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*Direct Elections of the European Parliament
and
Transnational Trends in European Parties¹.*

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1. Introduction

Between 1994 and 1996 about 368 million citizens from the 15 member countries of the European Union (EU) were called to elect, for the fourth time through universal suffrage, the European Parliament (EP), now 626 members strong². Owing to the inclusion in the Maastricht Treaty of new procedures which involved enhanced decision-making powers for the EP, and a role in the nomination of the Commission and its President, the new parliament was also more powerful. These developments notwithstanding, the salience of EP elections remains rather low for electors and commentators³, but for academics, elections are important vantage points for the observation of longer lasting phenomena such as the evolution of institutions (the EP above all) and other structural elements of the EU political system (parties and the party system).

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I wish to thank Fulvio Attinà for giving me access to his EP roll-call voting data and Ottavio Marzocchi for his help in securing up-to-date EP party group composition and size data.

² This represented an increase of 108 seats over 1989 resulting from the inclusion of three new national delegations (Sweden with 22 seats, Austria with 21, and Finland with 16), from the attribution of 18 seats to former East Germany, and from other minor adjustments. The present EP has 52.7% more MEPs than the one elected in 1979.

³ This was due to the nature of the embryonic EU political system, which still needs an autonomous legitimacy, and to the attitudes of politicians and media, which tend to privilege the domestic implications of the elections and of the connected debates. The fact that EP elections have no bearing on the EU executive certainly discounts their importance in the eyes of electors and politicians.

The first direct EP elections were hailed as extremely important for the evolution and the development of political parties at the EC/EU level. This view was supported, among other things, by the formation of transnational party federations in the years prior to the election. It would be misleading, however to consider all successive elections as necessarily positive events for the EU party system. Elections can also have negative and even disruptive effects. All elections produce change, whether big or small, not only as an outcome of the vote, but also as a consequence of the strategies chosen by the competing parties during the campaign and after the vote. The effects of elections on parties and the party system must therefore be analyzed jointly with those of the factors and processes that operate during the legislative term.

This paper is an update and completion of a previous article (Bardi, 1996) on parties and the party system in the EU and on the institutional and political factors that affect their development. Its purpose is to extend that study based on an analysis of the EP party system between 1989 and 1994 to the EP's full elected existence (1979-1997). Thus, the paper's main objective is the testing of hypotheses on the contrasting effects of a) institutional pressures within the European Parliament, and b) EP elections, on the transnationalization of European parties and on the evolution of the EU party system. According to findings based on the in-depth analysis carried out in the 1989-1994 study, institutional factors, which are effective during the EP's legislative terms, favor the consolidation of the longer established and larger EP party groups (European People's Party, Party of the European Socialists, and European Federation of Liberal, Democratic and Reform Parties) and ultimately of the EU party system. On the contrary, elections can be very disruptive, especially for the more recent and smaller EP groups, and are a negative factor in party system consolidation. The two combined effects appear to have had contrasting impacts on the number and size of party groups, thus contributing to the creation of a two-speed (or even three-speed) party system in the EU, characterized by an increasingly institutionalized core and by a mutable and unstable periphery. It is my intention to test more extensively these hypotheses by extending the analysis of party system data to all four elective terms. Effects on the EU party system will be assessed through the calculation of standard party system indices based on electoral outcomes (such as number of effective parties) and by monitoring the evolution of the EP party group system between elections. This will be done by looking at: 1) number of groups; 2) group size; 3) number of one-party groups⁴. Possible fluctuations in these indicators' values at election time and between elections should be taken as indicative of the effective existence of contrasting pressures for party system consolidation in different phases of the electoral cycle.

2. Factors of party development in the EU

Political parties are present at the EU level with two types of structures: EP party groups and extra parliamentary organizations, albeit underdeveloped or even embryonic⁵. The latter can take the form of either transnational organizations, in the case

⁴ One-party groups are defined as those for which at least half of the membership belongs to a single party delegation. See also section 3.

⁵ It must be noted however that national party organizations and even some of their subnational components actively engage in EU politics.

of the larger and longer established party families, like the European People's Party (EPP), Party of the European Socialists, (PES) and European Federation of Liberal, Democratic and Reform Parties (ELDR), or less formal structures of international coordination, as is the case of the smaller, newer, party families, such as the Greens and the now defunct European Right (ER)⁶. In general, transnational party federations appear to be very weak institutions if regarded from the point of view of membership, staffing, finance, and overall internal organization (Bardi, 1994)⁷. On the other hand there are important incentives (material resources as well as better committee and EP leadership positions) for party group formation and operation in the EP (see, for example, Attinà, 1990; Jacobs, Corbett, and Shackleton, 1995, Raunio, 1996). EP party groups seem to have more potential than the federations as potential Europarty cores⁸.

Therefore, the functioning of the EP and its elections must be considered the most important factors in the shaping of the Europarty system. The development of Europarties is conditioned by a number of political and institutional constraints. The EU political system presents a number of relevant institutional and political differences with respect to the national model. For example, according to the national model, elections decide the composition of Parliament, but most of all, set the conditions for the formation of government. The latter does not happen in the EU system. With few and generally unimportant exceptions, national members of parliament are all elected according to the same electoral law, whereas MEPs forming the EP's 15 national delegations are elected on the basis of 16 different sets of electoral rules⁹. Europarties are thus subject to very different institutional conditions and some of these differences can be seen as constraints, incentives, or at least, in a more neutral sense, factors in the formation of political parties at the EU level, beyond those which exist at the national level as well.

Fulvio Attinà (1994, p. 55 *passim*) has explicitly or implicitly identified the most important of these factors which may favor but also hinder Europarty development. Membership in one of the major EP party groups can be very important for individual national party delegations. It is well known that it is a crucial factor to obtain material resources but most of all considerable political advantages, such as important committee memberships and chairmanships or top EP official positions (Bardi, 1992 and 1994; Jacobs, Corbett and Shackleton, 1995; Bowler and Farrell, 1995). Others have made the same point by stressing the discrimination against non-attached members (Marzocchi, 1997). Moreover, membership in EP party groups (and/or transnational federations) is

⁶ In June 1993, the Green Alliance was replaced by the European Federation of Green Parties (EFGP). This development, however, cannot be seen as very relevant for the EU party system. Like its predecessor and unlike the three major federations, the EFGP is pan-European and not EU-specific, including 22 founding parties and declaring itself open to sister parties from all of Europe.

⁷ According to some authors, in recent years trans-national federations have seen their importance enhanced by the role taken in inter-governmental conferences (IGCs) (Ladrech, 1993, Hix, 1995a).

⁸ It should be noted however that EP party-groups are not the only providers of incentives towards Europarty development. Transnational federations (and their leaders' meetings) have proven capable of attracting potential new members, whose leaders are eager to join the Europarty elite. In turn, transnational federations select very carefully these potential applicants in order not to dilute the character of the "political family" (Hix, 1995b).

⁹ The UK uses two different systems, respectively for Northern Ireland and for the rest of the country.

considered a resource with important domestic political consequences, especially for politically marginal or scarcely legitimate parties. Until recently, these were considered to be sufficiently powerful incentives to EP group formation and certainly the most important ones. It would seem however that the operation of the EP produces other important conditioning factors. In recent years, mostly as a consequence of the Single European Act (SEA) and of the Maastricht Treaty, there has been a considerable increase in the number of absolute majority votes in the EP. Qualified majorities, requiring a positive vote by 50 percent plus one of all MEPs, and not only of those present at the time of the vote, are now also needed for two new categories of acts: those subject to co-operation and co-decision procedures. The creation of many ample majorities requires degrees of discipline and attendance which cannot be left to the spontaneous initiative and convergence of sufficient numbers of individual MEPs. The role of party groups has thus been considerably enhanced. According to Attinà (1994, p.56) this 'institutional imperative' favors, beyond greater party cohesion, a moderate and centripetal party system. This positive effect is compounded by another characteristic of the EU political system. EP activities are practically insulated from all other political arenas, European or domestic. This makes EP groups' or even individual MEPs' single voting decisions irrelevant in these arenas. An MEP's election or re-election does not depend on voting records. MEPs are thus virtually unaccountable and a possible lack of discipline on a few votes usually does not have negative consequences on overall group cohesion. In other words, given the institutional and political characteristics of the EU political system, voting discipline has a ratchet effect on EP group cohesion: the positive momentum greatly outweighs possible negative forces.

There are however other factors which can negatively affect the formation and the consolidation of EP groups. The fragmentation of the electoral arena permits the survival at the European level of practically every relevant, and sometimes even not-so relevant, component of most national party systems. This feature makes the EU party system very sensitive to individual national party system realignments and to voter opinion trends which are present only in some member-states. The absence of a common electoral system, but most of all the very high proportionality of most of the 16 electoral laws contributes to this phenomenon. Even parties with negligible absolute EU levels of electoral support can obtain seats in the EP because of the over-representation of the smaller member-states (the seat/population ratio is 1/66,000 for Luxembourg and 1/233,000 for Ireland, as opposed to 1/800,000 for Germany). Finally, the continuing expansion of the EU can be either a positive or a negative factor for Europarty evolution. Previously isolated national delegations may find allies to form a party group among the representatives of newly incorporated member-states. But the incorporation of new delegations into existing party groups can prove to be problematic.

3. Party and party-system development in the EU: indicators

This discussion appears to indicate that EP group consolidation occurs mostly during the legislative term, whereas elections create the conditions for fragmentation. Any conclusion, however, is made difficult by the scarcity of specific indicators of party and party system institutionalization. Academic attention to the development of Euro-specific indicators has been very scanty and some of the indicators used for national

parties and party systems (e.g. membership, finances, volatility, stability) cannot be used because of the different nature of the EU system¹⁰. But it can be inferred from the literature that cohesiveness and discipline indicate party group potential for institutionalization. Various studies have tried to assess such potential through the analysis of EP roll-call data (Attinà, 1990; Wolters, 1986; Quanjel and Wolters, 1993, Bay Brzinski, 1995, Raunio, 1996), through attempts to probe MEP attitudes (Kirchner, 1985; Bardi, 1989; Bowler and Farrell, 1993), or even combining the two approaches (Bardi, 1994).

These analyses, especially those based on roll-call data, appear to reveal a very high degree of intra-group cohesiveness, but such conclusions, should be treated very cautiously for the purpose of assessing party group institutionalization. In fact, this should be the consequence, among other things, of the development of a "collective identity" in society and in the party (Panebianco, 1982, p. 112). Group cohesiveness would then result from an expression of such identity. But the EP's institutional context does not allow us to assess the existence of such predisposition. In fact, intra-group quasi-unanimity is usually guaranteed by long preparatory committee and party-group sessions which have the stated purpose of smoothing out most disagreements. Moreover, one of three reasons for which roll-call voting is often requested "by Political Groups is to keep a check on their own members' participation in a vote, and the position they take" (Corbett, Jacobs, and Shackleton, 1995, p. 160). Indeed, the symbolic rather than politically concrete significance of most EP decisions lowers the level of internal dissent and facilitates quasi-unanimous decisions. Even the voting records for the whole EP, irrespective of party group affiliation, reveal a high overall level of cohesiveness (Bardi, 1994, p. 367). This could be a consequence of the well known EP party group tendency to present a "united front" in a common struggle against member-states' governments and other EU institutions. Moreover, it should be noted that if it is true that in the EP a strong degree of intra-group cooperation does occur (as revealed by roll-call voting), MEP attitudes reveal potential contrasts that would probably make cooperation more difficult in a post-Maastricht situation (Bardi, 1994, p. 369). It is doubtful, therefore, even if we accept that roll-call voting is an adequate indicator of cohesion, that very high absolute levels of cohesiveness can be considered indicative of EP party group institutionalization¹¹. But the most conclusive demonstration of the

¹⁰ For example, individual membership practically does not exist at the EU level; volatility is a meaningless measure, given the composite nature of the electoral arena; stability is conceptualized in national contexts as party system influence on the stability of the executive, which is obviously irrelevant in the EU.

¹¹ This view, already expressed in a previous article (Bardi, 1996) has been misinterpreted and, in my view, unconvincingly criticized by Tapio Raunio who thinks I questioned "the reliability of roll-call data as an indicator of EP party cohesion" (1996, p. 107). In actuality I only questioned (and still question) the reliability of party cohesion (as measured through roll call voting data) as an indicator of *EP party group institutionalization*. Raunio's further argues that my arguments are unconvincing because "if agreement is reached during the meetings, surely then the meetings are working" (p. 75). This point is so obvious and consistent with my argument that it should have hinted to my critic that I was looking at something different. In fact, precisely because cohesion is reached in group meetings as the result of institutional pressures I come to the conclusion that the EP groups are not yet *per se* institutionalized. Finally, Raunio's observation that "considering Parliament's increased influence, it is wrong to explain quasi-unanimity by referring to the EP's lack of powers, especially in the post-Maastricht period" (p. 75) overlooks the fact that the studies I referred to in the article were in fact based on the analysis of 1979-1989 data. Most of the votes considered were not only pre-Maastricht, but also pre-Single European Act (not to mention the fact that the authors did not make a distinction between pre- and post-). This oversight is particularly surprising, given Raunio's evident familiarity with that literature.

inadequacy of group cohesiveness as an indicator of party group institutionalization is an empirical one. During the EP's second elected term, the ER group, then consisting of two national delegations (the French Front National - FN, and the Italian MSI/DN) and one single representative from Greece, displayed the highest agreement index (.961) ever observed for any EP group (see table 2). This did not prevent the FN and the MSI/DN from going their separate ways after the 1989 election.

On the other hand, a longitudinal analysis of roll-call voting data could allow for an assessment of relative positive or negative variations in EP group cohesiveness, even in different institutional contexts (i.e. pre- and post-Single European Act). Cohesiveness trends cannot be considered adequate indicators of party group cohesiveness either, but they are certainly more useful than absolute values for an assessment of a potential for institutionalization.

The literature is even more vague on the conceptualization of the Europarty system's institutionalization¹². It would appear that the following are important variables for its assessment. a) number of groups; b) group size; c) number of one-party groups. A decline in the number of groups is considered to be positive for the consolidation of the party system, as is an increase in the relative size of at least the major groups (Attinà, 1994). Fewer and bigger parties certainly favor an institutionalization of the 'rules of the game'. An example of this is the *modus vivendi* reached in the EP by the EPP, PES and ELDR, and the 'technical coordination' achieved among the three major groups. But the number of one-party groups is perhaps the most important indicator of Europarty system institutionalization. In fact, one-party groups by definition lack the transnational dimension which distinguishes Europarties from national parties. One-party groups thus represent as many obstacles to Europarty system institutionalization and a declining trend in their number should be taken to indicate Europarty system consolidation. These indicators are admittedly very rough, as they were not chosen as a result of an in-depth conceptual discussion. In fact, most of the literature has been conditioned by empirical concerns and could not tackle problems of conceptualization. But to the extent that this is a limit shared by this paper, these indicators should serve the purpose and will be discussed in connection with the analysis of the impact of EP elections on the party system.

4. The evolution of EP party-groups (1979-1997)

Over the 18 years since the first universal suffrage election, the Europarty system has undergone numerous important changes. Only three components of the original EP group system, the Socialists (now PES) the European People's Party (EPP), and the Liberals (ELDR) are still present in the EP. It should be noted that even these groups experienced important changes of composition as a result of either EC enlargements or inter-group realignments. Three of the groups that were formed after the first election, the European Democrats (ED), the European Democratic Alliance (EDA), and the Group for the Technical Coordination and Defence of Independent Groups and Members

¹² Rudy Andeweg (1995) has brilliantly outlined different scenarios for the possible development of the European party system at the EU and national levels, but he has not explicitly indicated indicators of EU party system development.

(CDI), have since disappeared, respectively during the third, the fourth and at the beginning of the second elective term. In 1995 the EDA merged with the short-lived single-party group Forza Europa (FE, the EP version of Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia - FI) to form the Union for Europe (UFE). The Rainbow group and the group of the European Right (ER), formed after the 1984 election, survived for two terms and disappeared at the beginning of the fourth one. The Communist group (now EUL) suffered so many transformations and splits that it can almost be considered a new group. One of its splinters, the United Left (UL), dissolved itself into the PES, and roughly at the same time the ED was absorbed by the PPE. Three other groups created in 1989 and 1994, Greens, Nations of Europe (NE), Radical Alliance (ERA), complete the current EP, along with a record number, 36, of non-attached members.

The 1994 elections were perhaps the most disruptive of pre-existing intra- and inter-group equilibria. Not considering the 49 seat expansion, 105 inter-group seat changes occurred between the 1989 and the 1994 elections. This number is on the other hand dramatically lower (39) if one compares the newly elected EP to its immediate predecessor, as it was composed at the very end of its term (Bardi, 1996). This reflects the fact that the EP's composition was modified substantially during the 1989-1994 term because of important inter-group realignments, involving in particular, as we shall see, the EPP and the PES¹³. Obviously these figures only reflect net changes and do not take into account intra-group compensations resulting from the different fortunes of sister parties in different countries. It is interesting to note, however, that the total number of seat changes at the national level, 97, is still lower than the total number of changes between 1989 and 1994. This suggests that inter-group dynamics may be at least as important as electoral results in determining the EP's composition.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Elections, however, produce changes in intra-group equilibria, sometimes setting the conditions for wider inter-group realignments. In fact the 1994 elections' effects on the overall EP party group system were quite evident. Most, and certainly the most visible, of these effects were produced by developments in only three countries, albeit major ones: France, Germany and Italy. The German case is very straightforward: two delegations which were present in the previous EP, the Republikaner and the FDP, failed to reach the 5 percent threshold, with important implications for at least one group, the ER. Another important national delegation, the French Greens, suffered the same fate. But the most important developments in France came as a consequence of the success of two new lists (26 seats between them), *Energie Radicale* and *Majorité pour l'autre Europe*, mostly at the expense, also as a result of post-election decisions, of the Socialist and Liberal delegations. In Italy, just to mention the most important developments, the party system composition changes which had emerged in the

¹³ This is a not new phenomenon and its effects can be felt also right after the elections and not only during the term. Inter-group realignments accounted for 91 seat changes between 1984 and 1989, that is 17 per cent of the total (Bardi, 1994, p. 365).

national elections resulted in the huge success of Forza Italia (FI) and the crushing defeat of the remnants of the old Christian Democracy.

Overall, four of the groups formed in 1989 (ED, ER, Rainbow, and the UL) were not re-formed after the 1994 elections, whereas three new groups emerged from the new party alignments: Forza Europa (FE), European Radical Alliance (ERA), and Nations of Europe (NE). It should be noted however that these developments were not the exclusive consequences of elections. The ED and the UL were disbanded during the term in order to permit the incorporation of their respective dominant parties, the British Conservatives and the Italian Democratic Party of the Left, respectively into the EPP and the PES. Of the other two, the Rainbow group was as much a victim of its heterogeneity as of the whims of the electorate, with many of its potential members finding a new collocation in the newly formed ERA and NE or even, as was the case with the six strong Italian Lega Nord (LN) delegation, in one of the longest established groups, the ELDR. As we mentioned before, inter-group realignments can have a very dramatic impact on the EP's composition.

The ER group's demise was on the other hand a direct consequence of the vote, mostly because of the German Republikaner's failure to pass the 5 percent threshold required by the German electoral law, but it also had inter-group consequences. The ER's other major component, the French Front National (FN - 11 members), in fact failed to find an affiliation and its members joined the ranks of the non-attached, which swelled to unprecedented dimensions. Actually, the non-attached present totally novel characteristics in the fourth elected EP. The bulk of the non-attached (22 altogether) belong to two large national delegations: the FN and Italy's Alleanza Nazionale (AN). In 1979 and 1989, with only 4 members, AN's predecessor, the MSI, had been the largest component of this very fragmented pseudo-group. Given the present differences between the FN and AN, which were partners in the 1989 ER group, the two delegations are likely to act very independently and to keep their own identities in what appears to be a solution to the problem represented by the 26 member threshold required for the creation of groups with members from only one country.

This problem did not exist in the aftermath of the 1994 election for the already mentioned FE group, given the size (27 members) of the FI delegation. A similar privilege was shared by the French Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) whose 14 members gave it a dominant position in the EDA, only tempered by the *modus vivendi* established with the second largest delegation in the group, Ireland's Fianna Fáil (FF), also keen on the preservation of its own autonomy. The single-party option, however, was not one that a party like FI, whose domestic strategy has been one directed at forming and leading broad coalitions, could easily accept. In mid-1995, after a failed attempt to be accepted within the EPP's ranks, the party eventually joined forces with the EDA to form UFE. This move should be seen more as an attempt by all national parties involved to end their formal isolation than an effort to build a more stable Europarty¹⁴.

¹⁴ FI's strategy seems to have more in common with FF's than with the RPR's, aimed as it is at establishing a link with the EPP. Both FI and FF aspire at membership in the EPP, but they are prevented from joining because of EPP member-parties' vetoes (the PPI's against FI's entry and Fine Gael's against FF's).

The other two newly constituted groups were also respectively centered on two relatively large (13 members each) French delegations, Bernard Tapie's Radical Alliance and Philippe de Villiers' Other Europe, which could not be easily incorporated into existing EP groups. Their parallel decisions to join forces with small delegations from other countries that in previous EPs would have been non-attached or members of the Rainbow group permitted them to maintain a high degree of autonomy.

In the Green group the disappearance of the French delegation, which failed to reach the 5 percent threshold, was only partially compensated by sister parties' good performances especially in Germany and Ireland. To complete the picture, the most notable development in the ELDR was the near-disappearance of the French delegation, whose impact on the size of the group was more important than the inability of the German FDP to win any seats. The inclusion in the group of Italy's LN's 6 members only served as a partial and temporary compensation. In fact, in February 1997, the LN delegation (and national party) leader Umberto Bossi announced his delegation's resignation from the ELDR and the implicit decision to become non-attached, in a move to pre-empt an expulsion made unavoidable, according to the ELDR group's Chairman Gijs de Vries, by the LN's mounting xenophobia.

The EU's latest enlargement did not cause particular problems for the Europarty system. All but one of the 18 new national party delegations that entered the EP in 1995 as a consequence of elections in Austria, Finland, and Sweden, found an affiliation with already existing EP party-groups (mostly with the PES and EPP, but also with the Greens and the EUL), while the Austrian FPÖ's six members joined the ranks of the non-attached.

It would then appear that there are three types of party groups in the EP: a) transnational-party groups; b) multi-party groups; c) one-party groups. The first of these three categories consists of the party groups with members from all or most member-states and connected to the three historical transnational parties, the PES, the EPP, and the ELDR. They certainly constitute the core of the EP party system even if the ELDR is experiencing an evident decline. Multi-party groups are a less stable category, a mixture of relatively old and brand new groups. It consists of three groups in the current EP. The Greens and the EUL represent the evolution of groups that have a long history in the elected EP, the Communists and the original Rainbow group. They have experienced many membership changes and outright transformations and normally have fewer national components than the transnational-party groups. The UFE is the most recent addition to this category and results from the fusion of two previous one-party groups and it is too soon to advance any hypotheses about its evolution and even about its possible survival. In general, this rather composite category seems to be a moderate source of instability and resistance to the institutionalization of the EP party-group system. One-party groups, on the other hand, are an outright obstacle, along with the expanding non-attached group, to Europarty system consolidation. There is, however, a positive development in that the historic one-party groups (ED and EDA) have disappeared and their core parties (the British Conservatives and the RPR) have joined respectively a transnational (the EPP) and a multi-party (the UFE) group. Given the relatively small size and uncertain prospects of the two remaining one-party groups proper, ERA and NE, one could even surmise that this category is on its way to extinction. However, even if this development should eventually materialize, it is likely

that a residual group of marginalized and non-integrated national party-delegations would survive. The non-attached, once consisting of few and scattered individual MEPs (with the sole exception of the four-strong MSI delegation during the EP's first elected term), has now swelled to 36 members (which would make it the fifth largest group) belonging for the most part to four national party delegations (AN, FN, FPO, and LN). All of these parties, with the possible exception of AN, are marginal to their national party-systems, and, given their nationalistic and even xenophobic positions, unlikely to become easily integrated in the European one.

5. EP party-group cohesiveness (1979-1994)

As we have mentioned, something can be said on EP party-groups' potential for institutionalization on the basis of an albeit limited longitudinal analysis of roll-call voting indices. Table 2 includes comparable indices of agreement (IA) on roll-call votes taken during the first three elected terms. The values for the first two terms are taken from Fulvio Attinà's work. Attinà (1990) examined 936 resolutions which were voted upon during the first directly-elected term. Of these, only 142, or about 15 per cent, were taken by roll-call (110 during the second term).

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Attinà calculated IAs for all party groups on five categories of resolutions (the indices were not calculated if at least one third of the group's membership did not take part in a sufficient number of votes), and the figures in Table 2 report the averages of the five indices for all relevant groups in the first and second elected terms, as well as an overall EP index for the second term¹⁵. Tapio Raunio (1996) uses Attinà's index on 159 roll-call votes taken during the EP's third elected term. His data is also included in the table. In general, first term figures are very high, being extremely high in the case of the EPP, only slightly lower for four other groups, and only comparatively small in the case of the PES. The PES' display of the lowest, even if still very high, level of agreement probably reflects its extremely fragmented composition. The PES then consisted of 15 different parties, and was the only group with representatives from all member states. The second term data do not reflect many significant changes for the "old" groups, although average indices evidence a slight decline for four of the six groups. Again, the relative stability of the indices is remarkable, especially given the magnitude of some of the newly-incorporated delegations from the Portuguese and Spanish member parties. Of the new groups, the ER proved to be the most cohesive, while the slightly below average showing by the Rainbow group is still very high considering its evident heterogeneity. As we have already mentioned the ER's extremely high IA did not prevent the MSI's exit from the group. The MSI's "replacement" with the German Republikaner did not change substantially the ER's IA for the third term. Both facts, along with the apparently painless incorporation of the Italian PDS in the PES and of the British Conservatives in the EPP, seem to confirm that high levels of cohesiveness can be

¹⁵ The index varies between -33 and +100. Positive values indicate that at least half of the group members have voted according to the same modality, the three modalities being in favor, against and abstention (Attinà, 1990, p. 564).

obtained even with relatively low levels of institutionalization. Therefore, the most interesting finding is by far the noticeable improvement in most party-groups' Ias in the course of the third elected term. This appears to be especially noteworthy in view of: a) the continuing expansion of the number of national parties represented in the EP (now almost double the 1979 figure)¹⁶; b) the post-SEA climate should have made EP-voting more important and therefore more likely to produce disagreements. If confirmed by a trend, this could be taken to indicate the development of a greater potential for party-group institutionalization¹⁷. There is only one caveat: the overall EP IA has also improved, almost dramatically. This means that if MEPs voting behavior is increasingly more similar within groups it is also becoming incrementally more similar across groups. If voting behavior differences are becoming progressively more blurred across party-groups so are probably the respective "collective identities".

6. The evolution of the Europarty system

The analysis of the Table 2 data allows for more general considerations on the evolution of the Europarty system. The values of the three party system indicators discussed above are included in the table. The operationalization of the number of groups and parties is self explanatory. The latter measure is not in itself a Europarty system indicator, but it represents useful information as to the potential effort required for a full development of the system itself. One-party groups are defined as those for which at least half of the membership belongs to a single party delegation. For our purposes this operationalization is adequate even when two delegations of almost equal size make up most of the group, as was the case of the Communist group in the first elected EP. In fact under those circumstances the two parties maintain a high degree of autonomy, as the French and Italian Communist parties did. The percentages of MEPs not belonging to transnational- or multi-party groups, that is one-party group members plus the non-attached, are also included in the table, as a measure of the overall resistance in the EP to Europarty incorporation. Conversely, total seat percentages for the three transnational-party groups are included to monitor the size of the Europarty system's core. Finally, the relative size of parties, once the total number of parties is known, is adequately measured by Laakso's effective number of parties index (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979).

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The history of the directly elected EP is not long enough to permit the observation of sustained trends in the values reproduced in the table, although the impression one gets from a first look at the data is that, on the basis of the indicators, the Europarty system is already on a path to consolidation. In consideration of the high number of national parties that obtain representation in the EP, the number of EP groups has remained fairly stable. The 1984-1989 increase can certainly be explained as

¹⁶ In the present EP there are 106 national delegations as opposed to 54 in first elected one (see table 3)

¹⁷ In reality, it is unrealistic to expect the already extremely high Ias observed during the third elected term to continue going up. Therefore the opposite could also hold: that if EP party-groups should become more institutionalized this could not possibly be revealed by growing Ias.

due to the objective difficulties encountered in the incorporation of so many national delegations that entered the EP mostly as a result of the EC's expansion (25 between the two elections). In fact, the party/EP-group ratio has risen constantly over the years: 11.8:1 in 1997, as compared to a low of 6.8:1 in 1979. The party groups thus demonstrate an ability to incorporate new parties. The Europarty core has grown even if not dramatically from slightly under to slightly above two thirds of the EP's total membership. At the same time, the relative weight of the larger party groups has increased, as demonstrated by the effective parties indicator, which declines visibly between 1984 and 1997. But these findings are contradicted by the number of one-party groups values which show a growing trend, the significance of which is reinforced in the 1994 EP by the decision of two relatively large delegations (FN and AN) not to join any group. Including these two parties, over 58 percent of all French MEPs and almost 52 percent of the Italian MEPs belonged to one-party groups in the immediate aftermath of the 1994 elections. This was offset by the considerable decline since 1979 of the percentage of MEPs that belong to one-party groups or are non-attached. This indicator's trend, however, cannot be considered to be entirely positive for the institutionalization of the Europarty system because of its reversal between the last two elections, which appears to be dramatic if one compares the pre-election and post-election 1994 values (respectively 11.4 percent and 21.2 percent).

The apparently contradictory meaning of the data appears to be even more evident if one compares all post-election values with those registered at the expiration of each term (or in-between, in case of the current one). Generally, all party-system institutionalization indicators' values are much more positive at the end of each term than at its beginning. The only exceptions are the early stability in the total numbers of party groups and one-party groups and the slight decrease (from 70.2 to 69.5%) between 1994 and 1997 in the size of the Europarty system's core. This last datum is to be ascribed to the ELDR's progressive decline, and in particular to the LN's mid-term exit from the group. With the growth of the non-attached, the ELDR's relative loss of relative weight (down to 6.8% of total EP membership in 1997 from 9.8% in 1979) is the most worrisome development for EP party-system institutionalization. But it could be offset with the possible progressive institutionalization of other groups, such as the UFE. These findings, based on a post-election and end-of-term data for four elected Eps confirms the hypotheses formulated and substantiated on the basis of one single set of data in my 1996 study. The institutional 'imperatives' originating from provisions in the SEA and in the Maastricht Treaty identified by Fulvio Attinà (1994) along with other already existing institutional factors, facilitate EP group institutionalization in the course of legislative terms. The hypothesis that institutional and political pressures favor inter-group cooperation and eventually foster group integration is indeed consistent with the data. At the same time also the other hypothesis that elections can produce very disruptive effects on the Europarty system, effects which are magnified by the EU's successive enlargements and by the consequent EP expansions, appears to be confirmed.

7. Conclusions

EP elections can be important factors in shaping the evolution of Europarties and of the Europarty system. But contrary to the positions found in early commentaries on

the importance of direct elections for the EC/EU's political system's institutionalization, EP elections are not necessarily positive factors. To be sure, various indicators display trends towards the strengthening of Europarties and of the Europarty system. Moreover, even if only three of the original 1979 EP party groups still survive, at least two of them, the PES, and the EPP, are getting stronger and stronger and, with their combined membership having grown from about 54 percent of all MEPs in 1979 to about 63 percent in 1994, can rightfully be considered as the core of the Europarty system. The inclusion of the other, albeit declining, transnational party, the ELDR, expands the system's core to almost 70 percent. Progress is usually made in the course of elected terms. Consistently with Attinà's arguments, institutional incentives and an insulation from domestic political pressures could have facilitated inter-party cooperation and party group institutionalization. These observations seem to validate hypotheses which identify 'institutional imperatives' as important factors in Europarty development.

But some indicators' trends present discontinuities or even reversals if between-election values are calculated. In particular, most Europarty system indicators show evident declines between their pre- and post-elections values. This is particularly evident for the percentage of MEPs in one-party groups. While the 1989 difference was only just over 2 percent, in 1984 and 1994 pre-election values were almost 10 percentage points lower than the post-election ones. EP insulation from domestic pressures, one of the conditions supposed to favor Europarty institutionalization, only occurs during the legislative term and ceases at election time. Elections could thus be seen as producing disturbances and even disruptive effects on EP parliamentary groups. As we have seen, they formalize the incorporation of new member-states' delegations. These can take some time in finding a precise EP group collocation and be cause of disruption in the interim (the Spanish popular party is a case in point). National delegation realignments, which may occur as a consequence of the vote, but more often as a result of national party system developments, can have even more disruptive effects. Such realignments are facilitated by the second-order nature of EP elections, which make them more volatile than national elections. In particular, protest voting behavior can be very fickle and reward different anti-system parties in different elections, sometimes changing substantially the composition of national delegations from one election to the next (e.g. the unexpected success and consequent demise of the French Greens in 1989 and 1994). Moreover, differences in electoral rules can magnify the effects of electoral results at the Europarty level. For example, failures at the national level to pass electoral thresholds can cause the disappearance of national delegations which are crucial for the survival of some EP groups. Permanent national realignments can also be very disruptive. New parties can find it very difficult to obtain admission to their preferred party group if it already includes members from their national adversaries delegations (e.g. FI and the EPP; Energie Radicale and the PES). The entrenchment of these could make the absorption of emerging delegations very difficult and facilitate the creation of one-party groups, whose full integration may require a very lengthy process.

This process could be responsible for the creation of the third Europarty category, multi-party groups. Non-existent in 1979, multi-party groups now account for almost 19 percent of all MEPs. The older ones, especially the Greens, are getting increasingly more similar to transnational-party groups, but the more recent ones, such as the UFE,

resemble more closely one-party groups. Despite the creation of this intermediate category, elections could thus contribute to the reinforcement of the 'two speed' or even 'three speed' character of the EP system of party groups. The longer established groups, the EPP and, to a slightly lesser extent, the ELDR and the PES, which already tend towards the creation of cohesive Europarties, benefit the most from the EP's institutional pressures. All three are based on sufficiently ubiquitous party families as to be able to counter electoral effects which may negatively affect some of their national components. Similar considerations can be made about the Greens and the EUL. On the other hand, one-party groups whose survival depends on the fortunes of one major national delegations (ERA, EN) can show their vulnerability at election time. But if their components are strong and/or lasting enough they could evolve into multi-party groups (UFE). Finally the viscosity of the non-attached has increased considerably in the course of the last two EP terms. There seems to be a new category of parties whose very characteristics (nationalism and even xenophobia) make them perfect candidates for non-integration. In this case one should perhaps speak of a 'standstill' rather than of a 'third speed'. The non-attached, however do not add up in total to much more than 5 percent of the EP. If future elections should prove to be no more disruptive than the ones registered so far this phenomenon should remain constant or even be reduced in case some of the parties now at the margins of the EP party system should develop links with some of the existing groups. At the moment AN seems to be the most likely candidate. Such an incidence of 'anti-system' members is to be considered acceptable.

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TABLE 1

Seat distribution in the European Parliament by EP party group 1979-1997

	1979-1984	1984-1989	1989-1994	1994-1997
Party of the European Socialists	113 125	130 166	180 197	198 214
European People's Party	107 117	110 113	121 162	157 181
Liberal Democratic and Reform Parties	40 38	31 48	49 44	43 40
Communists and Allies	44 48	41 46		
Unitary Left			28 -	
European United Left			14 13	28 33
European Democrats	64 63	50 66	34 -	
European Democratic Alliance	22 22	29 29	20 20	26 -
Rainbow Group		20 20	13 16	
Green Group			30 28	23 28
European Right		16 16	17 12	
Union For Europe				- 56
Forza Europa				27 -
European Radical Alliance				19 20
Europe of Nations				19 18
Technical Coordination Group	11 11			
Non-attached	9 10	7 15	12 26	27 36
TOTAL EP	410 434	434 518	518 518	567 626

The first figure in each cell refers to the beginning and the second one to the end of the relevant term.

TABLE 2

Indices of agreement in European Parliament roll-call voting by EP party group (1979-1994)

	EP I	EP II	EP III
PES	.658	.622	.786
EPP	.832	.841	.882
ED	.773	.829	.922
COMM/EUL	.719	.712	.923
EDA	.757	.708	.645
ER	n.a.	.961	.889
Rainbow	n.a.	.678	.695
EP	n.a.	.259	.513

Sources: EP I and EP II: Attinà (1990), p.574; EP III: Raunio (1996), p. 135. The overall EP II index was not included in the original source, and has been calculated on the basis of data kindly supplied by Fulvio Attinà.

TABLE 3

EU party system indicators 1979-1997

Term	Nr. Parties	Nr. EP groups	Effective Parties ⁵	One-Party Groups	% of MEPs in One-Party Groups	PES, PPE, ELDR Total Seat %
1979-1984	54 58	8 8	5.2 5	3 3	33.9 19.6	63.4 64.5
1984-1989	76 88	9	5.3 5.2	4 3	29.3 18.5	62.4 63.1
1989-1994	99 101	11 9	5.0 3.8	4 2	20.8 11.4	67.6 77.8
1994-1997	88 106	10 9	4.6 4.5	6 4	21.2 11.8	70.2 69.5

The first figure in each cell refers to the beginning and the second one to the end of the relevant term.

⁵ $N = \frac{1}{\sum s_i^2}$ where s_i represents the seat shares of the i parties in the system (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979).

¹ Includes non-attached MEPs

² Includes the non-attached AN and FN delegations.