or states. (...) Reference to American and Canadian experience underscores the difficulty of disentangling federal effects and leaves unanswered the question of when to expect federalism to be conducive to catch-all alliances and when to regionalist parties’ (1987: 152-153).

We would therefore like to formulate the intermediate conclusion *that it is not very useful to try to build theories and to derive hypotheses about parties in federal-type polities in general*. The answer on what parties do, where they are linked into the federal structures, which strategies they follow and which organizational features they display, is empirically always ‘it depends’. It depends on where you are in the system and it depends on the point from which you look into the political action. We therefore need the tools to describe these relations and the possible variations in them. The federalist literature has offered some clues, but they are not sufficient. Since our final aim is still to look at parties in the European Union (i.e. at all levels and both in the vertical interactions between levels and in the horizontal interactions between units at the same level), it is also possible to profit from what has been done so far on political parties of Europe and in Europe. This literature is to an increasing extent confronted with the fact that one can not anymore fully understand the dynamics of parties and party systems if one stays analytically within one single level, be it the national or the European. The concept of the multi-level party system is already implicitly present in much of the recent literature.

The party literature on Europe also takes explicitly into account one very special and peculiar characteristic of the EU: the absence of one central party-dominated executive. Even if the strict notion of responsible party government needs some qualification when applied to federal systems, the central level always has a recognizable executive in which parties play a major role. Possible hypotheses about the relationship between the levels and about the dynamics of the political game can not be transferred just like that to the European Union. At this point we reach the limits of the comparative exercise. It is one more reason to stick, for the time being, to general concept building and to the search for good indicators.

THE END OF THE SINGLE-LEVEL PARTY SYSTEM

In October 2000 the Belgians go to the polls to elect local councils. The campaign started quite early, with the formation of a federal coalition in Austria. That is a relevant event because the right-wing extremist party Vlaams Blok might eventually become a necessary coalition partner in the city of Antwerp. The Haider case did also produce some tensions within the European EPP. Its president is Wilfried Martens. He was until June 1999 a MEP, but was not reelected. His home party, the Flemish Christian-Democratic CVP in Belgium, had refused to give him the first place on the list, because he had allowed Forza Italia to join the EPP⁴. There are many more stories of this kind to be told, like for instance the one on the importance of the sequence of the 1994 referendums in Austria, Finland, Sweden and Norway (Jahn & Storsved 1995). They all illustrate one obvious and evident fact, that deserves however to be stressed again very explicitly: *it is not possible any more to understand the dynamics of a single party system without taking into account its linkages, both horizontal and vertical, with other party systems.*

This is the very moment at which ‘Europeanization’ enters the scene. It “involves the evolution of a new layer of politics which interacts with older ones in ways to be examined” (Bartolini, Risse & Stråth 1999: 1). But it also brings the old levels together in one common political and societal sphere, which leads to *horizontal* interactions that need to be examined. Europeanization opens the boundaries and obliges us to look at – among others – party systems as interrelated phenomena. That is becoming very clear if one looks at the attempts so far to describe and understand the changes in party politics as they become linked in and by Europe. A quick overview of the current state of the art will illustrate this, and will also give us the raw material from which we will then construct the concept of the multi-level party system.

Parties of Europe

At first sight a very simple choice is offered: either one looks at the development of the European party system at the European level, or one opts for an analysis of the effects of Europe on the national systems. Choosing one of the two should not present too many problems. Yet that is not the case. Both options are soon confronted with the fact that the other level has to be taken into consideration. And the differentiation between the two does not seem to follow the expected logical lines (Mair 1999).

The literature on the development of the parties at the EU-level is already quite impressive (we will not list it here). If Europeanization means that new things are going on in Strasbourg, Brussels or any other place where European

institutions convene, this can be illustrated with lots of evidence. Material is available on the party groups in the European Parliament, on the European party federations and on the more informal but also important party activities that have evolved around the European summit meetings. We have information on the attitudes of candidates in European elections and on the behavior of the MEPs, on the way in which they conceive of their representational roles, on the degree of congruence between their activities and the voters at home. There has been research on the dimensions of conflict that are evolving, on the development of a certain language of politics, on the structure of competition. We can say that this part of the picture has received much attention, and begins to show clear patterns.

This is the strictly ‘European’ side of the story. Yet the research concentrating on the partisan aspect of politics in the EU institutions is never strictly European. Scholars of the European parties always need to mention the national level. As far as the structure of competition is concerned, it is generally accepted that two dimensions have to be taken into account: a classical Left-Right dimension and a national-European or more abstractly federalist versus anti-federalist dimension (Hix 1999a; 1999b). The second however relates directly to the national level, and has to take into account the partisan but especially also the national variations. The cleavage structure at the European level is directly linked to and affected by the national political competition. Whether parties of the left and of the right are pro or against further European integration, depends on their position at home (Hix 1999b). That produces thus a non-symmetrical picture. The way in which the national level is linked to Europe and the consequences of it vary per country (and per party).

The European election research is probably the sub-discipline that has been confronted with the interconnectedness of the levels in the most visible and obvious way. The first analyses labeled the European elections as ‘second order’ (Reif 1980), as less important than the national elections, because less is at stake. Therefore they produce the well-known results: expressive voting, lower turnout, poor results for the national governing parties. European elections were and are hidden inside or behind the national elections, being so to say a part of the national electoral party system. The national party systems were thus having an impact on the European party system, as far as the latter could indeed be identified. The ‘second order’ notion has recently been very much qualified (Van der Eijk, Franklin & March 1996), by stating and illustrating very clearly that the effects go both ways. The national party system has effects on the European (electoral) party system, while the European (electoral) party systems does affect the national party competition. The two are to some extent different, but are intimately linked (see also Reif 1984).

Parties in Europe

Some authors have opted for a different approach: not study the strictly European partisan formations and activities or the European elections, but focus merely on the national level, to see how the development of the European level impacts on it. This option has so far apparently not attracted many scholars. There are a number of country studies (e.g. Ladrech 1994; Guyomarch 1995; Saglie 1998; Christensen 1996), some analyses of party families (mainly the Socialists (e.g. Ladrech 1993; Geyer & Swank 1997)) and some attempts to look at how individual parties in general deal with the European fact (e.g. Gaffney 1996). This is much less a cumulative body of theory than the literature of the parties at the European level. It is also much younger. Attention for the European level goes back at least as far as the first direct election of the European Parliament in 1979, while the explicit assertion that Europe is doing something with the national party systems is in fact very much a post-Maastricht discovery. Especially the mass mobilization with respect to the ratification of the Treaty in the Danish and French referendums, and then the debates in Finland, Sweden, Austria, Norway and Switzerland proved that there was indeed some potential for politicization of the European issues in member states and even in states not formally joining the EU (Sciarini & Listhaug 1997)

The kinds of debates around which the European issues have been politicized, have of course very much affected the way in which it has been studied. The mobilization of protest *against* European integration, by new or existing parties or the presence of this debate inside parties has become the main indicator for Europeanization and its effects.

What is the Evidence of ‘Impact’

The search for what exactly is to be considered as ‘impact’ or ‘effect’ of Europe on national parties and party systems is probably the best illustration of the need to look at more than one level at a time. Mair (1999) adopts a very strict notion: he looks at the presence and electoral success of parties whose origin is clearly the European issue, and he wants these to be present in national elections. Thus if Europe is not explicitly present on the strictly national scene, preferably in the form of parties that have Europe or European integration as their primary *raison d’être*, nothing is to be seen that can be called ‘effect of Europeanization’. And indeed, almost nothing is then to be seen. Europe has no visible impact.

But that might of course just be the logical consequence of the way in which the Europeanization is measured. One can also try to see how and to what extent the presence of Europe affects the competition between the national parties. There has not been very much attention for that so far. Actually one can

assume that the presence of the European level of policy does not only introduce the debate about the future of the European institutions, but also deeply affects the very notions of – for instance – social security, fiscal policy, defense, privatization, liberalism, socialism, etceteras. Analysis of the conflict dimensions at the European level reveal that a left-right axis does structure the debates. But is this the same one as the national left-right axis? What does this mean for the national debate in countries where this left-right axis is not the familiar language of politics? What does it mean for countries where left and right govern together? There is a wide range of questions that have not yet been fully explored. A noticeable exception is Marks & Wilson (1999) and Marks (1999) who have connected the evolution of the positions of national parties on the European issue to their ideology and to the evolution of it over time.

Taggart (1998) asserts that what is happening at the EU-level can teach us things about domestic politics. He does however also use discontent with the institutional developments of Europe as the primary indicator. Or to put it differently, he tries to explain evolutions in domestic politics by explicitly allowing the European level to be part of the issues at stake. Taggart is less strict than Mair in allowing evidence to be taken on board. He also does not make the strict division between national and European elections. Euroscepticism comes in four varieties: single-issue Eurosceptical parties like (e.g. De Villiers in France), protest parties that include (or add) Euroscepticism to their existing anti-establishment program (e.g. Vlaams Blok or FPÖ), established parties moving into the Eurosceptical direction (e.g. Swedish Left Party and Eurosceptical factions (e.g. in the Conservative Party)). The most pervasive evidence comes of course from the anti-establishment parties. The presence of Europe seems to be (one more) means for these parties to mark their difference with the mainstream politics. Since all the other parties accept the European Union as it is, or support further integration, they offer the anti-establishment parties one more proof of the elitist collusion (see also Mair 1999; Fieschi, Shields & Woods 1996).

These anti-establishment parties are all in the very first place firmly entrenched in their national political system, mobilizing protest against very specific domestic policies or institutional devices. This national variety makes it very difficult for them to unite at the European level. Even in European elections most of them give primacy to the national game. How can one know then to what extent the success of right-wing populist parties is due to Europeanization? They were around and already being successful long before the real politicization of the European issues. They score better in European elections, but so do all opposition parties. And the time problem is also present: from when exactly do we accept that Europe has an effect? Is it after Maastricht, after the Single European Act, or after the Treaty of Rome? Mair (1999) again adopts

a very sceptical view. He states that the EU is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to explain the success of the populist Eurosceptics. The EU has not made for new alliances. But the least one can say is that the EU adds to the success, that it offers new possibilities for mobilization of discontent, whether it is strictly domestic or not.

The same could be expected for regionalist parties, though here the predicted effect is less clear. At the domestic level, regionalist parties do challenge the central state and the (party) elites, and are to a certain extent anti-system or anti-establishment. Yet some of these regionalist parties govern at the national level, or support the national government. The European Union has recently very much accepted and even stimulated the regional level. The European Union thus modifies clearly the structure of opportunities of regional movements and parties. Europe is a way to get round the national state. Yet it seems that the regions that are the best integrated into their national polities, are also better integrated into the European polity (Keating 1998). A real three-level game is being played here, and it is so far not clear how the regional parties are dealing with it (Dudek, 2000).

The same question rises again: where to look? At what level should one expect the effects of Europeanization in these cases: at the European elections, at the national elections or at the regional elections? Looking at only one level does not help. The story is to be found in the combination, in the analysis of the interrelation.

Only Andeweg (1995) has so far tried to imagine how the national and the European level – at least in the electoral arena – might relate to each other. Two scenarios, in which either a genuine European and transnational party system would develop along the left-right axis, or a European party system along the federalist versus anti-federalist line, are not seen as the most likely developments. Andeweg thinks a ‘split-level’ party system will develop, where mainly the same parties compete both in national and in European elections, but on different grounds. Specific parties might also be present in one of the two types of elections. This supposes thus indeed that the two levels become closely connected, with a large common ground as far as the parties and the type of competition is concerned, and a certain degree of specificity for national and European elections.

THE MULTI-LEVEL PARTY SYSTEMS

At the end of our exploration of party politics in federal states, we formulated the conclusion that it is not very useful to try to build theories and to derive hypotheses about parties in federal-type polities *in general*. In the exploration of the literature on parties of and in Europe, we tried to show that this literature is to an increasing extent confronted with the fact that one can not anymore fully understand the dynamics of parties and party systems if one stays analytically within one single level, be it the national or the European. These are the two major ideas on which we try to build.

If we only take the second – the need for analysis at more than one level – we could eventually derive a broad and general definition of a multi-level party system. If a party system is composed of the relations between the parties of a given political system, a party system with more than one level would be composed of (1) the horizontal relations between the parties within each level (i.e. the normal interactions of a party system), (2) the vertical relations between different parties at different levels, (3) the vertical relations between the same parties at different levels, (4) the horizontal relations between systems and within the same party and (5) the horizontal relations between systems and between different parties. The characteristics of such a party system would then be the properties of all these relations, and also the differences and similarities between the party systems at one level and between levels. If we furthermore take into account that these relations can be different in the electoral, the parliamentary and the governmental arenas, we would probably have produced the least parsimonious concept ever presented. This becomes so complex, that it would be totally useless. It is not possible to say anything meaningful about real life politics by using such a concept. And that is exactly the problem with which the literature on parties in federations has been confronted: *it is not possible to say something general about the system as a whole*.

A more fruitful and hopefully more workable approach is then to assert the fact that party systems are interrelated, and to analyze *each of them* in relation to one or more of the others. We should look for tools that allow us to see and to understand how a party system is linked to others, to see the similarities and differences, to see where eventually the tensions are, and finally to understand how the parties adapt to and use these relations with other party systems. If we want to understand party politics in Tuscany, we have to see how Tuscany is vertically linked with Italy and Europe and with the local politics in the Tuscan cities and villages, and how Tuscany is linked horizontally to the other Italian regions and eventually to other regions in Europe. That would still be much more complex than the analysis of a single-level party system, but that

is just the consequence of the growing complexity of the polities in which parties function, be it the national or the European.

In the remaining part of the paper we will present some first ideas on how to proceed with the analysis of the multi-level party systems. These are still extremely rough and need further elaboration and organization. At this point they can be seen as a research agenda, as a way to orient future research and as a way to present or to reorganize the existing insights on parties in federations and in Europe. They can orient both the researches on parties and on party systems. Though our focus here was and will mainly be party systems, it is clear that the dimensions of a multi-level party system affect the life and possible strategies of individual parties. It defines and limits the way in which they can seek votes, office and policy. It creates new intra-party relations, both vertical and horizontal, for the co-ordination of strategies and choices at different levels and in different regions and countries. Our knowledge of these intra-party relations is not yet very developed. By organizing in a more systematic way the possible dimensions of variation in multi-level party systems, we might be able in the future to make progress on this front.

The ‘Master Level’

The federalist literature seems to assume that the federal level is the master level, though extreme regional variation or specificity might mean that for some parties or regions the master level, the level of reference, is the regional one. The European elections literature, with its idea of second-order or even ‘third rate elections’ (Irwin 1995), explicitly says that the national level is the master level. There is a hierarchy. The presence of a master level does not necessarily mean that this level fully determines what is going on elsewhere, but only that it serves as a point of reference for other levels. If Land elections in Germany are relevant for the federal level, the federal level gives meaning to the Land election. It might eventually have an influence on the selection of candidates and on the campaign, but the federal level can then in turn be affected by the result. The majority party might lose its control over the Bundestag and thus have to change its strategies. All this might then in turn affect the next Land election.

Though it again increases complexity, we should not assume that there is one single and unique master level. First the master level might be different, depending on where one looks from. If there is a region or a country with a very distinct nature, its master level might be the region or the country itself, while for the other substates of the multi-layered polity the central level is the most crucial point of reference. Second the point of reference in a multi-layered system might not be the same for all the parties. A party focussing on only one region and not engaging in federal politics, has a different point of reference

than a party that is present and active in all the substates. Third the master level might not be the same for the electoral, parliamentary and governmental arena. And fourth, there might be more than one master level (or no master level) if the levels are really balanced. Hix (1998) suggest this for the Swiss political system.

How can one determine which level is the point of reference? Keeping in mind that the point of reference depends on where one looks from, there are a number of possible indicators:

- How are election results interpreted? At which level can we see and read the aggregation of the votes? In European elections results are presented per country, and not for the EU as a whole. That is eventually done in seats for the EP, but not in votes per party. In Belgium the votes are always presented per language community. That is indeed the level at which party competition occurs. The aggregation of the votes at the Belgian level is politically meaningless and never used.
- Where does one find the highest party discipline? (Hadley, Morass & Nick 1989)? In Switzerland this is low at the federal level, and clearly higher in the cantons. Party discipline is also less important in the EP than in the national parliaments.
- Which is the level of the candidate selection? Are candidates for higher or local elections selected or nominated at a master level?
- Which level is perceived as the 'highest price' in a political career? Do parties recruit and transfer from less important levels to the master level? Being a MEP is not the highest goal, but being a member of the Commission seems to be higher than a position in a national or regional executive. Evidence from federal systems show quite some variation in the career and recruitment patterns. In Germany the federal Chancellor comes from below, while in Belgium there is so far no clear career pattern to be seen, but a lot of shifting between levels and in both directions.
- Where is the money and the staff concentrated (Katz 1999)?
- What is at stake? This is the notion used by Reif (1980). European elections are second order because there is no government to be chosen. That is probably a bit limited, and only applicable to systems in which elections – even at the national level – are meaningfully linked to government formation. That might be the case in majoritarian or in bipolar systems, but certainly not in multi-polar multi-party systems. There the election can be about whom will be the biggest party, which then can chose its coalition partners. The direct election of the head of the executive – at the local, regional or national level – might also determine the stakes of the election. In sum, the idea that

some elections are more important than others need further elaboration. Heath et. al (1999) also suggest that second order is a matter of degree: local elections are less second order than European elections.

The Relations between the Single-level Party Systems

The idea of a master level refers obviously to the vertical relations. That is why we looked at it separately. For the analysis of other vertical relations and of the horizontal relations, we suggest five dimensions. The list might still be expanded and/or reorganized. We briefly present them below, with some general ideas about their relevance.

1. The Electoral Rules of the Game.

Elections at different levels and in different regions or countries are not contested under the same conditions. Different rules of the game allow for different strategies (Bardi 1999). There are a number of possible sub-dimensions:

- Who can vote? This might be something of the past, since today all citizens are enfranchised at all levels. Immigrants however do not necessary vote in all elections. In local elections and in European elections the European citizens can vote where they live. In regions or countries with a high concentration of them (Luxembourg, Brussels) this can affect the results.
- Electoral formula, thresholds, district magnitude, preferential voting. If the electoral formula differs, some parties might not have the same chances to elect candidates in regional or in national elections. They might eventually not run in elections in which they are likely not to reach the threshold. Different district magnitudes can indeed have this effect (Lutz 1998). The European Parliament is an interesting place to see MEPs from different countries playing their role differently, because they are elected in a different way. There is already quite some convincing evidence on the way in which electoral rules affect the role orientations of members of parliaments (Bowler & Farrell 1993; Katz 1999; Wessels 1999; Hamann 1999).

2. Timing of Elections.

The literature on European elections has shown very nicely how the way in which the European and the national elections relate to each other is a matter of timing. The elections can coincide, they can come just before or just after one another, or at mid-term. The electoral cycles seem thus to be an important indicator of the way in which the levels interact (Reif 1984; Van der Eijk,

Franklin & March 1996; Lohman, Brady & Rivers 1997). This is something that has also been found for the German federal and Land elections (see Jeffery 1999 for a good summary) and for Australian state and federal elections (Rydon 1988)

Simultaneity is a factor that needs to be looked at. If elections at the lower level are all held on the same day (horizontal simultaneity), their 'nationalization' is very likely. A very striking example of this were the Italian regional elections of May 2000, where the national Prime Minister even resigned because he saw the result as a defeat of his ruling national coalition. Vertical simultaneity means that elections at different levels coincide, like for instance national and European elections. The first order election is then likely to 'absorb' in terms of stakes and campaigning the second order (e.g. Deschouwer 2000).

3. Electoral Behavior.

This is a very broad category that needs to be broken down in a number of subcategories. It goes without saying that the behavior of the voters can differ between levels and between systems. Under this heading comes the analysis of split-ticket voting and of differentiated party identification (Blake 1982; Cotter & Stovall 1992; Hadley, Morass & Nick 1985; Lancaster 1999; Stewart & Clarke 1998; Uslander 1989). Other relevant topics are differences in turnout (Hix 1998; Blondel, Sinnott & Svensson 1998), in volatility, in fractionalization, ... These dimensions have not yet been analyzed in a systematic way. The focus is generally on the election results as such, and on the eventual divergence between levels (e.g. Abedi & Siaroff, 1999). This is of course and obviously also related to the aspect of timing as discussed above.

4. The Electoral Offer, the Parties.

Which parties are present in the different systems? Do parties specialize in one level or one system? Are there different issues, cleavages, degrees of polarization? A very wide range of questions and approaches are possible here. If the party offer is different at different levels, this can take many forms. Parties at the regional level can choose to run only in regional elections, or be present at more than just that level. National parties can be absent in a number of regions for national elections (e.g. Switzerland). Parties at the regional level can be specific for that region and seek more autonomy for it (e.g. the Catalan CiU), can be a regional party associated with a national party (e.g. the Bavarian CSU), or can just be the regional wing of a national party. But then these regional wings can be more or less autonomous from the national party. A strong personalization of the head of the regional executive, eventually triggered by the direct election of the head of government (like for instance in Italy), can give the regional wing of the party a dynamic of its own (see also Abedi & Siaroff 1999 on the important role of the Landeshauptman in Austria). Career choices can

also play a role here. If a regional Prime Minister has national ambitions (e.g. Chaves in Andalucía), he might need to keep the regional branch closer to the national party. Probably the best way to grasp the variation and complexity of this dimension is building a typology of parties (actually of party branches), focussing on their type of vertical and horizontal relations with the other levels.

5. The Executive.

Who is governing at which level and in which system? Are coalitions congruent, i.e. following the same division-lines between governing and opposition parties or not? Is office holding at one level an asset or a liability for power seeking at the other levels?

For all these dimensions it is necessary to refine the subcategories and to refine the possible indicators and measurements of the differences between the systems and the levels. The research agenda or catalogue is well filled. The concept of a multi-level party system should be used in a more dynamic way. It is not just meant to describe, but also to analyze and to explain. The link should be made with possible behavior of parties and voters. Some concrete hypotheses are to be found in the literature, like the assumption that local dominant parties lose in elections at higher levels (Reif 1980; Hadley, Morass & Nick 1989) or that party systems that become horizontally linked, tend to homogenize (Katz 1999). But it is still a bit too early for the production of testable hypotheses. First the conceptual tools need some further refinement. It was the aim of this comparative exercise to bring together the essential building blocks. Now the real work can start.

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RSCAS-EUI

Endnotes

1. The version presented here has profited very much from the discussions with the colleagues of the European Forum 1999-2000 at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and with the participants of the conference '*Multi-level party systems: Europeanization and the reshaping of national political representation*' (EUI, December 1999). I am especially very grateful to Stefano Bartolini and to Steve Wolinetz, who might find some of their very good ideas reflected in this paper. The responsibility for errors and mistakes and for the bad ideas remains of course my own.
1. Besides the more theoretical arguments that will be developed below, this point is also without any doubt the product of my own Belgian background and bias. If Belgium qualifies as a state, then an extremely wide range of polities do qualify. Belgium has – to mention only this – not one single national political party and no national public sphere or 'demos'.
2. We deliberately use 'multi-layered' and not 'multi-level', since the concept of multi-level governance refers to much more than just the presence of more than one level.
3. Martens was not defeated, but simply refused to be a candidate if he could not be number one on the list. He was able to refuse to be elected, because being a MEP is not a prerequisite to remain president of the EPP. After the June 1999 elections he further annoyed his home party by saying that he was rather happy with the results. The EPP had done well at the European level, but the Flemish CVP faced its poorest result ever.

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