

THE EUROPEANISATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES: THE CASE OF THE IRISH LABOUR PARTY

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Introduction

This paper considers the 'Europeanisation' of the Irish Labour Party (hereafter 'Labour Party') between Ireland's entry into the European Community in 1973 and the early months of 1999. After a short discussion of the meaning of the term 'Europeanisation' we place the Labour Party in the context of the Irish party system: the party's origins, and the nature of its support base, make it distinctive within Ireland, and within the broader family of social democratic parties to which it belongs. The main corpus of the paper examines the Labour Party as an actor in the process of Europeanisation: here the argument is that participation in government compelled the party leadership to realign itself more closely to European policies and assumptions. A discussion of rank and file opinion serves to illustrate the convergence between elite and mass opinion in the party, as well as between Labour and the other parties. Finally, some conclusions are drawn which may have implications for Europeanisation in other party systems as well as in Ireland.

The implications of 'Europeanisation' in Ireland

The term 'Europeanisation' within the Irish context can be taken to refer to a number of discrete dimensions defining the relationship between the state and the broader context of the European Union. At one level, Europeanisation refers to the process whereby a state orients its external and domestic policies towards norms established by the EU. This process can evolve either before a state becomes a member of the EU, or after it has acceded. The countries of Eastern Europe can be said currently to be undergoing Europeanisation in the sense that they are 'approximating' their legal systems to those of the EU, while new member states, like Sweden and Austria can be seen to be Europeanising in the sense that they are under pressure to implement EU directives, adopt common positions in foreign policy, and react to, even if, as in the case of Sweden, they are not subsumed by, the strictures of a common currency. At another level, national policy-making institutions, as well as political parties, adopt working practices, form alliances and networks, make strategic choices, allocate resources, and absorb new ideas: in each case willingly reflecting, and extending, the influence of the European Union within the nation-state. The extent to which political parties, in particular, are affected by the process of Europeanisation is a function of several interlinked variables: the likelihood of the party being in government; the extent to which its philosophical roots and support base are compatible with the developing *acquis*, and the extent of popular support for European integration in the state concerned. The latter depends in turn on the degree to which the state is a net beneficiary from the EU budget, and on the size of its welfare state (Kitschelt

1997:148). There is, in other words, some variation in the significance of European integration as an issue in national politics. In some countries, integration versus sovereignty (e.g. Britain) provides a new cleavage in politics, and one that is as likely to split existing parties as strengthen the divisions between them. In states where the welfare state is seen as strong and effective (e.g. Norway) EU membership is seen as threatening to level down social protection and benefits to a European norm while, in states like Britain (where the post-Thatcher welfare state is quite weak) the converse is also true: EU membership (or the process of Europeanisation) is seen as threatening because of the levelling *upwards* that the adoption of EU norms might involve.

The origins of the Labour Party

The Labour Party is the oldest of Ireland's political parties, having been founded in 1912, and some years prior to the establishment of Ireland as an independent, sovereign state in 1920. Nevertheless, it has remained rather marginal within the political system. There are several factors that seem to account for this. First, the industrialisation of Ireland was late and gradual, and the urban working class on whom left wing parties traditionally depended in other West European societies simply did not exist in Ireland and what industrialisation did occur in the early part of the century was concentrated around Belfast, and effectively marooned behind the border after partition. Second, the salience of the national issue in Irish politics has been so pronounced that a party like Labour, by consciously avoiding it, has found it difficult to compete in successive elections where nationalism was always implicitly, and often explicitly, the major cleavage in party political contests. Thirdly, and consequently, if we accept the Lipset-Rokkan thesis that anchors the genesis of European party systems in the societal cleavages that were dominant at the time universal suffrage was introduced, then the pervasive preoccupation with the national question in the early part of the twentieth century effectively 'froze out' other more socioeconomic concerns, even though these were the dominant cleavages in many other contemporary European societies. Fourth, if the Labour Party was effectively excluded from a nascent political agenda dominated by nationalism, it sealed that exclusion by tactically abstaining from the 1918 election. Had it participated at that moment, and offered Irish voters a radically different agenda, then its own position, and the whole tenor of Irish politics thereafter, might have been entirely different. As it was, Fianna Fail eventually emerged as the dominant party, and this hegemony was not effectively challenged until the 1980s when Fianna Fail went into coalition for the first time. Since then, the party system has become more volatile with new parties emerging on the right (Progressive Democrats) and on the left (Democratic Left) with the result that the axis of the party system is now more obviously right-left in its orientation. The left has remained weak by European standards, and the Labour Party itself has been at first 'squeezed' by a more authentically socialist alternative (Democratic Left) and then strengthened by merging with it: the merger underlining the fact that there is precious little ideological space left of centre in Irish politics. The Labour Party today belongs to the social democratic family of parties in Western Europe. When Democratic Left was a separate party vaunting the purity of its socialist ideals, its leader could mock the 'champagne socialism' of Labour. But it was only a matter of time before an intrepid journalist captured on film the Democratic Left leader quaffing champagne in a Dublin restaurant; and the *embourgeoisement* of socialism in Ireland was virtually complete.

In a Catholic, conservative and agricultural society, Labour has always been forced to tread warily; and its enjoyment of political power in government has always been tempered by the anguish associated with the ideological compromises that coalition government

implies. Due to its sheer size, Fianna Fail has always commanded more working class support than Labour. Like Fianna Fail, Labour has had important roots in rural Ireland but these have been superseded, in electoral terms, by a burgeoning urban middle class, especially in the Dublin area, that is secular in its outlook and distinctly uninterested in the old Civil War issues that moulded the party system at its inception. In coalition, Labour has been forced to moderate its ideological rectitude; and pragmatism has guided it towards adopting a similar pro-European stance to the other main parties. Having placed Labour within the context of the Irish party system, we turn now to consider the party's 'Europeanisation' between 1972 and 1999.

The *Europeanisation* of the Labour Party from 1972 to 1999

The extent to which the Labour Party has become Europeanised in this period is neatly summarised by the contrasting position of the party in 1972 as officially opposing membership of the EC, and its position in 1998-9 when the former party leader Dick Spring was being discussed as a possible candidate for the post of 'Monsieur PESC' (i.e. the EU's chief spokesperson for the CFSP) as provided for in the Treaty of Amsterdam; and later as a possible contender for the post of European Commissioner in succession to P.Flynn. In both cases, it was not simply Mr Spring's personal attributes (substantial though these were and sufficient to outweigh the fact that he was not a member of either government parties in coalition), but more that he was perceived as someone who had 'led from the front' in drawing the Labour Party into a stance that was as authentically 'European' as the other two major Irish parties. Spring's White Paper on Foreign Policy (entitled *Challenges and Opportunities Abroad*) published in 1996 was a pioneering document in two senses: the extent to which the Irish public had been involved in its compilation; and the breadth of the vision it set out for Ireland's role in the world. In particular, it succeeded in appearing to defend Ireland's traditional role of neutrality while at the same time arguing cogently for Irish involvement in an evolving European security architecture through such mechanisms as the Petersberg tasks and the Partnership for Peace.

Back in 1972, however, the Labour Party had adopted (not without some internal wrangling) a position where it would oppose EEC entry on the terms negotiated by the Fianna Fail Government led by Taoiseach Jack Lynch. The party's opposition to EEC membership was based on two principal arguments: firstly, the Irish economy would be so vulnerable in a common market regime that unemployment would inevitably rise; and, secondly, that the country's traditional policy of neutrality would be jeopardised as Ireland became increasingly drawn into common positions on foreign policy issues with other member states all of whom were either ex-colonial powers, or clearly aligned in the Cold War, or both. Labour's opposition to EEC membership in 1972 was, however, more nuanced and less wholehearted than official party pronouncements indicated. On the one hand, opposition to the EEC stemmed from different, and even divergent, perspectives: ideological, political, economic, pragmatic and personal. On the other hand, there were some prominent individuals within the party who actually favoured membership, and the terms of the entry that had been negotiated, but simply had to keep quiet during the campaign and, worse still, watch Labour Party campaigners share anti-EEC platforms with a variety of unsavoury fellow-travellers on the extreme right, and left.

With the two major parties, and virtually all the media, favouring membership, it would have been surprising if the referendum had produced anything other than a landslide endorsement of the government's position. The result was, therefore, something of a foregone conclusion although the size of the 'yes' vote (at 83%) was unexpected although it

reflected, almost exactly, the combined electoral strength of the two parties campaigning in favour of entry. The fact that Britain had already accepted EC entry as inevitable, and in view of Ireland's overwhelming dependence on trade with Britain, there was probably more than a touch of pragmatism in the size of the final vote.

Indeed, the unambiguous outcome of the 1972 referendum led almost immediately to a rapid reappraisal of policy towards the EEC in the Labour Party. There seemed little point in continuing to oppose membership in the face of what appeared to be widespread popular support for accession. The pragmatic volte-face that now ensued was assisted by those in the party who had favoured entry but had remained dutifully silent during the referendum campaign. As they emerged from the woodwork to capitalise on the new reality, they were joined by the erstwhile anti-marketeters who now adopted a stance of, at least, constructive opposition in the same vein that both the SNP (in Scotland) and the Paisleyite DUP (in Northern Ireland) were soon to argue, in the mid-1970s, that the best way to wreck/reform the EEC was 'from within'. In fact, in the context of a national political arena that was, and would remain, fervently pro-European, seeing both substantial benefits accruing from the CAP, and later the structural funds, it was not difficult for Labour's former EEC opponents to 'bed down' eagerly with the prevailing political consensus. However, within a few months, a much more pressing set of circumstances helped to concentrate minds even more keenly within the Labour leadership.

From March 1973, Labour found itself in a coalition government with Fine Gael. The sharp debate surrounding the wisdom, or otherwise, of entering a coalition with a party that was, to the extent that an ideological spectrum exists at all in Irish politics, the polar opposite of Labour's own aspiration to be 'on the left', helped to divert attention away from bitter and divisive memories engendered by the referendum campaign. More immediately, Labour ministers in government found themselves participating in the decision-making institutions of the EEC, an organisation to which, less than a year before, they had been expressing the most ardent opposition. Meanwhile, two Labour TDs were being appointed to the ten-member Irish delegation in the European Parliament. Despite their party's Pauline conversion to the European ideal, the two Labour MEPs found themselves with an initial advantage over their Irish colleagues: they had a ready-made political group to join; and, indeed, the strength and multinational composition of the Socialist Group was the best advertisement, to waverers at home, that socialism and the progress of European integration could coexist in harmony.

By the time of the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979, Labour had accepted that Irish membership of the EEC was permanent and broadly beneficial; but the party reserved the right to advance, and took pride in promoting, a more critical analysis of Irish EEC membership than was offered by the other two parties. During the 1970s, a time of pervasive 'Europessimism', the Labour Party was able to adopt a rather sanctimonious attitude towards the other parties and, in the 1979 campaign, Labour could point out accurately that many of its gloomier predictions in 1972, such as rising unemployment, had in fact come to pass. What distinguished the party's position in 1979, from its position seven years earlier, was that Community membership was now accepted as a fact of life, even if a certain *schadenfreude* at the expense of Euro-enthusiasts in the other parties was allowed to colour Labour's new found attachment to Europe. This continuing critical focus in the Labour Party was both cause and consequence of a new ideological solidarity that had been forged out of the conflicting traditions within it.

Due largely to the vagaries of the Irish electoral system, Labour won a disproportionately large number of seats in the newly enlarged Irish delegation to the

European Parliament: 4 out of 15. With just 14.5% of the vote, the party had secured over 26% of the seats. Despite Labour's conspicuously successful, even lucky, performance in the first direct elections, the impact of the party's auspicious initiation into the politics of the European Parliament was soon dissipated by a series of miscalculations, and sheer bad luck. The 1981 general election brought another Labour-Fine Gael coalition into power with the result that three of the Labour MEPs were made Ministers and one was expelled from the party. All four were replaced by nominees but, after two more general elections in 1982, another Fine Gael-Labour coalition came to power and another set of nominees replaced the Labour MEPs. In the European elections of 1984, the voters took their revenge on the party and it lost all four seats. The propensity of Labour MEPs to seek ministerial 'mercs and perks' instead of pursuing their European vocations, and the undemocratic way in which they were replaced, must have disillusioned voters; although it must be said, in the party's defence, that the paucity of talent at the top, and indeed the relatively small size of the party, meant that there were never going to be enough people to serve in Cabinet, and in the European Parliament, at the same time.

The absence of the Labour Party from the European Parliament was felt in both practical and symbolic terms: it removed the party from day-to-day contact with sister parties within the Socialist Group and it coloured voters' perceptions at home with respect to the party's credibility now that Fine Gael and Fianna Fail appeared to have a competitive edge on the European stage. More seriously, however, the party was now to face a crucial period in its relationship with the European integration process as the saga of the Single European Act (SEA) began to unfold. Labour was in coalition government with Fine Gael when the SEA was brought forward for ratification in the Irish parliament; but the Labour leadership only won support for ratification in the Party after a fairly tense debate. However, just at the point when ratification seemed safe, sections of the Act were deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court thus necessitating a referendum. Before the referendum could be held, the Coalition Government fell and was succeeded by a Fianna Fail administration. Although Fianna Fail had opposed the SEA in opposition, this was quickly forgotten once they returned to government, while anti-SEA elements in Labour, having suppressed their reservations when their party was in office, now felt less inhibited in expressing their hostility to the SEA - especially the sections on foreign policy which were alleged to threaten the country's neutrality. Although the Labour leadership clung to its position of support for ratification of the SEA, it was not able to carry the rank and file with them, and the party went into the referendum allowing individuals to vote as they saw fit. The SEA debate, and referendum, had intruded at a time when the Party was beginning to heal the divisions following the entry referendum in 1972. The foreign policy sections of the SEA reawakened the deeply-held, and intensely ideological, attachment to neutrality that was rooted in the Labour Party in a way that was not the case in either Fine Gael or Fianna Fail where neutrality was perceived as instrumental, in some circumstances dispensable, and strictly limited in its application.

The 1989 European Parliament elections were held on the same day as a general election with the result that the latter dominated both the campaign and the voting. Having stitched together a manifesto that attempted to hold together the Eurosceptic rank and file and the more Europeanised leadership epitomised by Dick Spring, the party won one seat in the European Parliament. Neutrality featured heavily in the manifesto but was portrayed as being unaffected by the steps being taken within the European Community to enable it to speak with one voice in world affairs.

In the process of negotiating the Maastricht Treaty, which now dominated the Community agenda, the Labour Party was outside government and was therefore relegated to the role of spectator. Labour reaction to the draft Treaty once it was published was to welcome it in principle but to quibble with some of the details. The Labour Party's response to Maastricht is a measure of how the Party was now being Europeanised: the policy for the Maastricht referendum was to recommend acceptance despite its flaws. Twenty years earlier, the Party had recommended rejection of the terms of entry despite the many virtues contained within them. Thus Labour's support for the Maastricht Treaty marks the first occasion on which the Party came out in favour of a step towards European integration. This new found confidence in, and support for, European integration was not without its problems or detractors: the abortion issue threatened to throw the referendum campaign off course but Labour's stance was not shaken; two Labour TDs announced they would not vote for the TEU, but the Labour Party generally was not perturbed; Denmark voted against Maastricht but still Labour held firm. It was always clear that the outcome of the referendum would be in favour of accepting the Maastricht Treaty even though the size of the majority was not a foregone conclusion: and Labour was now perhaps unwilling to be left outside the mainstream of European developments and unwilling to be in a position of isolation from like-minded parties in other EU countries. Again in 1998, Labour supported a yes vote in the referendum.

Between 1972 and 1998, there is a clear trajectory followed by the Labour Party *qua* party. From outright opposition to the terms of membership in 1972, the party moved to a position of accepting the far-reaching reforms relating to citizenship, and especially foreign policy, contained in Amsterdam. What conclusions can we draw about this process? Firstly, the Europeanisation of the party was led by the leadership. This was true from 1984 onwards in particular when the leadership realised that the party could not afford the luxury of ideological isolation from the European integration process if it wanted to play a part in the nation's foreign and domestic policy. Secondly, the experience of being in government was a major factor in hastening the Europeanisation process. In 1973, as partners in government, opposition to the EEC soon dissipated; and conversely, entry into opposition just before the SEA referendum allowed the party's Eurosceptics to pull the party back to its earlier less committed position. In the 1990s, Labour has experienced more time in government and Dick Spring became the first Labour Foreign Minister in Irish history. That fact, more than anything else, has wedded Labour to the European Union and has seen Labour emerge not simply as a passive participant in EU affairs but exerting real influence and leadership. Dick Spring's stewardship in the Irish Council Presidency was the climax of Labour's new role as a party in the EU. Thus far, we have considered the Labour Party as an actor in the process of its own Europeanisation: as explained, this process was largely driven in a 'top-down' way by a party leadership that saw the linkage between the Europeanisation of the state within the EU and opportunities for exercising political power that such a process offered. One of the principal constraints to this process was the more limited horizon of rank and file party members: we turn briefly to consider the evolution of grassroots opinion in the same three decades.

Rank and file opinion

If we take three separate dates, we can trace the evolution of public opinion (1) within the rank and file of the Labour Party: the SEA of 1987, Maastricht in 1992, and preparations for Amsterdam in 1997. These three dates allow us to monitor the progress of rank and file opinion from 1972, when it can be safely assumed that most Labour voters followed their

leaders' recommendation to vote against the EEC terms of entry up to 1998 when, in some respects, Labour voters emerge as being more 'Europeanised' than their counterparts in the other two parties. By comparing these three key attitudinal 'milestones' it is also possible to discern a *convergence* between opinion in the Labour Party and opinion in the other two major parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fail, where an already strong pro-European consensus, evident in the country generally, is firmly rooted.

In a poll conducted on 14 May 1987, we can see a wide gap between Labour party identifiers and those from other parties. Firstly, only 13 per cent of Labour supporters intended to vote yes in the referendum on the Single European Act, compared with 52 per cent for Fianna Fail and 50 per cent for Fine Gael. In the same poll, 59 per cent of Labour supporters felt that EEC membership had been 'good for the country' compared with 75 per cent for Fianna Fail and 72 per cent for Fine Gael, reflecting persistent concerns over unemployment and the erosion of Irish neutrality discussed above. To the statement 'We have to vote yes because the markets for our goods and services are in Europe' there was again a marked disparity of response between Labour supporters, 33 per cent of whom agreed, and Fianna Fail and Fine Gael supporters where, in each case, there was 68 per cent agreement (more than double). The fears among Labour supporters that the SEA would compromise Irish neutrality are evident in the 44 per cent who agreed that 'A Yes vote in this referendum will weaken our neutrality' compared with Fine Gael and Fianna Fail where 38 and 27 per cent respectively were of the same opinion.

By the time of the Maastricht Treaty(1992) the divergence between rank and file opinion in Labour, and the Labour leadership had narrowed considerably as had the gap between Labour and other two major parties. One month before the Maastricht referendum, 50 per cent of Labour supporters said they would be following their party's recommendation to vote 'yes' (compared with 58 per cent in Fine Gael and 59 per cent in Fianna Fail). Even fears that neutrality was being eroded by the EC seem to be dissipating in the early 1990s: 44 per cent of Labour voters agreed that voting for Maastricht would affect neutrality compared with the same per cent in Fianna Fail and 47 per cent in Fine Gael.

In the run-up to the Amsterdam Treaty, another poll allows us to see the extent to which Labour rank and file attitudes had (a) been Europeanised and (b) become virtually indistinguishable from those in Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. 63 per cent of Labour supporters reported that would feel 'sorry' if they were told that the EU had 'been scrapped', compared with 65 per cent in FineGael and 54 per cent in Fianna Fail. 'A common effort by the EU with regard to unemployment' would make a 'big difference' according to 15 per cent of Labour voters(14 per cent of Fianna Fail and 17 per cent of Fine Gael). On some issues, Labour voters appear to have become *more* Europeanised than their counterparts in the other two parties. On extending EU citizenship rights (a quintessentially pro-integrationist issue) a substantial (81 per cent) section of Labour are in favour (compared with only 69 per cent and 64 per cent in Fianna Fail and Fine Gael respectively). More surprising, perhaps, is the 67 per cent of Labour voters who support the idea of 'all EU member states being committed to come to the defence of one being attacked' (compared with 59 per cent in Fianna Fail and 62 per cent in Fine Gael).

These opinion poll data,selected from three distinct time frames, are intended to provide a crude, but nevertheless convincing indicator of the way in which rank and file opinion within the Labour Party became Europeanised in the period 1972-1998. Several observations can be made: firstly, opinion shifts appear to follow elite leadership. In the Maastricht referendum, Labour voters were recommended by the party to vote Yes and

they did so to an extent not seen previously. Secondly, it would be fallacious to conclude that Labour Party supporters were *anti-European* at any stage in the three decades under discussion. On the contrary, even opposition to the EEC referendum in 1972 was couched in terms of the conditions under which Ireland would enter. There was a genuine, understandable and even justified concern that exposure to free market conditions would prove disastrous for some parts of the Irish economy. The 'eldorado' provided by the CAP to large farmers was not of great interest to Labour voters. The data from the 1993 and 1997 polls indicate the extent to which Labour reservations about Europe are linked to its shortcomings regarding unemployment, and Irish neutrality. In other words, it is not a root and branch opposition but a discriminating critique. The support for extended EU citizenship rights is evidence of Labour's instinctive internationalism - something that pre-dates the referendum of 1972 and informs its policy when in government with its first Foreign Minister in the person of Dick Spring.

Conclusions

Our examination of the Labour Party in Ireland reveals a number of insights that are relevant to the Irish political system, and some that may be more broadly applicable.

1. The Europeanisation of political parties does not evolve in a vacuum. It is a manifestation of a wider phenomenon that is a logical concomitant of the European integration process: the Europeanisation of the member-states. Wallace and Wallace (1996) remind us that three uniquely convergent factors lie behind this process: the inadequacy of the state; globalisation; the specificity of the west European region. In this context, 'European integration can also be seen as a distinct west European effort to contain the consequences of globalisation. Rather than be forced to choose between the national polity for developing policies and the relative anarchy of the globe, west Europeans invented a form of regional governance with polity-like features to extend the state and to harden the boundary between themselves and the rest of the world' (Wallace and Wallace 1996:17). If we accept this picture of the European Union as a polity-in-waiting it follows logically that national political parties in the member-states must adapt to the role of European parties-in-waiting if they are to operate effectively in the new political and economic environment. Thus more intense Europeanisation is itself linked to the increasing range of issues that have been subsumed within the Union's policy-making competence. The traditional distinction between domestic politics and external relations is particularly inappropriate when we consider the EU today. Civil service departments that formerly focussed on solely 'domestic' issues (e.g. health, education, social security or agriculture) have become Europeanised in the sense that they are increasingly constrained and stimulated by norms expressed in legal form 'beyond the nation-state'. Political parties have many functions ranging from interest aggregation, to interest articulation, to representation, and socialisation. Where parties intersect with states most obviously is in the exercise of power within government. Thus if the state becomes Europeanised, so must any party that wishes to share in the exercise of political power within, or on behalf of, the state.
2. Within Ireland, as we have seen, parties on the left have been weak and marginal. This was explained partly by a conservative political culture that has only recently rejected an authoritarian and sacerdotal ethos; and partly by the dominance within the party system of a nationalist cleavage that either ignored a social democratic agenda or, more accurately, coopted it into the broader nationalist discourse. If Europeanisation of the state is associated with preserving state autonomy à la Milward, it is not surprising that

parties, whose own *raison d'être* is expressed in a nationalist vocabulary, should be the first to espouse the European project as an essentially *national* project. Coakley was an early observer of the fact that 'Irish people appear...not to perceive any conflict between nationalist values, and support for membership of the Community' (Coakley 1983:61). Against such a juxtaposition of values, left-wing parties in Ireland, and perhaps elsewhere, have had to choose between Europeanisation or redundancy. If European integration is perceived as part of the state's weaponry in the battle for survival against globalisation, or even if European integration is seen as a species of globalisation, political parties of any ideological hue must join that game if they are to fulfil their defining roles as parties.

3. Political parties in Ireland operate in a political environment that is instinctively pro-European in the sense that there is broad support within and between the parties for the supranational methods and objectives of the EU policy-making process. In this respect, Ireland can be contrasted with both the UK and Denmark where public opinion and governments display caution towards new initiatives within the EU. In Ireland, the reaction is to embrace such innovations unless they are demonstrably deleterious to the national interest; in Britain or Denmark, the reaction is to 'wait and see' before committing the country to integration within a new policy sector. The predisposition of Irish governments towards *communautaire* solutions is often interpreted as a utilitarian response to the budgetary advantages accruing to Ireland from wealth redistributions within the EU. At a deeper level, however, Irish attachment to the European Union in general, and to the European Commission as an institution in particular, reflects a deep-rooted belief in a small country that its survival is dependent upon strong supra-national and redistributive policies at the European level. In a geopolitical context where Ireland cannot hope to get its own way by force, reliance on a supranational legal order, enshrined in Treaties and administered by the European Court of Justice, assumes overriding importance in the hierarchy of national objectives. The same argument applies *mutatis mutandis* to minor political parties. If the Labour Party has sometimes been sidelined on the national political stage because the terms of the national political debate are deemed irrelevant or antithetical to party ideology, the European context can supply a welcome release: within the European Parliament, and in the broader framework of transnational party federations, a small party like Labour can find scope for influence, and even policy fulfilment, that the national context may deny. In other words, the Europeanisation of small political parties may bring benefits analogous to those derived by small countries in the European Union: the opportunity to construct transnational alliances; the ability to exploit European norms to apply leverage in the domestic policy arena; and a chance to tap a wider range of political resources than would ever be available in the national setting.

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NOTE

(1) All the opinion poll results in this paper are taken from the data sections of *Irish Political Studies* vols 3, 8, and 12