

**Europeanisation and Political Parties: Towards a Framework for Analysis**

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The aim of this paper is to advance political party analysis by incorporating the impact of the EU on national political systems, and by extension on the behaviour, internal and external, of political parties. The impact of European integration on national parties, analysed in a comparative perspective, is generally absent from the literature on European integration as well as that on parties, although there is a growing focus on the activities of European Parliamentary groups and transnational party federations. The term 'Europeanisation' is employed to label a process of adaptation and adjustment by parties to changed conditions within their domestic political systems. I label the various responses by parties 'Europeanisation' – whether it is organisational change repositioning the role of their EP delegation, programmatic developments signalling a more sophisticated attention to the influence of the EU in domestic policy-making, increased factionalism or even new party formation, an additional dimension in party-government relations, or new linkages with European actors. Five broad areas of investigation are presented: 1) policy change; 2) organisational; 3) patterns of party competition; 4) party-government relations; and 5) relations beyond the national party system. The paper is divided as follows. 'Europeanisation' is briefly reviewed before setting out my working definition. The concept is then linked with political party activity. The five areas of investigation then make up the rest of the paper before concluding with thoughts regarding a comparative framework for analysing the Europeanisation of parties in future research.

**Introduction**

Europeanisation is a term that has increasingly insinuated itself into the literature on European Union policy-making. In its broadest meaning, it refers to responses by actors - institutional and otherwise - to the effects of European integration. Although more precise meanings vary (see below), a common denominator in most usages of the term is the identification of a national-supranational nexus regarding authoritative policy decisions. Consequently, most efforts involve the identification of appropriate levels of analysis, key institutional actors, and policy competence ownership; employing network analogies, etc., all as part of the attempt to label a process of change and adaptation which is understood to be a consequence of the development of the European Union. Within this growing literature, there is practically no mention made of the role of political parties as actors in the integration process, either caught up in this phenomenon, or else as key actors possibly influencing the very nature and direction of change and adaptation by institutions, etc.

On the other hand, political party analysis has only recently begun to acknowledge the European Union as an environment that holds potentially significant consequences for political parties. To date, this literature can be divided into two camps. The first

explores attempts to recreate party activity outside the national political system, that is, a focus on party groups in the European Parliament (EP) and the development of transnational party federations. This literature dates from the end of the 1970's, when direct elections to the EP began. The development of the European Union 'system' has often been the implicit dependent variable in this analytical tradition. The second camp focuses on the European policy orientation of individual political parties. Whether organised by party family or national political system, this orientation has been characterised by a pronounced descriptive dimension. Domestic determinants of party positions have prevented the generation of truly comparative analyses. In neither of these two approaches are national political parties viewed as actors in the European integration and/or policy process nor as actors affected by this process, apart from instances when the EU has become an issue itself politicised in elections.

It seems self-evident that as national governments are organised on partisan bases, with parties operating at several levels of activity in government and opposition, and as national executives, even within the context of inter-governmental bargaining, remain party politicians, that some systematic framework for the inclusion of party politics into the study of EU policy-making be constructed. Similarly, political parties have been affected by European integration, not the least of which their operating environments, national political systems, have themselves been transformed by the development and impact of EU policy-making (the 'Europeanisation of domestic politics and policy-making'). There is therefore a connection between the two phenomenon, that is, the change and adaptation of national institutions and styles of policy-making and issue agendas by virtue of EU inputs, and the ability of political parties to pursue their traditional functions of representation, legislation and government formation. A rigorous definition of the concept of Europeanisation does present an opportunity to systematically analyse political parties as organisations responding to the effects of European integration upon their primary operating arena, the national political system. The aim of this paper is therefore to advance political party analysis by incorporating the impact of the EU on national political systems, and by extension on the behaviour, internal and external, of political parties. One consequence of this effort will be a better understanding of the incentives of national political parties to organise their individual resources and capabilities at the European level, whether within the EP or else in the organisation and activities of transnational party federations.

The paper is divided as follows. I will first briefly review the 'Europeanisation' terminology, before setting out my own definition. I will then attempt to link Europeanisation with political party activity. Next, I will proceed to a consideration of the Europeanisation of political parties by evaluating the potential impact upon the function of parties, and then onto innovative responses, or empirical evidence of change, by parties. I will conclude by summarising my findings in a framework for the comparative analysis of the Europeanisation of political parties.

### **Europeanisation**

Europeanisation is a term that has become increasingly employed to label or describe a process of transformation, but whether of domestic dynamics as a result of European integration, or of EU institutions themselves, consensus remains unachieved, as witnessed by the sample of definitions below:

- *de jure* transfer of sovereignty to the EU level (Lawton, 1999);
- sharing of power between national governments and the EU (also labelled by some 'Europeification', Andersen & Eliassen, 1993);
- a process by which domestic policy areas become increasingly subject to European policy-making (Börzel, 1999);
- the emergence and development at the European level of a distinct political system, a set of political institutions that formalises and routinises interaction among the actors, and the growth of policy networks specialising in the creation of authoritative rules (Capraro, Green Cowles and Risse, 2000);
- extending the boundaries of the relevant political space beyond the member states (Kohler-Koch, 1999).

Some use interchangeably in the same study terms such as 'impact of Europe', 'impact of Europeanisation' and the impact of European integration (Mair, 2000).

As demonstrated by these excerpts, the definitions require further precision in order to be useful as a tool for analysis. One could also say, following Morisi and Morlino (1999), that there are different forms of Europeanisation operating at different levels at different times. Nonetheless, one would think that Europeanisation has something to do with the penetration of the European dimension into national arenas of politics and policy. In a 1994 *JCMS* article, I defined Europeanisation as 'an incremental process re-orienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making'. By 'organizational logic' I meant the 'adaptive processes of organizations to a changed or changing environment'. I wanted to emphasise the role of organisational adaptation, learning and policy change. Drawing upon my definition, Radaelli (2000) argues that the concept of Europeanisation refers to 'a set of processes through which the EU political, social and economic dynamics become part of the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies'. His definition stresses the importance of change in the logic of behaviour, but does not mention organisations *per se*. Nevertheless, the definition accommodates both organisations and individuals. It seems 'sufficiently broad to cover the major interests of political scientists, such as political structure, public policy, identities and the cognitive dimension of politics'. Radaelli further argues what Europeanisation is not. It is not convergence, although convergence may be one dimension of Europeanisation, as it may also produce divergence; it is not harmonisation, as Europeanisation may result in regulatory competition, for example; and it is not political integration, as Europeanisation is a consequence of European integration. The central insight in the Ladrech/Radaelli definition of Europeanisation is the focus on the adaptive response by actors to a changed or changing environment, in particular, the primary environment or arena which has most direct impact on resources, system or organisation maintenance, etc.

As mentioned in the introduction of the paper, most academic work in which the term Europeanisation is employed involves institutional and policy analysis with a primary focus on domestic political structures, e.g., the role of parliaments, strengthened executives, new policy networks and coalitions, administrative innovation, as well as the effects of European Court of Justice rulings on national legal systems. Bearing in mind this paper's definition of Europeanisation, it seems clear that what most analysts have been engaged in is precisely to understand the direction and change in the logic

of behaviour of institutions and policy entrepreneurs stimulated by advancements in the EU institutional and policy competences. Kohler-Koch's definition specifically draws attention to the extra-national dimension of changed behaviour and new strategies for goal attainment. In my original definition, I suggested that change may be an incremental process, but in some cases, especially where a dramatic EU input into domestic political systems has occurred, for instance the launch of the single currency, changed or altered patterns of behaviour may be more rapid. Europeanisation may be understood much more as a response to a type of challenge, whether of a marginal degree such as developing or building relationships with recently introduced actors and institutions, or more significantly to the relevance of an existing organisation and its ability to attain certain indispensable goals. If we understand Europeanisation as the process by which individuals and organisational actors and institutions respond to the altered conditions of their operating environment by the development of the European Union since the launch of the Single European Act, then a single or linear line of response is virtually impossible. Rather, variable responses, even within single national political systems, are most likely. Thus, as Radaelli has noted, Europeanisation is not to be confused with convergence or harmonisation, although these may be manifestations of the response. Unitary or federal territorial designs; the mix of public and private components of the economy; longstanding political cultural traditions; patterns of party competition, etc., all of these factors condition the response of actors to the penetration of EU inputs into their operating environments. Although it is not the focus of this paper, one may also understand that the response of national actors to EU inputs may influence the supranational level as well, thereby suggesting that in some cases we may identify a feedback or reflexive relationship. When we turn to political parties, it becomes clear that additional constraints exist that influence the 'direction and shape' of organisational change.

### **Europeanisation and political parties**

Specific analyses of Europeanisation and parties and party systems are a rather recent feature of the academic debate. To date, the development of a European dimension of party systems and interest groups has dominated the field, such as it is, and unsurprisingly regarding parties, this is tied in most cases to the organisation and elections of and to the European Parliament. Mair (2000) finds very little impact of Europeanisation on national party systems. 'Indeed, I suggest that of the many areas of domestic politics which may have experienced an impact from Europe, it is party systems in particular that have perhaps proved to be most impervious to change' (p. 4). By this statement Mair means party systems have experienced little or no *direct* change to the format and mechanics of party systems. However, he makes a significant qualification when addressing a potential *indirect* impact arising from the impact of European integration:

In the first place, European integration increasingly operates to constrain the freedom of movement of national governments, and hence encourages a hollowing out of competition among those parties with a governing aspiration. As such, it promotes a degree of consensus across the mainstream and an inevitable reduction in the range of policy alternatives available to voters. Second, by taking Europe itself out of national competition, and by working within a supranational structure that clearly lacks democratic accountability, party and political leaderships do little to counteract the

notion of the irrelevance of conventional politics (pp. 48-49).

Mair also does not intentionally analyse the impact of European integration on individual parties. According to Mair, in the end, the absence of a genuine European level party system explains the insularity of national party systems from the impact of European integration.

I agree that in terms of format and mechanics (other than in the context of a European Parliament election), national party systems appear to exhibit very little in the way of Europeanisation. Mair determines as not very salient new party formation and party splits, in the sense of having an impact upon the relevant parties in a party system. However, the two points raised by Mair regarding an indirect impact are precisely the areas of investigation for evidence of the Europeanisation of political parties, for they both draw attention to altered conditions of parties' primary operating environments and crucial associated factors. Let us focus on his two points, namely the constraints on government policy manoeuvrability which 'hollow out' competition among parties with a governing aspiration, and the growing notion of the irrelevance of conventional politics, both traceable as much as possible to effects emanating from EU processes. There would seem to be a rather substantial potential effect upon the classic functions of political parties, e.g. recruitment, election campaigning, interest aggregation, interest articulation, party government roles, etc. If we accept this assumption, then it follows that those parties with a governing aspiration will seek to adapt and/or influence this state of affairs. This is because the consequences for parties is growing irrelevance, defined as a diminishing capability to alter existing macroeconomic policies and a shrinking scope of issues that can be promised resolution in election campaigns.

Therefore, bearing in mind that as I have defined Europeanisation there is an emphasis upon the role of adaptation and policy change, and further, that Europeanisation does not mean either convergence nor harmonisation, the evidence of Europeanisation will vary across and within political systems. Consequently, we should view European integration as an independent variable and increased government policy constraints and the public perception of growing irrelevance of conventional politics as dependent variables. European integration influences the operating arenas, or environments, of national political parties, and the Europeanisation of parties is consequently a dependent variable. We should search for evidence of party adaptation to this changed environment, be it policy change and/or organisational change. In other words, the Europeanisation of political parties will be reflected in their response to the impact upon their environments. The response can be identified in changes that produce new and sometimes innovative relationships, policies or structures.

National political parties, unlike government bureaucracies, individual politicians, and interest groups, do not have the ability or opportunity to develop privileged or intimate relationships with authoritative EU actors. Interest groups may independently approach other similar organisations in other EU member states in order to create European level associations, or respond to entreaties by the European Commission itself. Government agencies and bureaucracies come into contact with EU institutions, or else are obliged to develop new administrative means with which to translate EU regulations, directives, etc. into corresponding national ones. National government politicians may come to develop personal relations with their counterpart in other EU

member states in order to ally on particular issues in Council of Minister meetings, European Council, etc.. All of these actors have a certain amount of latitude in their adaptation to EU inputs, or else have little choice, as in the case of government agencies, and must therefore liase as quickly as possible in order to avoid negative repercussions later. Political parties, as I assume, have the incentive and motivation to 'come to terms' with the changes in their environment as it impacts their fortunes, but unlike the examples just given, they are constrained in a number of ways. The most basic dilemma, though perhaps not so obvious, is that there is little if anything in the way of resources that the EU possesses that can be translated into a positive gain for a political party. New and explicit rules in fact forbid a transfer of EU funds to national parties: 'The funding for political parties at European level provided out of the Community budget may not be used to fund, either directly or indirectly, political parties at national level' (Article 191 amendment in Treaty of Nice). Furthermore, political parties do not have an extra-national space or environment to operate within. The European Parliament is of course a *European* institution, and although we may state that the problem of irrelevance is common to all parties with a governing aspiration, the European parliament has neither the mandate nor the composition to intrude upon national circumstances.

Bereft of direct channels into authoritative EU decision-making, yet subject to influences upon their own operating environments, Europeanisation is very much a complex phenomenon to identify. This is especially so as when in government, national party leaders are also in most cases national government leaders, and as such may pursue policies and strategies with an appeal beyond the strictly partisan (this is most likely the case in instances of coalition government). Although we may agree with Mair's identification of the two indirect effects upon political parties, neither are so dramatic as to cause immediate and high-profile changes. Nevertheless, it is possible to outline the broad areas where one may recognise changes that reflect a process of Europeanisation. The particular task for the analyst is to trace changes back to an EU source, or else to recognise an intended usage of the EU as a possible aid in the resolution of an issue, or to evaluate the problems that the presence of the EU-issue presents for parties. Five areas of investigation for evidence of Europeanisation in parties and party activity are proposed: 1) policy/programmatic content; 2) organisational; 3) patterns of party competition; 4) party-government relations; and 5) relations beyond the national party system.

**1) Policy change:** One of the most explicit types of evidence of Europeanisation will be programmatic change, made in party programmes. This can be measured quantitatively - increased mention of the EU in terms of European policy *per se* and in references to other policy areas, normally those considered to be domestic policy. Qualitatively, references to the EU as an additional factor in the pursuit of policies traditionally considered domestic, e.g. employment, immigration and asylum, etc., may develop. This will reflect enhanced European policy expertise among party specialists, as well as agreement with the leadership to integrate the European dimension into references to domestic policy. Additionally, references to co-operation with transnational organisations such as transnational party federations, and European level institutions such as the European Parliament, may be made more explicit. Overall, policy and programmatic references to the role of the EU as a factor in

domestic policy pursuits will become more sophisticated over time, as recognition of the impact of the EU becomes clearer, and strategies proposed *for* the EU develop.

Examples: In the evolution of the former Italian Communist Party (PCI) to its present day incarnation as the Democrats of the Left (DS), explicit positive references to the EU as a factor in Italian modernisation and as an anchor of the supranational commitments of the party were made, thus instrumentalising the EU as part of party strategy. In the French Socialist Party (PS), the appearance of specific recommendations for the direction of EU policy, e.g. in public services, as well as mentions of the need to strengthen the transnational party federation, the Party of European Socialists, have appeared more regularly since the late 1990's (Ladrech, 2000).

**2) Organisational change:** Internal party rules and statutes regarding the role and influence of the delegation to the European Parliament in party congresses and leadership bodies may reflect the greater profile of European policy, and the leadership's need to manage it more closely. Organisational links with actors outside of the national territory, as with transnational party federations may also stimulate organisational innovation.

Examples: Many parties, for instance the British Labour Party, have included the leader of their national delegation to the EP on party leadership bodies, e.g. the National Executive Committee. Increased liaison between national party and EP delegation has also taken place. Some parties, such as the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA), have gone so far as to elect their delegates to the biennial congress of the Party of European Socialists, thus unintentionally perhaps, causing party management problems for the national party leadership. In Belgium, the EP delegation has full voting rights at Socialist party congresses.

**3) Patterns of party competition:** To the extent the EU itself becomes politicised in a national political system, new voters may be targeted in an opportunistic strategy, either in a pro- or anti- EU position. The politicisation of the EU may become a cause for concern for party management, even leading to new party formation. Determinants affecting changing tactics and strategies by parties designed to capitalise on the 'EU issue' will be existing patterns of competition incorporating the number of parties in a national party system, the presence of a strongly pro- or anti- EU party, the nature of a party's 'dominant coalition' (Panbianco, 1988) determining whether such a party strategy will cause internal dis-equilibrium, etc.

Examples: British politics provides two examples of party strategy emphasising European policy, one pro, Labour, one anti, Conservative. Although background factors accounting for a new direction regarding the party stance vis-à-vis the EU may be different - policy evolution in the case of Labour, factionalism in the Conservatives - each leadership has sought to incorporate its position on the EU as a means of attracting and/or stabilising its voter base. In France, a new party, the RPF, formed by defectors from the Gaullist party (RPR) at the time of the 1999 European Parliament elections, fills the political space for a nationalist mainstream conservative party abandoned by the policy evolution of RPR party leaders during the 1990's, especially the European policy pursued by President

Chirac (RPR). The positioning of Bavarian CSU party leader Stoiber vis-à-vis the national CDU over the single currency also reflects aspects of party competition.

**4) Party-government relations:** Participation of government leaders in EU forums may strain relations with the party on particular policies. In other words, inter-governmental bargaining - either IGC type, European Council, or Council of Ministers/COREPER - may distance the government/party leader from party programmatic positions in an unintended fashion. This may set into motion qualitative changes in the nature of party-government relations over time. Party-government relations on EU matters may become 'push-pull' in nature. Government is 'pushed' by party to maximalist positions on matters close to party programme, for example in the social dimension for social democratic parties. Government is 'pulled' by party to minimalist positions on institutional matters that run counter to notions of state sovereignty.

Examples: Divergence between government and party on EU issues may prompt changes in the manner of party management, i.e., greater control over party apparatus as in the case of the British Labour Party, or more flexible or looser relations over EU issues as in the case of the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP) regarding party/government positions over single currency membership (Aylott, 1997). Where the party leader is not prime minister, as in the case of France, Norway, and Italy, the relative independence of the party leadership from government may result in the party acting more explicitly as the 'conscience' of the government, 'pushing' and 'pulling' it in directions closer to purist perspectives on policy. The implications of party-government relations subject to Europeanisation dynamics may be the development of party programmes more explicitly integrating what is possible in an institutional environment which includes decision-making in EU institutions. Also, the liaison between party and government on EU matters would take on new forms of interaction, in part by enhancing the role of the party's EP delegation by linking them more intimately into party-government relations (Raunio, 2000).

**5) Relations beyond the national party system:** Europeanisation may stimulate new perspectives on transnational co-operation with parties from other EU member states to the extent that new organisational and programmatic activities are promoted. Niedermayer (1983) proposed a model of development for a European level party organisation, differentiating between three stages: contact, co-operation, and integration. The four major party families represented in the European Parliament and have some form of transnational party organisation affiliating member national parties. The social democratic Party of European Socialists and the christian democratic (and increasingly conservative) European People's Party are the furthest along in the co-operation stage, with a permanent organisation and frequent and prepared interaction. The Liberal and Green federations follow (Dietz, 2000).

Examples: If Europeanisation involves a challenge and response to the policy orientation of party families (Marks and Wilson, 1999), then it is not surprising that the PES has evolved beyond the other transnational federations in the development of European policy alternatives, as well as in the integration of national party and European Union officials in

shared programmatic initiatives, such as mobilising support for the Employment chapter in the Amsterdam Treaty (Johansson, 1999; Ladrech, 2000). Support is also expressed for a more transparent and permanent form of funding for these European 'proto-parties' from a combination of EU and national sources, initiatives supported by all four party federations. Support for this initiative was expressed at the EU summit in Porto in June 2000 and introduced in the Nice Treaty in December 2000.

National parties outside of a transnational party family may seek Europe-level legitimation by developing links to a relevant European Parliament party group, as in the case of Berlusconi/Forza Italia and the European People's Party (EPP).

Party personnel, from party leaders and prime ministers to party euro-experts, etc, engage in partisan networks in extra-national forums, thus developing contacts and possible influence aimed at Brussels decision-making (Ladrech, 2000).

### **Conclusion**

Organisationally, there are limits to the response by national parties to the impact of the European Union on national politics and policy-making. Finances, electoral considerations, relations with government, opposition status, all are based upon national considerations. The increased relevance of the EU upon domestic policies impacts parties, but not in such a manner that a policy or institutional response route is clear. EU specialists within individual parties share the same problem as national parliaments, namely, there is no one person nor parliamentary committee that can have sole responsibility for EU issues, since strictly speaking the EU is involved in so many policy areas. This emphasises not only the need for co-ordination between party, government and EP delegation, but also transnationally between parties, relevant ministers, and the respective party groups in the EP.

What I have tried to accomplish in this paper is to provide a basic framework with which to investigate changes in political parties that result from the challenge presented to their classic functions by the impact of the EU upon their primary operating environments, the national political system. I label the various responses by parties Europeanisation - whether it be organisational changes repositioning the role of their EP delegation, programmatic developments signalling a more sophisticated attention to the influence of the EU in domestic policy-making, increased factionalism or even new party formation, an additional dimension in party-government relations, or new linkages with European actors beyond the national political system. Parties adapt to their environments, just as most organisations when presented with institutional change. The nature of the environmental change, in this case external inputs into domestic political systems, provokes a variety of responses. These responses range from allowing national executives less scrutiny from parliaments, sharing responsibility over different policy areas, and relinquishing aspects of economic policy to supranational actors such as the European Central Bank. All of these alter to some extent the terrain upon which political parties operate, though in usually subtle rather than dramatic fashion. Nevertheless, the 'deepening' of the EU is increasingly presenting parties with a governmental vocation a challenge in terms of conceptualising government policy as purely a self-contained national exercise. Mair's remarks concerning the apparent growing lack of competition between parties may

contribute to the overall de-politicisation of national politics. So the EU matters in national party politics, although this varies across member state political systems.

Assuming that parties-as-organisations respond to changes in their environments, we should expect to witness many forms of response to the impact of the EU on domestic politics, i.e., Europeanisation. By presenting five areas for investigation, with many of them inextricably linked, one ought to be able to begin to systematically compare party responses across political systems, bearing in mind of course that each political system represents a bundle of national-specific factors that condition party responses, from referenda traditions, two-party or multi-party systems, the presence of Euro-sceptic public opinion, the level of economic development of the member state, coalition dynamics, etc. Yet these are the very factors that comparativists must always pay close attention to when engaging in the comparative enterprise. The Europeanisation of political parties should not present an insurmountable obstacle in this respect.

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