
Europeanization and political parties

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Abstract

This Living Review makes the case for the study of Europeanization and political parties as related but distinct from the study of political parties *and* European integration. It then presents the Europeanization approach to parties, noting that some of the components in this approach developed to study policy and institutional change may not lend themselves so well to the study of national parties. This argument distinguishes between direct and indirect effects of European Union influence on parties. Next, it briefly discusses the application of party Europeanization research to post-communist parties. This is followed by a discussion of proposed normative consequences of party Europeanization. Finally, suggestions for further research focuses on the need for refining the analytic framework in order to better identify the causal mechanisms specific to party Europeanization.

Keywords: Europeanization, political parties, political representation, political science

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1 Introduction: Parties and European integration

The Europeanization of political parties has emerged only recently as a separate research area. Although the study of political parties and European integration entered the field of political party research in the late 1970s in response to the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979, it was not until the 1990s that the concept of Europeanization and political party research intersected. Why was this so? The explanation may lie in the fact that political party analysis has focused overwhelmingly on domestic political systems and the variables that derive from each system's national characteristics, whether institutional, social, economic or cultural. Whether in single country cases or large-N cross-national studies, the sub-discipline of comparative politics, and within it the study of political parties, has evaluated domestic factors as the independent variables. In other words, political party analysts did not, as a matter of course, search for extra-national factors for explanations for domestic party change or related electoral developments, e.g. party system re-alignment. The emergence of a research area that combines the concept of Europeanization with a focus on political party activity can be attributed to a broader turn in comparative politics toward incorporating European integration dynamics into explanations of domestic political change. Amongst the array of changes that have been examined are the activities of political parties and party systems.

The study of the relationship between party politics and European integration did not develop in parallel with the integration process, although there is some discussion of party political dynamics in one of the seminal works explaining European integration, *The Uniting of Europe* by Haas (1958). This can be explained by a number of reasons. To a large extent, the first three decades of the European integration process unfolded under the mantle of public – and therefore party-political – disinterest, what has also been labelled a ‘permissive consensus’ (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970). The technocratic process of decision-making in Brussels contributed to this. Additionally, much of the politics, as it were, was between member states and the European Commission, that is, inter-governmental bargaining represented the arena that approximated political conflict, not partisan forces *per se*. The essentially ‘low’ politics of these decades, that is, the nature of the policy issues promoted and agreed with member states, were not of a character that were easily identified with a left-right ‘national’ political spectrum. Finally, the institution most clearly indicative of partisan, and thereby party politics, the European Parliament, had not attained either the inter-institutional power in relation to the Council of Ministers to become a factor in European level decision-making nor had it the mobilizing attraction of direct elections.

We can divide the study of political parties *and* European integration into two broad areas. The first represents a focus on national parties' positions on European integration and developments at the European level, mostly but not exclusively involving party groups and elections to the European Parliament and less so the development of transnational party federations. This area of study is linked with the evolution of the European Union itself, both in terms of its institutions and scope of policy-making. In the case of transnational party federations, or Euro-parties, developments at the European level occur first, in that scholars react to the establishment of transnational party federations by situating them in the context of a) the first direct elections to the European Parliament, and b) advances in the political system itself of the European Union. Early references to these Euro-parties were generally descriptions of the organization and membership (Henig 1979; for particular party families, see Irving 1979 for Christian Democrats, and Featherstone 1988 for Socialists). Pridham and Pridham (1979) explored in more depth the institutional and contextual conditions leading to the establishment of these Euro-parties, finding that their organizational format was very much conditioned by the relationship between national parties and the degree of institutional development of the EU itself. Niedermayer (1983) further elaborated the developmental trajectory of Euro-parties, suggesting three stages in which the third would result in near autonomy of the Euro-party from its national party membership.

From 1979 onwards, with the establishment of direct elections and formation of party groups in the European Parliament along partisan lines, a new focus on the organization, ideology, voting patterns, etc., of these actors ensued (early work on MEP voting patterns is [Attinà 1990](#); on organization [Bardi 1994](#) and [Ladrech 1996](#); [Hix and Lord 1997](#)). This focus on MEPs and party groups has continued to the present, with increasingly sophisticated survey and other analytical approaches to understanding the internal dynamics of the individual party groups as well as competition within the European Parliament (see for example [Hix, Noury, and Roland 2007](#); on national parties and internal EP decision-making see [Whitaker 2005](#)). Few have investigated the relationship between MEPs and their national party organization (an exception is [Raunio 2000](#)). The ‘re-launch’ of the European integration process from the mid-1980s onward (reflecting the dynamics of the Single European Act 1986 and especially the Single Market programme), also generated a renewed scholarly interest in national party position on the EU and transnational party federations. The volume edited by [Gaffney \(1996\)](#) was one of the first attempts to provide a co-ordinated analysis both of national party positions on the EU as well as the development of EP party groups and transnational party federations since the Maastricht Treaty. Literature in this vein has continued to be produced, that is, charting developments in a national party’s policy toward the EU.

As for transnational party federations, renewed interest came as a result of European level developments. The Maastricht Treaty was a turning point in the fortunes of these so-called Euro-parties for two reasons. First, language in the Treaty, Art 138a, gave official recognition to their place and role in the integration process. This fact contributed to efforts by certain member parties to institute organizational changes leading to the enhancement of the profile of the party federations. Secondly, national party leaders, acting under the auspices of the two main party federations, the Christian Democrat-led European People’s Party (EPP) and the Party of European Socialists (PES), began to increase their co-ordinated efforts at influencing the EU agenda through Party Leaders’ Summits ([Hix 1996](#); for the Single European Act, Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties, see [Johansson 1999, 2002a,b](#)). Attention to these European level partisan organizations continued over the course of the 1990s and up to the present, with debates over a number of issues such as the efficacy of party federations ([Lightfoot 2005](#)), future developments of each federation ([Ladrech 2000](#); [Johansson and Zervakis 2002](#); [Hanley 2008](#)), whether a European party system is emerging ([Bardi 2002](#)), the impact of new EU statutes regarding Euro-parties, etc. Although national parties are implicitly acknowledged as actors influencing the fortunes and future role for these parties, party elites are the primary and explicit decision-makers, and therefore broader domestic party political dynamics are often not integrated into the analysis. The dependent variable of these efforts remains the same, a focus on explaining European level changes and activities on the part of national party elites acting through transnational party federations.

The study of political parties *and* the European Union has certainly established itself as a significant sub-field in political party research. We can expect that the study of party positions on the EU to continue, especially as new treaties or fundamental challenges to and from the EU reverberate in the political systems and public opinion of its member states. The distinction between studies that investigate EU-level partisan developments and the more recent emphasis on Europeanization and parties that more directly aims to analyze domestic party change is not watertight. A good example of this mixture of levels as well as areas of analysis is the edited volume by [Marks and Steenbergen \(2004\)](#), which includes chapters evaluating the extent to which the European Parliament represents an arena for partisan competition; the election manifestos of transnational party federations; and party positions on European integration. At the same time, however, there are also chapters on the salience of the EU as an issue within national parties and the potential for the EU to influence national elections. In the latter cases, the concept of Europeanization is not employed, but as we shall see in the next section, it is precisely the ways in which the EU becomes integrated into national parties and party politics that the Europeanization research agenda addresses.

2 Europeanization and party research

As the previous section has explained, a good amount of research has been generated over the past twenty years on the subject of political parties and the European Union. What distinguishes the research agenda of Europeanization and political parties from the work carried out in the first area of study, is an explicit focus on how national parties and party systems are affected by the influence of the EU. Whether direct or indirect, these are changes in parties such that the causal trail can be traced back to a EU input. Bearing in mind that the effort at disentangling the many factors that can induce change (in parties or other actors, institutions and policies) can be difficult in the first place, if not contested (Graziano and Vink 2007), there are specific methodological issues related to the application of the Europeanization research agenda to political parties. In essence, the research strategies summarised and presented by Haverland (2007) – process tracing, counterfactual reasoning and inclusion of non-EU cases in the research design as a control group – have a relevance more particular for policy and institutions than actors for whom the EU has no statutory or direct impact (see below). This does not mean that efforts are confined to, at best, thick description of changes in parties, but simply that the factors that precipitate change in parties may depart from those associated with Europeanization research in general, e.g. the ‘misfit’ condition.

Europeanization, as a concept applied to the study of parties, is employed here in its most generally understood sense, which is an analysis of the domestic impact of the EU. Originally developed in response to change in policies and institutions, the application of a Europeanization research agenda to parties – or domestic non-governmental organization in general, has emerged without some of the key explanatory variables that have been developed to understand policy and institutional change. For example, the ‘trigger’ for change – or rather the potential conditions for change – are pressures deriving from the interplay of factors, but in most cases incorporating a degree of ‘misfit’ (Börzel 2005) between domestic actors’ activities and governmental policy on the one hand, and EU policies and decision-making style on the other, such that an adjustment to EU norms and practices ensues. In the Europeanization literature, explanations for observed variation in national actors and institutions have posited such mediating factors as the presence of ‘veto players’ and formal institutions. For actors in particular, whether parties or interest groups (Ladrech 2005), or policy or norm ‘entrepreneurs’ within and outside government, or even sub-national governmental actors, the EU may also provide a form of ‘political opportunity structure’ that opens up possibilities to exploit in the pursuit of their interests (here an example presents itself of the close intertwining of the two areas, as national parties have at times invoked membership in a transnational party federation or EP party group for purposes of domestic competition, in particular for reasons related to domestic legitimacy; see Van Hecke and Matuschek 2005).

As applied to party research, a Europeanization approach means that the focus includes such arenas and activities as party organization, party manifestos and programmes, party-government relations, patterns of party competition, etc. (see Ladrech 2002 for an early framework for analysis). Within this particular research area there is a distinction between parties in post-communist member states and those from the older, pre-2004 accession states (Lewis 2006a). This facet will be considered separately in Section 4 below. Furthermore, it is necessary to adapt some of the intervening variables developed for institutions and policies to the study of parties. This is because the application of the Europeanization research agenda, as applied to parties, is rather problematic due to the manner in which they ‘experience’ the influence and operation of EU policy and decision-making.

2.1 The direct impact of the EU on parties

Although Mair (2007b) usefully draws attention to the direct and indirect effects of the EU on parties and party competition, which we shall return to below, we should note at the outset that unlike domestic policies and institutions, Europe does not ‘hit’ parties in a direct manner. Put simply, the EU is neither an attractive opportunity structure as it may be for certain interest groups or sub-national actors in federal or quasi-federal states – there are no apparent resources that can be transferred nor allies that could be useful for domestic partisan gain, nor are they legally obliged to interact with either EU institutions or operate at the EU level (attention to regional parties, e.g. Scottish National party, and Europeanization is developing; see Hepburn 2010). So, in a sense, the impact of the EU is by definition indirect on national political parties. This situation can be explained from a rational-institutionalist perspective as well. What incentives does the EU hold for parties that could induce a change in behaviour, as might be the case for interest groups for example (although research suggests that even here the domestic political system remains the primary locus of activity; see Beyers and Kerremans 2007). The answer is little to none. EU rules forbid a transfer of funds from whatever source (and this includes transnational party federations) into the coffers of national parties; individual parties are unable to influence the EU decision-making process in order to gain an advantage in domestic competition (this is especially so for opposition parties, as they are also bereft of representation in the Council of Ministers); elections to the European Parliament remain for the most part second-order (at least in the older member states, see Schmitt 2005 or the Living Review by Marsh and Mikhaylov 2010; in post-communist member states, see Koepke and Ringe 2006); and last but not least, the goals of national parties are to maximize votes and gain office, both of which the EU contributes nothing toward (in a member state with pronounced euro-sceptic attitudes, it may even be counter-productive to trumpet involvement in any fashion with EU level actors).

It would appear then that political parties are not, at first sight, ideal candidates to incorporate into a Europeanization research agenda due to their ‘insularity’ from EU influence (but see below for parties in post-communist member states). As we have established, this relates primarily to the absence of direct and legal EU inputs into parties’ primary operating environments – rules – and activities – campaigning, etc. Nonetheless, there is evidence that national political parties have indeed experienced changes in several dimensions. Although we can generally portray EU influences as indirect when employing the Europeanization approach, Mair (2007b) makes an important distinction between direct and indirect effects of the EU when he poses the question of whether “Europeanization as penetration has directly led to the formation of new political parties, whether in the national or European arenas” (Mair 2007b: 157). The implications of such a phenomenon for existing national parties is bound up in a more fundamental dynamic, that is, whether “a European dimension – however defined – constitutes a wholly separate and new dimension in party competition, or whether it reinforces, is absorbed within, or is even exploited by, pre-existing dimensions of competition” (Mair 2007b: 158). This ‘direct’ impact of the EU on national parties and party systems, that is, the creation of a new dimension in party competition, was investigated by Hix (1999), in which he suggested that a pro- and anti-integration axis was emerging, but orthogonal to the left-right axis. Further, for parties divided over the question of European integration, a new dimension presents party leaderships with the task of containing dissent while maintaining a strategy oriented to the dominant left-right pattern of competition (Edwards 2007; Gabel and Scheve 2007). Research in this vein has continued to explore the possible impact of the EU issue on traditional alignments (van der Eijk and Franklin 2004; Hooghe and Marks 2008), and how left-right determines parties’ responses to Europe (Marks and Wilson 2000; Marks, Wilson, and Ray 2002; Hellström 2008). As for the impact of the EU on national party systems, at least in pre-2004 EU member states, the conclusion by Mair (2000) has been prominent. When taking into consideration the impact of the EU on creating new parties (format) or re-structuring the nature of

issue competition between parties (mechanics), he finds that in general there is very little impact of a direct nature.

It would appear that the EU's direct impact is upon the domestic political environment in which parties operate, not on parties *per se*. In this sense, then, parties respond to changes or trends in public opinion. Along these lines, a more specific focus on eurosceptic attitudes and the response by parties has consequently become another important variation on this theme (Taggart 1998; Kopecký and Mudde 2002; Lubbers and Scheepers 2005; special issue of *Acta Politica* edited by Hooghe and Marks 2007; de Vries 2007). In the end, the importance of this line of research for parties lies in the attention it brings to the conditions in which parties operate, rather than what occurs *within* parties.

2.2 The indirect impact of the EU on parties and party systems

As we have established above, the direct impact of the EU upon parties is limited to the environmental context in which parties operate. Even so, as Börzel and Risse (2007) have acknowledged in the case of the 'goodness of fit' proposition, this "amounts to nothing more than an enabling condition for the domestic impact of Europe, a starting point without much causal weight in and of itself. Domestic change in response to Europe and the EU then requires domestic or European actors to actively construct 'adaptational pressures' and to engage in politics" (Börzel and Risse 2007: 492). It is in this sense of trying to understand where and why change in organizations such as parties occurs that it is "the indirect effects that may well prove the more decisive" (Mair 2007b: 159). By indirect effects is meant changes in the domestic political system that may have an impact on internal features and behaviour of parties. In particular, it is the Europeanization of the national government – specifically in the scope of domestic policy-making – that we find EU-generated constraints may have indirect effects on national parties, and by extension, patterns of party competition.

Ladrech (2002) argued in one of the first attempts to systematize the study of Europeanization and national political parties that, following Mair (2000), the constraints on the range of policy making reduced the scope of policy proposals that parties could offer at elections. Mair (2007b) further elaborated these constraints as manifesting themselves in three ways. The first was a limiting of policy space available to competing parties. This constraint is most applicable for party system research. The second was a reduction in the policy instruments at the disposal of national governments. The third was a limiting of the policy repertoire. All three of these constraints represent the impact of the EU on national government; the effect on parties derives from the overall reduction or limitations on the ability of member state governments – in particular the national executive – to offer choices to voters, and therefore party competition. If this is so, argued Ladrech, there may be several dimensions of party organization and activity to investigate if this reduced manoeuvrability of the government is reflected in parties. He suggested that such evidence of Europeanization could be reflected in a) programmatic change; b) organizational change; c) patterns of party competition; d) party-government relations; and e) relations beyond the national political system. The impact of this framework for analysis has been to introduce more analytical rigor into the use of the term Europeanization as applied to the study of political parties. For example, where this term had been employed in the past, it was used simply as a label to describe a change in the position of a party towards the EU, that is, usually from a hostile or sceptical to a more pro-EU stance (for example in the case of the British Labour Party, Daniels 1998). Published work since Ladrech's contribution has taken up the call for more precision in evaluating the impact of the EU on the internal operation of parties as well as on party competition.

- Programmatic change: several studies have employed comparative and national data on party manifestos in qualitative as well as quantitative ways, that is to detect how much the EU is referred to in these documents what is being proposed, whether there is convergence among

parties, etc. (*inter alia* Kritzinger, Cavatorta, and Chari 2004; Kritzinger and Michalowitz 2005; Dorussen and Nanou 2006; Pennings 2006; Harmel, Somer, and Smith 2007).

- Organizational change: a few studies have sought to investigate internal organizational change, whether evaluating how European integration impacts leadership autonomy (Raunio 2002); or the creation and/or enhancement of EU-related posts within parties (Poguntke *et al.* 2007).
- Patterns of party competition: this dimension most closely follows Mair's discussion of the effect of policy constraints on party competition. The expectation is that there would be indications of a convergence among the major centre-left and centre-right parties. The inverse effect of policy convergence on party competition by major centre-right and centre-left parties is to open up potential competitive space on the extremes of the party system, and it could be that referendums, as in the Netherlands and France in 2005, are examples where, released from the usual channels of party cues, voters express a reaction to the attenuated spectrum of choice. Surprisingly, there is little published work addressing this proposition beyond policy convergence (see above). Some of the literature looks closely at questions of issue salience (Steenbergen and Scott 2004) or identity (Hooghe and Marks 2008). Bernhard (2004) does focus on the implications of limits on economic policy manoeuvre and party competition, but not from the Europeanization perspective. As we shall see in Section 4 below, this is a central feature of the literature on Europeanization and post-communist parties.
- Party-government relations: the assumption here is that the expanding policy competence of the EU may lead to tensions between the party in public office and the party on the ground, with the party in central office playing (or attempting to play) a mediating role. Katz and Mair's (1993) perspective on party organization is evident in Ladrech's assumption, which focuses on consequences of inter-governmental bargaining for government support. This is another dimension that has not seen investigation yet.
- Relations beyond the national party system: although the study of transnational party federations has been discussed in relation to the first broad area of EU studies and political parties, there is some work which takes the national party as the starting point, that is, explaining why a national party should promote or become involved in the activities of its respective transnational party. Van Hecke and Matuschek (2005) study of the Spanish PP and the EPP is one of the few studies to adopt this perspective. Again, the post-communist experience is different from that of the west (see below).

Very few studies have attempted to combine all or most of the above dimensions into one comparative study (Johansson and Raunio 2001 is an exception). Although the list of possible dimensions of change may be expanded, the fact that there is very little published research to date specifically investigating changes in Western European political parties that derive from the impact of Europe suggests that either national parties are 'immune' to indirect as well as direct effects of European integration, or else the conceptual and analytical tools necessary to pursue this research agenda are not yet sufficiently developed (see Section 5 below).

3 Implications for representative democracy

If one accepts that there are indirect effects of Europe on member state political systems, e.g. policy constraints, and political parties are integral to party government, what then are the implications for the role of parties in the contemporary EU member state? Put another way, if there is evidence of policy convergence that affects party competition, and further, that once in government, members of the party in public office (non-government ministers), the party in central office as well as

the party on the ground, are unable to hold government ministers accountable for their actions and decisions in EU level institutions (e.g. the Council of Ministers or European Council), what impact does this have for broader questions of party government, representation and system legitimacy? Mair (2000, 2004, 2007a,b), Ladrech (2007) and, as part of a wider analysis, Bartolini (2005), have explored this issue in regard to *de-politicization* and *disengagement* (Mair), a *democratic deficit inside political parties* (Ladrech), and *party system destructuring* at the national level (Bartolini). All three detect the potential for a profound shift in the relationship between national government and the governed, especially the legitimacy of national elections. For Mair, the inability of citizens to express opposition to EU policies has the potential to feed into opposition to the EU itself. The alternative or simultaneous reaction to the inability to influence EU policy-making through electoral/representational means is withdraw from political participation itself. Mair (2007b) characterizes the situation thusly: the Europeanization of party government could lead to an “effect whereby all elections, and not just European elections, are turned into second-order – or at least second-rate – contests” (Mair 2007b: 161).

Ladrech (2007) argues that despite the increase in EU policy competence, which reduces national policy options, parties have essentially not engaged in any profound internal changes that might produce a), better internal processing of their members in government actions at the European level, i.e. some type of *ex ante* or *ex post* mechanisms, nor b), expertise within the central party organization to lessen dependence on external sources of information and evaluation. This ‘democratic deficit’ inside parties may lead to further discrediting of the legitimacy of party government.

Bartolini (2005) in *Restructuring Europe* argues that in essence, the development of the European Union is akin to the historical evolution of the national state, in that we are witnessing a new political centre in the making, and all of the ensuing dynamics surrounding such a profound development, especially the current “imbalance between the lack of party system structuring at the EU level and the growing potential for party destructuring at the national level”, may undermine national alignments if the ‘sleeping giant’ of public opinion were to be mobilized.

The depoliticization argument advanced by Mair is often noted, but to date it has not been the object of sustained empirical investigation. Interestingly, it is cited in work that comes under the label of ‘politicisation’ (e.g. de Wilde 2007; see a review of this literature by Sudbery and Laffan 2006).

4 Europeanization and parties in post-communist member states

The experience of post-communist political parties and the European Union, or more specifically the impact of European integration upon their development and activities, has been of a different order compared with established parties in the older EU member states. Indeed, as Enyedi (2007: 65) succinctly states, “parties in Eastern Central Europe do not simply adapt to the process of European integration: they are part of it from the very beginning”. The literature on the impact of the EU on post-communist transition and consolidation (see the Living Review by Sedelmeier 2011 for an overview), and parties in particular, has concerned itself with questions of democratization, the instilling of EU norms, and party development factors deriving from EU political conditionality in general, and the specific role of transnational party co-operation (Pridham 2005, 2007). Enyedi and Lewis (2006) conclude that “European Union institutions, and the European integration process in general, have been able to strengthen the position of some parties and weaken others. More important, by influencing coalition-making strategies and facilitating the ideological reorientation (mainly towards moderation) of certain parties, EU integration has contributed to changes in the mechanisms of party systems” (Enyedi and Lewis 2006: 247).

One of the main differences between the indirect effects (Lewis 2006a) of the EU on parties in post-communist member states (and particularly during the pre-accession period) and parties in the west is the role that transnational party federations have played. Pridham (1996, 2001, 2005, 2007) has argued that in terms of programmatic development, campaign guidance and ideological profiles, these western party federations contributed significantly to the developmental trajectory that the main parties in most central European countries followed. Walecki (2007) also suggests that in terms of the regulation of party funding, here too the EU has had an indirect effect, primarily through its promotion of anti-corruption reforms. Party competition, some claim, was indirectly affected – if not impaired – by the decision of most parties in the centre of the political spectrum to agree to ‘not disagree’ over the policy content of the EU *acquis communautaire* that they were obliged to accept in parliamentary votes, if they wanted to join the EU as soon as possible (Grzymala-Busse and Innes 2003). If one interprets this an indirect EU effect, it should be balanced by additional considerations. First, the lack of controversy by parliamentary parties entering such a ‘pact’ did not mean the absence of internal dissent over the EU policy content, and this is most clearly seen in the behaviour of parties *after* accession, where more soft eurosceptic discourse soon arose. This may imply a ‘shallow Europeanization’, and this characterization may be further reinforced by the actual behaviour of certain parties, such as the coalition between the SMER and extreme right populist parties in Slovakia in 2006. Second, and somewhat related to the first point, the lower degree of party system institutionalization (apart from Hungary and the Czech Republic), suggests that fluidity of position, indeed party system instability, cancels out the notion of ‘misfit’, that is, electoral volatility means that policy space is still open for new parties to exploit and ‘established’ parties to adapt more easily (see for example Tavits 2005; Lewis 2006b).

The attention to eurosceptic parties is also based on different premises, as some suggest the generally higher levels of eurosceptic public opinion in post-communist countries (which increased the closer to accession in 2004), is related to a more significant presence or intrusion of the EU in domestic affairs (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004). The structure of post-communist party competition is different than in the west, where hard euro-scepticism is reflected in the extremes of the party system, but in the east it is concentrated in left-authoritarian parties (or hard left, hard TAN, in the terminology of Marks *et al.* 2006). Neumayer (2008) argues that eurosceptic positions by some post-communist parties can also be understood in more instrumental terms, that is, as strategic positioning in party competition.

No doubt due to the explicit asymmetric relationship between the EU and post-communist states in the 1990s and early 2000s, there has been a greater interest in the question of Europeanization and post-communist party politics (e.g. Lewis and Mansfeldová 2006; special issue of *Politics in Central Europe* 2007; Enyedi 2007; Lewis 2008; numerous conference panels and papers). The comparative volume by Lewis and Mansfeldová (2006) does in fact begin with a discussion of the Ladrech formulation of Europeanization and parties as the starting point for their study, as does a special issue of *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* edited by Houghton (2009). States from the former Yugoslavia, either in accession negotiations or negotiating to do so, i.e. Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia, are the subject of the Europeanization approach regarding parties in a special issue of the *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, guest edited by Fink-Hafner and Ladrech (2008). Factors such as war and nationalism as additional intervening variables in parties response to the EU is explored, with a more explicit ‘soft Euroscepticism’ noted at the outset even by pro-EU membership parties (in contrast to the experience of central European parties during the 1990s).

5 Suggestions for further research

The issue of whether the Europeanization research framework, such as it exists, is applicable to political parties was raised in Section 2. The main point was that the causal explanations and intervening variables were drawn from primarily policy analysis and to a lesser extent institutional change. Applying this to parties had represented a few problems, which have been generally directly avoided in the literature. In relation to causal factors, the ‘misfit’ hypothesis appears to enjoy widespread acceptance as a condition in which growing pressure results in some form of adaptational response. The presence of veto players and facilitating institutions contributes to the explanation of variation in responses (or lack thereof). The brief discussion in Section 2 turned on the fact that national parties, as organizations, are removed from direct and legal obligations and effects by the EU. Although the EU may influence certain aspects of parties’ operating environments – the domestic political system, they are themselves insulated from direct EU inputs, unless we conclude that the activities of national party personnel in the European Parliament have an impact on the national party – and research to date is, if anything, focuses on the reverse causality (Scully and Farrell 2003; Scully 2005). Further, veto players and other domestic variables that have been invoked to explain variability of adaptational response appear to be inappropriate for the study of parties, especially considering the lack of direct pressure from the EU. So, despite documented evidence of change in political parties in relation to a more influential EU, the exact mechanisms for this are under-theorized.

The ‘misfit’ argument involves two sets of policy and institutional practice – EU and national, and the pressure that arises due to the degree of difference between them that then creates an enabling condition for change. Since the practices of national political parties are not replicated on the European level – indeed, even EP elections do not provide for choice or selection of the executive – and the EU cannot set the rules or boundaries of national elections nor intervene in coalition government negotiations, there is no adaptational pressure to speak of. The view that the EU acts as an environmental ‘political opportunity structure’ has more application for domestic interest groups and other actors such as businesses and sub-national government than national political parties, again because of the lack of material benefit that can be achieved. Related to this, the number of veto points/players in a domestic system as well as facilitating institutions/resources available to actors seeking to exploit the EU would also seem inapplicable to parties, as ostensibly there is nothing preventing national parties from becoming more involved in various European level organizations – in fact the main transnational party federations attempt to co-ordinate the positions of their members in EU institutions such as the Commission and the Council of Ministers in addition to the Parliament. As for facilitating institutions, government ministers taking part in Council of Ministers negotiations would serve as better defenders as well as promoters of a party’s interest, especially where this appears to coincide with a national preference.

Does this mean that the mechanisms of change in parties are not susceptible to comparative political analysis? Or that every documented change, from an increase in mentions of the EU in party manifestos to the appointment of a Europe Secretary in a party’s International Secretariat is a result of individual, random or discrete decisions? Ladrech (2007) has argued that party leaders control or management of internal party matters is such that they are not predisposed to changes that would diminish their influence, and so organizational changes are only presented if it connects with achieving the party’s main goals and objectives, namely winning elections and gaining office. Greater accountability by party leaders, especially in government, to the party in central office or even to the other two ‘faces’ of the party, and the development of independent expertise by individuals within the party that might not be brought with the control of the leadership, are all innovations that have no real gain for the leadership. For parties especially in the older EU member states, the salience of the EU is not one that contributes to improving a party’s competitive position, and in fact the tendency for parties to downplay or even suppress the EU

as an issue is again a decision that rests with party leaders. Lees (2002) adds that party system factors that prevent euro-sceptic party positions may in fact be a result of the formal institutional characteristics of the polity (e.g. in the case of Germany). The implications of this ‘suppression’ over time, i.e. the possible latent pressures manifest in public opinion, could be discerned from analysis of referendums and research on euro-scepticism. This would demonstrate the disjuncture between the apparent lack of EU effect on party systems’ format and mechanics and potential realignments. Whereas rationalist assumptions of change in structure or behaviour by interest groups treats them as singular entities, in the case of political parties the internal dynamics, which may can be compared for instance in terms of party organizational type – e.g. parliamentary-party dominant, or the characteristics of the party system (which again raise the salience issue) could be factored into a more refined framework for analysing party Europeanization, that is, an emphasis on the identification and subsequent interplay of potential causal factors and the party.

The disjuncture between parties in post-communist member states and older ones may diminish over time, as EU inputs which were prominent in the early development phase for these parties recedes, and at least the main parties of government come to increasingly resemble their western counterparts, at least in some selective areas. Thus the amount of available party comparisons could be, with great care, enlarged in the future.

The research strategies that have been promoted for Europeanization research, namely process tracing, counterfactual reasoning, and inclusion of non-EU cases, also require some modification when directed at party research. Process tracing involves identifying the EU input, usually a directive or regulation, whose negotiation or transposition or implementation produces pressure for change on existing domestic policies. It involves, basically, identifying two sides of the coin. However, as it has already been demonstrated, a direct EU input is absent in the case of parties. Where would the trail lead in the case tracing the ‘trigger’ for party change? This is of course related to the application of the misfit argument as well in the case of parties. Here rationalist assumptions may need to be either replaced or complemented by social constructivist insights, especially directed to *perceptions* of pressure (changing political fortunes). There is, therefore, probably no alternative to interviewing in order to uncover the bases upon which certain decisions were taken inside parties. Counterfactual reasoning – would x have occurred without the EU – may be relevant in some types of change, for instance in party programmes (as opposed to campaign manifestos) because the wider policy environment may have altered to the degree that adjustments/updating of general policy orientations are required. For example, in member states where some parts of the public sector may have undergone a degree of de-regulation and/or privatization because of EU liberalization directives, the social democratic party may be forced to both accommodate this reality in its programme and at the same time manage potentially strained relations with public sector trade union allies. Finally, the inclusion of non-EU cases as a control group in order to isolate the EU effect would appear to be irrelevant to Europeanization of parties in western Europe as evidence of change is explicitly ‘EU-oriented’, whether programmatic, etc. However, this is more problematic for post-communist parties, for the model of party organization is certainly not confined to simply older EU member states. For both groups of parties, non-EU cases (and this should not include countries such as Norway where EU influence in general is strong by virtue of membership in the European Economic Area) may be necessary to include in an analysis of policy convergence in order to distinguish between Europeanization and globalization.

6 Conclusion

The scholarly interest shown in Europeanization and political parties is based on empirical evidence of changes in national parties that is *somehow* related to the EU. A significant challenge to this research agenda is separating EU-induced responses from wider environmental variables, not just globalization. For example, in an edited work by Poguntke and Webb (2007), a presidentialization of parliamentary democracy is asserted, of which the executive bias in EU decision-making for national executives is one among several variables. At the same time, a near-unchallenged finding of Europeanization studies is that the national executive has been strengthened, often at the expense of the national parliament. Documentary evidence also demonstrates that party leaders have benefited from internal rules changes, and at the same time Raunio (2002) argues how European integration increases leadership autonomy. The point is that at times there may be more than one approach to studying the same phenomenon, and there could be benefits gained from wider dissemination of findings as well as an expansion of research teams with individual researchers reflecting more diverse methodological as well as sub-disciplinary backgrounds. Much as the ‘comparative politics’ turn in European integration studies has produced insights into the nature of institutional changes in the EU, perhaps party analysis could benefit from the insights so far produced by Europeanization studies, and in turn the development of a more rigorous analytic Europeanization framework sensitive to causal links could emerge from attention by those who study, in a more ‘classical’ sense, party change (e.g. Harmel 2002).

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