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EUROPEAN COMMUNITY STUDIES ASSOCIATION  
Second International Conference  
*"The Challenge of a New European Architecture: Implications for  
the European Community's Internal and External Agendas"*  
May 22-24, 1991 George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia

Panel on "The EC: Institutional Aspects"

PARTIES, PARTY SYSTEM AND DEMOCRACY IN THE EC POLITICAL SYSTEM

by

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First draft

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(Abstract)

The EC political system is undergoing a process of parliament institutionalization. Started in the Seventies and far from being accomplished, the process depends in a substantial degree on how EP Party Groups organize party co-operation and make for party integration. The paper summarizes the Party Group experience and analyzes the EP party system in order to anticipate party organization and role in the EC political system. In the last part of the paper, attention is devoted to the related issue of EC 'democracy gap'.

The main features of the EP party system are considered dependent on two institutional imperatives: the rules of the EC decision-making process and the laws regulating the EC elections. The paper focuses on the second imperative and reveals that the EC governments opted for a very comprehensive representation of political parties in the European Parliament. Apart from the British case, proportional representation methods are used to distribute EP seats among party lists competing in a single electoral district or in a small number of large electoral districts. The analysis of the EC electoral system and of the left-right spectrum of the EP political 'streams', and the existing empirical analyses of the EP functioning support the conclusion that the EP party system is a case of *moderate* multi-party system.

When the EC governments decided to give the people the right to elect the members of the EP, they accepted or unintentionally created the condition for making the EC executive accountable to the Parliament. It is not reasonable that an elected parliament abstains from the attempt to control the executive; still, a number of critical reforms is needed for making out such a condition. A reform proposal is made in the concluding part of the paper; it maintains that political parties must be directly involved in the EC institutional structure to narrow the EC democracy gap. A proposal is made also on how the political parties of the member states may organize their future co-operation.

Fulvio Attinà

PARTIES, PARTY SYSTEM AND DEMOCRACY IN THE EC POLITICAL SYSTEM

The directive and executive bodies of the European Community (the Council of Ministers and the Commission) do not account to the European Parliament (EP). The Treaties give the EP the power to censure the Commission and force her to resigne, but the members of the European Parliament (MEPs) never agreed to vote on a censure resolution because they have no control on the subsequent political crisis. On the other hand, the Treaties make the Council of Ministers absolutely free from parliamentary sanctions and the EC political system is only marginally or indirectly affected by the fact that individual ministers account to their own national parliaments on Community affairs; as a matter of fact, this has been a rather exceptional event. The absence of accountability of the two directive and executive institutions is the most relevant aspect of the democracy gap in the Community political system; in the future it will disappear, but in the present framework of Treaty provisions and institutional arrangements, national parliaments have been deprived, in a substantial degree, of the control on policies and regulations transferred to the EC authorities; at the same time, the European Parliament is not capable of controlling the Council and the Commission with the supreme sanction of dismissing them. The fact that the EP is destitute of this specific parliamentary power, however, does not mean that it is prevented from being effectively involved in the making of EC decisions and political outputs. The consultation procedure and, much more, the budgetary, co-operation and assent procedures give the EP a formal role in the EC decision-making process. Moreover, practices and procedures such as formal debates, questions to Ministers and Commissioners, hearings, etc., enable it to play a function of orientation and scrutiny of the other EC governing institutions. As all the parliaments, the EP takes decisions by majority and voting majorities - especially when a particular majority is requested by the Treaties - are negotiated by the EP Party Groups. Despite weak "party discipline", Party Groups behave as parliamentary parties and the present structure of their mutual relationship is the early form of the EC party system.

The EC political system is undergoing a process of institutionalization of the parliament. Started in the Seventies (with the two treaties on the Community budget), this process is far from being completed but, if the EC federalization will not be blocked by unfortunate, though always possible crises, the EC parliament institutionalization is likely to continue. Such a development and the institutional and political yield of the Parliament largely depend on how Party Groups establish a permanent and viable organization among its component parties. The EC decision-making process will greatly benefit from

homogeneous parliamentary majorities which are made possible only by a permanent form of party organization at the EC level - like the one suggested in the final section of this paper.

Party Groups are here examined and their structure - the EP party system - is analyzed after the early hypotheses made on the eve of the first European direct election<sup>1</sup>; party role and party organization in the on-coming EC political system are also examined.

### *Party Groups and Parliamentary Seats Distribution*

It seems that the integration process has brought minor problems of adaptation to political parties in Western Europe but the reforms presently negotiated in the two inter-governmental conferences will probably make political parties conscious of the necessity to create more effective forms of coordination. Party adaptation to EC integration has taken two major forms: the so-called federations and the electoral alliance accords. A number of parties, however, took no strategy but pragmatic decisions of co-operation with similar parties during the parliamentary sessions. Party federations have been made by socialist, christian-democratic and liberal parties, the largest parties in Europe and the largest Groups in the EP. The electoral alliance strategy has been adopted by less powered parties (regional and ethnic parties, communist parties, national rightist parties and the Greens). Electoral alliances are precarious forms of co-operation; however, by establishing an alliance, the subscribing parties prepare their relations in the EP and their entry in a single Party Group.

In the middle of the Seventies when the decision to run the first European direct election was taken, the three party federations took the place of already existing liaison offices. They were the *European People's Party* or Federation of the Christian-Democratic Parties of the European Community (EPP), the *Federation of the Liberal, Democratic and Reformist Parties* of the European Community (ELDR) and the *Confederation of the Socialist Parties* of the European Community (CSP). Federations were expected to provoke a real party integration and to provide a channel for selecting the EC political leadership, but - to say it smoothly - they have not performed very well in these fields. Fifteen years after their origin, the principles shared by federate parties are still few and generic ones. They organize congresses and meetings, but it is hard to say that they have a stable, on-going political activity. Their financial and structural resources are kept small and they live on the corresponding Party Groups. Their most important public action takes place every five years, in the occasion of the European elections. Still, the electoral programmes diffused by the Federations are formulated by Party Group officials and contain rather vague messages and brief propositions on the most ticklish issues. Parties may publicly repudiate any section of the electoral programme of their Federation - as the British Labour

Party and the Danish Socialdemocratic Party did in the 1989 election. National parties make the use they want about the electoral programme issued by federation leaders: they may adopt it as their own programme or diffuse it jointly with their own-made programme or they may flatly ignore it.

The experience of party federation and electoral alliance allows us to say that party integration is made elsewhere. The very place of party integration is the EP where deputies, elected in national polls from national party lists, form Party Groups and work on a single agenda. The history of the EP is entirely pervaded with the experience of Party Groups; they were firstly created in 1954 in the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSA)<sup>2</sup>. The Groups have their Statute and organization rules, a budget, a staff and an elected political leadership. The EP Rules of Procedure formally acknowledge the existence of Party Groups and regulate the EP process upon their existence. EP Rules put only numerical conditions on the constitution of Groups: a Group may be formed by 23 deputies from one state, 18 from two states, 12 from three or more states. Party Groups are awarded with financial resources, staff, offices and other facilities; moreover, the Rules assign procedural benefits to Party Groups: seats in the permanent committees, time for speech and questions and other parliamentary devices are distributed according to the size of the Groups. Fruition of these benefits has been considered a decisive stimulus on deputies to create Party Groups, but it is right to say that it has not been so with the exception of a very small number of cases represented by small Groups like the CDI (Technical Group of Coordination and Defense of Independent Deputies) in the first elected Parliament, the Rainbow Group in the second one, the Technical Group of the European Right in the third one. Certainly, it was absolutely not a factor that worked without affinity in the ideologies and strategies of the parties which decided to form a Group.

Political scientists have produced much literature on party families in Western Europe and have extensively investigated the origin and nature of the ideological and social affinities of today's Europe political parties<sup>3</sup>. To acknowledge the existence of party families (the liberal, the christian-democratic, the conservative and rightist, the socialist and communist, and the newly formed green or ecologist family) does not involve to underestimate national differences among the parties of an ideological family. Social and cultural traditions of individual states as well as specific opportunities and restraints raised by national competition structures (or party systems) create differences in the organization and strategy of the parties belonging to a single political family or historical tradition. They make party co-operation in the EP a difficult one, but the difficulties raised by national imperatives are largely balanced by EC institutional imperatives. Deputies and parties, working on the EP agenda, are urged to take decisions by majority votes and the EP institutional aims can not

be attained without constraining the members of a Group to cast the same vote. Of course, it is not always and necessarily so (after all, not all the votes in the EP are important ones), but the necessity for unitary Group voting can not be denied when the requested majority is counted on the total number of the MEPs and not on the number of the MEPs who are present in a voting session. The budget procedure and the procedures introduced by the Single European Act - the co-operation and the assent procedure - are based on such a kind of voting and it will be probably extended by the present inter-governmental conference on political union.

The number and composition of the Groups changed passing from the first (1979-84) to the second (1984-89) and third (1989-) elected parliament. The Technical Group of Coordination and Defense of Independent Deputies (CDI) did not survive the first parliament; in the second one, two new Groups arose: the Rainbow (R) and the European Right (ER). Major changes took place when the third parliament was inaugurated: the Green Group (G) made its entry with a large number of deputies and the Communist Group (Com) splitted into two Groups, the Left Unity (LU) (made by the French, Greek and Portuguese Communist Parties) and the European Unitary Left (EUL) (made by the Italian and Spanish Communist Parties with the addition of one Greek and one Danish communist). The percentages and numbers of seats have changed (Table n.1). Along the three elections, the *Socialist Group* (S) increased its percentage and absolute number. The *Liberal, Democratic and Reformist Group* (LDR) increased its number of seats but not its percentage. The *European Democratic Group* (ED) and the *Group of the European Democratic Alliance* (EDA) - two prevalently mono-national Groups (ED is prevalently composed by the British Conservatives, EDA by the French Gaullists) - have been in constant decline. The Christian-Democrats of the EPP (*Group of the European People's Party* or Christian-Democratic Group) and the Communists suffered a decline in the second election but remained substantially stable in the third one (concerning the Communists we consider the sum of LU and EUL). The *Greens* (G) were a major winning Group of the third election and formed a new large Group. The few ecologist deputies elected to the second Parliament were one of the heterogenous components of the *Rainbow Group* (R) which is present also in the third EP, still with a mixed composition. In the third Parliament the *Technical Group of the European Right* (ER) has the same number of seats it had in the second one, but it has been abandoned by the Italians (who are now Not-attached MEPs) and joined by the Germans.

// Table n.1 //

Also the national composition of Groups changed passing from a Parliament to the successive one (Table n.2). The three largest Groups and party federations kept the largest national coverage: in today's Parliament the Socialist and

Christian-Democratic Groups have a Community-wide membership, the Liberal Group never had representatives from Greece and the United Kingdom. The increase of Socialist seats is the merit of the British Labour, a party with small feelings toward the supranational idea. The light increase of Christian-Democratic seats in the third Parliament has been made possible by the entry in the EPP of the *Partido Popular* which compensated the electoral defeat suffered by the EPP German party, the CDU-CSU. The European Democrats (ED) have reduced themselves to a half in the third Parliament because of the electoral defeat of the British Conservatives and of the passage of the Spanish deputies to the EPP Group. The slight decline of the Communists from the first to the second election has continued and slightly worsened in the third one. The national composition of the Communists is today larger than in the past, but they have formed two Groups with different political orientations and can not be further treated as a single entity. The European Democratic Alliance (EDA) has diminished its number of seats and restricted its national base, but it continues to be dominated by the French Gaullists. The European Right shows the same number of seats and the same percentage in the second and third Parliament, but it substituted the Italian deputies with the Germans; the substitution made the Group more extremist without improving its shape since the German faction does not amalgamate with the French one. Finally, the deputies of the Green Group come from more than half the number of the Community states and mainly from three major states (Germany, France and Italy).

// Table n.2 //

For the sake of a new candidature and re-election, MEPs must seek the favour of their national parties more than that of their Party Groups. However, national parties are used to pay small attention to what MEPs do; they seem to accept that competition and lineup in the EP are independent from competition and coalition in national parliaments. The fact that Groups do not financially depend on the cases of national parties but have their own financial resources (directly appropriated to them in the EP budget) greatly favours Party Group autonomy and, consequently, the autonomy of the EP party system. However, the EP party system is substantially dependent on two institutional imperatives: the rules of the EC decision-making process and the laws regulating the EC election. Such institutional imperatives make the EP party system discontinuous from national party systems and, as much the EP party system consolidates in a Community that gradually assumes the nature of a federal political system, a 'split' party system progressively consolidates in such a political system<sup>4</sup>. Before examining the major aspects of the in-coming 'split' system, we focus on how electoral regulations affect the format of the EP party system. Regarding the EC decision-making process, I presently remind only that the Treaties make the production of Community legislation (with the

consultation and the co-operation procedure) dependent on the willingness of the EC institutions and governments to compromise on decisions benefiting as much as possible the whole (the Community) and the single parts (the states). For what the Parliament is concerned, this condition involves that MEPs are forced to reach majority positions and Party Groups are urged to behave as homogeneous and responsible parties in order not to hinder the functioning of the EC decision-making process<sup>5</sup>; regarding the EP party system, as we see later in this essay, this institutional imperative makes the EP party system working as a moderate multi-party system.

#### *Basic aspects of the EC electoral system*

The EC electoral system is regulated by the art. 138 of the EEC Treaty and by the Act on the direct election attached to the Decision of the Council of Ministers of September 20th, 1976. According to art. 138, the Parliament has the power to propose a uniform procedure for the election of its members valid in all the member states; until the EP proposes a uniform procedure and the Council of Ministers approves the Parliament proposal, the same article states that European elections are regulated by national laws according to guidelines issued by the Council of Ministers. This is what the Council did with the 1976 Act. Thanks to these provisions and to the resistance of governments and political actors (parties not excluded) against direct election and uniformity (especially, the British refusal to adopt the proportional system), the first direct elections were put off until 1979 and no decision has been made on the uniform electoral system<sup>6</sup>. 'EC electoral system' is, consequently, a term here adopted to indicate the complex of the national laws regulating the five-year European election.

The 518 seats are assigned to member states as shown in column (a) of Table n.3. The distribution, fixed by the 1976 Act, creates inequality in the national rates of population on seats, as shown in column (c) of the same Table. The German Federal Republic had one deputy per 755.000 citizens and the united Germany has one deputy per 977.000 citizens; Greece has one deputy per 416.000 citizens; Ireland one per 233.000 citizens; Luxembourg one per 66.000 citizens. Inequality can not be avoided if under-representation of less populated states and over-extension of the number of deputies are to be avoided. However, the question of seat distribution may be reconsidered and the Community is expected to do it in a non distant future. The increased disproportion brought by the German unification will prompt a seat distribution reform.

// Table n.3 //

The present number of seats may be kept unaltered and the German disproportion in the rate of population on seats may be corrected by altering the present distribution of seats. If a

minimum of six seats (the present Luxembourg's quota) is appropriated to each state and the remaining 446 seats are divided according to a quota obtained by dividing the total Community population by the number of the remaining seats (one seat per 766.000 people), three countries (Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) keep their present number of seats unaltered and Germany obtains a new contingent of 28 seats, subtracted in a variable quantity (from 1 to 5) to the remaining eight states (see column d). The German population/seat rate decreases, as it was sought, and the other national rates remain close to the present ones (column e). The loss of three, four or five deputies may not be accepted by the affected states; in this case, a good solution could be a partial correction of the present distribution by increasing the number of German seats by 28 units in order to lessen the population/seat rate of Germany to a level comparable to that of the other large Community states; of course, the total number of MEPs will increase to 546 (column f). Significantly, as contemplated by EP Rules art. 136 *bis*, an agreement has been reached and executed to admit, as observers to the EP sessions, 18 deputies from the East German *Lander*.

Governments and political parties will consider alternative solutions to the rate problem according to consequence on the size of the Groups. The increased number of German seats, for example, will increase the number of christian-democratic and socialist MEPs. New changes will come after the entry of new states in the Community and of new parties in the Parliament. Under the previously exposed criteria, for example, the number of parliamentary seats will grow to 562 when the Austrian demand will be accepted: Austria will get 16 deputies (one per 475.000 citizens) which are expected to increase the number of the seats of the christian-democratic and socialist Groups.

Let us now come back to the present features of the EC electoral system and to their impact on the EP party system. With the exception of the United Kingdom (where plurality system is adopted in 78 electoral districts and proportional representation in the 79th Ulster electoral district), all the Community states use the proportional system; they differentiate in the adopted proportional formula but six of them use the d'Hondt formula. In France and Germany, seats are attributed only to the lists which get a number of votes higher than the 5 % of the electorate. Seven countries (Denmark, France, Greece, Luxembourg, Netherland, Portugal and Spain) form a single electoral district; Belgium has three electoral districts, Ireland four, Italy five; before re-unification, Germany had ten electoral districts plus that of Berlin (a different number of electoral districts is expected in the 1994 election); the United Kingdom has 79 electoral districts as already specified. In sum, the EC governments - with the British exception - opted for a large representation of political parties and lists: it is this, in fact, the consequence of distributing parliamentary seats by proportional representation

among party lists competing in a political system comprehended in a single electoral district or subdivided in a small number of large electoral districts.

Electoral systems show different degrees of *representativeness* according to the high or low number of party lists they allow to be represented in a parliament. By determining the party composition of a parliament, the electoral system directly affects party lineups and restricts the number of possible parliamentary majorities; consequently, it creates the condition for a single party majority or for the constitution of a small number of coalition majorities. According to some analysts, parliamentary majorities and the duration of governments depend on party system features (polarization, balance, etc.) which are affected in a small degree by the electoral system; according to others, the electoral system is the very factor determining the creation and duration (or *stability*) of governments<sup>7</sup>. No less important than the effect on government, it is the electoral system effect on the making of majorities to vote for or against parliamentary deliberations. It is in such a respect that the electoral system is important in the present EC political system.

There is no doubt that EP election laws (decided at the national level) suit the preferences and calculations of the national governments and of major political parties or, at least, they do no contrast their preferences. It is hardly conceivable that governmental parties accept to introduce great differences between the election law for the EP and the election law for the national parliament for the difficulties such differences create to domestic politics. Differences between European and national electoral laws exist in all the Community states but they are minor ones; the only remarkable exception is France where a ballot majority system is used in national election and a proportional system in the European election. In the other states the most important difference regards the electoral district magnitude. Reminding that the smaller the number of electoral districts, the higher the *representativeness* of the proportional system (or the lower the electoral *disproportionality*), we find that most states have decided for large electoral districts in European election: the territories of seven states are single electoral districts; Belgium - according to its nature of federal and bi-national state - has three electoral districts (the Flemish, the Wallon and the district of Bruxelles); Italy has five districts but - in order to correct the distorsion made by the division of the national territory - the remainders are redistributed in a "national district". Independently from the number and magnitude of the electoral districts, however, the proportionality (or *representativeness*) of the electoral system decreases when the distribution of seats is made only among party lists which obtain a pre-established percentage of votes: this is the case of Germany and France. Besides this, in the last two

systems and in Greece, Netherland, Portugal and Spain voters are not allowed to express candidate preferences and the parties control of voters' choice by ordering the candidates in the list.

### *The EP Party System and the Left-Right Axis*

The comparative study of electoral systems has extensively examined the theory maintaining that proportional electoral system accounts for multipartism and multi-party systems, and plurality and majority electoral systems account for a small number of parties and two-party systems<sup>8</sup>. Many West European countries adopt the proportional system and have a high number of political parties, but not all of them are true multi-party system. As a matter of fact, the above theory does not differentiate between number of parties and structure of party system. Not all the parties of a political system are *important* or *essential* elements of its party system<sup>9</sup>. To individuate the essential parties and to define a party system it is necessary to consider the effective arena where party competition takes place and affects the development of a political system; in Western Europe such an arena is the parliament and essential or 'core' parties are those possessing a conditioning power in the struggle for parliamentary majorities. Consequently, electoral laws are important because they constrain the entrance of the parties in the parliament and determine their parliamentary size. In the EC political system the institutionalization process of the Parliament is in its early stage but it is destined to grow and the EP is already the only political arena where EC party competition takes place.

On the ground of these considerations, it is relevant to see how the EC electoral system determines the party composition of the EP and how the party composition is structured in a party system. At a first glance, the EC electoral system seems to produce a multi-party system; in fact, as all proportional systems, it gives a large number of lists the possibility to get seats in the parliament, it puts few obstacles to parliamentary representation of new lists and prolongs the presence in the parliament of lists with declining electoral fortune. But, at a second glance, the EP party system does not seem a case of extreme multi-party system: in fact, the number of its *important* parties is low. Though the spectrum of political ideologies and party streams represented in the EP is wide - as it is the spectrum of many party systems in Western Europe - the number of *important* parties or Groups is restricted to the three Groups which formed party federations or, quite more, to the two Socialist and Christian-democratic Groups. They are the essential components of any parliamentary majority for the approval of major parliamentary decisions (budgetary decisions, co-operation procedure, appointments to Parliament offices, etc.). To better argue these statements, the ideological composition of the system must be examined.

Electoral laws and voters' choice have given parties of eight political, ideological streams access to the third EP. The eight streams (long-established traditions and new tendencies) of the West European politics are the communist, the socialist, the liberal-radical, the christian, the liberal-conservative, the nationalist and extreme right, the regionalist and ethnic, and the ecologist or green stream. The best way of illustrating a party system is by displaying it on a horizontal space - the left-right axis - according to a conventional location of political ideologies from the left/progressive extreme to the right/conservative extreme of the space. The positioning of parties on the space - which visualizes the ideological and strategic contiguity or distance of the parties of a political system - is sometimes a difficult job and the difficulties grow when the parties come from twelve political systems. However, the frequency of alignment in national political struggles and parliamentary coalitions may support the analyst's decision<sup>10</sup>. When these difficulties are solved, two conventions must be made in displaying the eight European streams on the left-right axis. Two streams - the liberal-radical and the liberal-conservative - are to be laid across two sectors of the horizontal axis. Two other streams - the regionalist and the ecologist - cannot be properly disposed on the ideological axis and must be located outside<sup>11</sup>. Finally, it is reminded that (a) the eight streams are not present in all the Community states and (b) the difficulty of positioning parties in one stream mostly regards liberal-radical and liberal-conservative parties.

Left		Centre	Right				
Com.	Soc.	Lib.-rad.	Christ.	Lib.-cons.	Nat-Ext.	Reg.	Ecol.

Most of the 24 parties of the left sector are in the socialist stream (Table n.4) and all the Community states have parties belonging to this stream. The liberal-radical stream is represented by one Italian deputy of the *Partito Radicale* (a not-attached MEP) and by eight Dutch socialdemocrats whose party - the PvdA - is very close to the socialist tradition, belongs to the Socialist Group and is a member of the Socialist International. The communist stream is represented by parties from seven states, but half of the deputies of this stream belongs to the Italian communist party (now renamed Democratic Party of the Left). The communist stream is divided into two Groups: Left Unity (LU) and European Unitary Left (EUL). The two remaining MEPs of the communist stream (an Italian deputy of *Democrazia Proletaria* and a Spanish deputy of *Izquierda Popular*) are members of the Green Group.

The largest part of the 26 parties of the Centre belongs to two streams - the Christian and the Liberal-conservative - and forms two Party Groups (EPP and LDR) with the exception of two Italian socialdemocrats, whose party (the PSDI) was born in the socialist stream and belongs to the Socialist Group (Table n.5). The members of the christian and the conservative streams and of the EPP and LDR Groups come from almost all the twelve states. Greece, Spain and the United Kingdom show some peculiarities. The Greek party New Democracy (ND) is not a confessional party; it stands on the right of the christian-democratic parties, but is a member of the EPP Group; no Greek party is member of the LDR Group. No confessional party exists even in Spain; the *Partido Popular* (PP), though a member of the EPP Group, is not a confessional party and is positioned in the conservative stream of the Right sector. The United Kingdom has no deputies in the LDR Group because the British Liberal Party gets no seats in the electoral districts as they have been designed for the EC elections; the British Conservative party - which in 1989 considered possible to join the EPP Group - is a member of the Right sector of the European axis and has formed a Group (the ED) with MEPs from Ireland and Denmark.

// Table n.5 //

The Right sector - the most exiguous one of the EP party system - is populated with nine political parties from eight states. It is divided into two streams: the conservative and the nationalist/extreme right streams (Table n.6). The parties of the former created two Groups - the European Democratic Group (ED) and the Group of the European Democratic Alliance (EDA) - dominated by two national parties, the British *Conservative and Unionist* party and the French *Rassemblement pour la Republique* (RPR). The nationalist and extreme right stream is mainly represented by the Technical Group of the European Right (ER) which is composed by the French *Front National* (FN) and the German *Republikaner* (Rep). The deputies of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI) formed a Group with the French followers of Le Pen in the second Parliament; in the third EP they dissociated from the ER Group because of the extreme orientations of the partners and also because of conflicting views with the German *Republikaner* about the Alto Adige/South Tirol question.

// Table n.6 //

The regionalist and ethnic parties do not share the same orientations and aims: some of them (like the Spanish HB, *Herri Batasuna*, and the Belgian VB, *Vlaams Blok*) have strong nationalistic aims, others (like the Belgian VU, *Volksunie*, and the numerous parties of Spain's *comunidades autonomas*) ask for more autonomy to regional communities, and the further ones declare 'hard' regionalist aims (like the Italian *Lega Lombarda*) or anti-Community sentiments (like the Danish *anti-makeeters*).

Finally, the ecologist deputies, who form a rather big Group, come from seven Community states; a small number of them is located on the left sector of the European political spectrum (Table n.7).

//Table n.7//

On the ground of previous examination and elsewhere reported empirical analysis and evidence<sup>12</sup>, the EP party system is to be classified as a *limited* multi-party system for its format (or from a *static* point of view) and as a *moderate* multi-party system for its functioning (or from a *mechanical* point of view)<sup>13</sup>. The numerically decisive Groups are only two, the Socialist and the Christian-democratic Groups, but neither of them has a number of seats so large to control the Parliament nor any of them is capable of convincing minor Groups to enter lasting coalitions or form recurrent majorities when the Parliament votes on specific economic or political interests - this fact is clearly demonstrated in the analysis on MEPs voting behaviour<sup>14</sup>. Briefly, the EP party system has a good number of Party Groups but it is not an extreme multi-party system because two of them have a number of seats much higher than the others. Secondly, despite the existence of two *essential* Party Groups, the mechanics of the EP party system is not a two-party system mechanics because those two Groups do not act as alternative competing parties, do not lead confronting coalitions nor stand as the leaders of two strongly opposite ideological poles. Moreover, despite its rather wide ideological spectrum, the EP party system is not a polarized multi-party system because its major Groups are not located on the extremes nor on distant points of the left-right axis. Finally, there are no anti-system Groups nor Groups commonly behaving as "unresponsible" parties considering themselves permanently excluded from the making of decisive majorities. From the mechanical point of view, then, the EP party system is a system of moderate pluralism with a diffused consent on social and political ideas and strategies.

#### *EC Destination, Parties and Democracy*

The European Community institutions were conceived of as part of a political system evolving towards a destination called the "*European union*". When the EC governments drafted the Treaties, many of them were conceiving of a *union of states* not very different from other international organizations, but there were those who intended the term as unequivocally referred to the building of a *federal union*. Today a common understanding exists on the fact that the Community is not a static system, and also an emerging consciousness exists about the chance that supranational co-operation is leading nowhere but to a federal destination whose stages of development and final features are yet - in Shonfield's terms - largely unknown.

A federation of states is a political system where powers and competences are distributed among the central government and the governments of the states. They are independent but co-ordinated entities and the controversies on their relations are solved by a federal court. The variety of existing federal systems makes highly controversial the empirical definition of the federal nature of a political system<sup>15</sup>. However, independence of central institutions and attribution of different competences to the central authority and to the states may be used as two general dimensions for making such a definition. Independence of the central institutions means, at least, three things: (a) an elected federal parliament with powers to legislate and control the federal executive; (b) the exclusive competence of the federal court in the interpretation of the federal constitution and legislation and in the legal solution to the conflicts between central and state institutions; (c) the exclusive power of the federal parliament to emend federal constitution. Distribution of political competences among the federation and the member states means, above all, two things: (d) the explicit definition of what policies are to be decided and administered by the federation and/or by the states; (e) the exclusive competence of the federal authority in specific policy areas (mainly monetary, fiscal, foreign and defence policies).

Where does the Community stand on the way to its federal destination? Regarding the distribution of competence in policy areas (or horizontal power division), the explicit definition of issues or political sectors pertaining to Community and to states is sufficiently clear in the constitutive and subsequent Treaties; largely uncomplete, instead, is the attribution to the Community of the exclusive competence in sectors whose centralization is essential for the existence of the federal system. However, monetary and economic policies, fiscal policy, foreign and defence policies are the very issues of the on-going inter-governmental negotiations and it is expected that they will be gradually put in the Community competence. Regarding the division of powers among central and state institutions (or vertical power division), the Community is provided with one of the three requisites for the independence of central institutions, that of an independent court competent for interpreting common legislation and for deciding on inter-institutional conflicts and on Community-state conflicts. On the contrary, Community is far from an adequate setting of the other two requisites: the accountability of the federal executive to the federal parliament and the exclusive power of the federal parliament to emend federal constitution. People identity with the federal system is a pre-condition for these requisites: in contemporary Europe, popular identity with the political system and popular loyalty to political institutions depend also on the respect of the principles of democracy and especially on the observance of the principle of government accountability. In parliamentary systems, the accountability of government is

generally *indirect*: the government accounts to the parliament and the parliament accounts to the voters. When the EC governments decided to give people the right to elect the members of the EP, they accepted or unintentionally created the condition for executing the principle of accountability of the EC executive institution(s). It is not reasonable that an elected parliament abstains from the attempt to control the executive. A number of important and difficult reforms is needed for making out such a requisite; however, the debate on the proposals to draw it up is gaining momentum. The proposal contained in the remaining part of this paper is a contribution to the debate on such an issue. It maintains that a reduction of the EC democracy gap depends on the direct involvement of political parties in the EC institutional structure in order to establish a federal, representative executive.

The Commission, elected with a special procedure, will enjoy the directive and executive power of the EC political system, including that power of initiating legislation that all contemporary governments have. A bicameral parliament will enjoy the power to control the political, budgetary and legislative acts of the Commission and the power to initiate legislation. In contemporary democratic systems, the legislation initiative is a prerogative of both the parliament and the government; the latter may command the political and economic development of the system if it detains the power of formulating legislation on fundamental social and economic affairs; the former can fully represent and promote the interests of the people if it detains the right of initiating and emanating legislation even though this right is unavoidably constrained by the obligation of the majority parties which support and obey to the government.

The EC parliament will be a bicameral one, formed by a House of the States - composed by delegates of the national governments - and a House of the People - composed by deputies elected by the citizens. The present number of Commissioners, which is different for major and minor states, will be maintained but the Commissioners will be nominated with a totally different procedure in order to introduce the accountability condition. They will be nominated with a two stages procedure: the first stage will be at the state level and consist of the designation of a double (or higher) number of candidates by the national parliaments of the member countries; the second stage will be the election of the Commissioners made by the bicameral parliament with an appropriate procedure contemplating a different participation of the two Houses: the House of the People will elect the Commission and its President by absolute majority, while the House of the States will have only the power to unanimously reject the Commission elected by the other House. Such a procedure has the advantage of electing a truly federal democratic government because the two-stage nomination creates a 'federalized' and multinational executive endowed with national, governmental and federal legitimacy. After nomination, the Commission will account to the House of the People and to the

House of the States but it may be censured and dismissed by the latter with a majority vote and by the former with the unanimous consent of all the members<sup>16</sup>.

Political parties are the fundamental actors of the proposed institutional reform: by selecting and supporting candidates to the Commission offices, they will play the fundamental role of linking the various parts of the EC institutional structure. To play their role and to succeed in the two-stage nomination procedure of the Commission members, political parties will be forced to interact and integrate themselves much more than they have ever done. It is not necessary that national parties gradually give up and be substituted by new Community parties; but they will acknowledge the necessity for constituting joint directive boards at the Community level, formed by the leaders of the national parties and of the EP Groups. The main tasks of these boards will be the formulation of the political programme of the future Commission and the selection of the candidates to the Commission offices. Since the EC party system is a moderate multi-party system, the elected Commission will have the nature of a coalition government; the boards of the parties whose candidates reached the nomination to the Commission offices will organize the support to the EC executive while the boards of the excluded or unsuccessful parties will lead the opposition.

Should the EC institutional evolution be close or distant from the above suggested model, the extension of the Parliament powers is a highly probable outcome of the on-going conference on political union and such an evolution will enhance the importance of Party Groups. National party leaders will be urged to pay more attention to the relations between national parties and EP Party Groups and they will probably act more effectively toward party co-operation and integration. Since party assimilation from the above or trans-national party fusion are far from the reality, the above mentioned co-operation (joint directive boards) is the most probable organizational result of future party co-operation in the EC. Consequently, a 'split' party system seems the most probable result from a structural point of view. Such an evolution raises a set of questions for research: the EC political system will be national party system dominant or Community party system dominant? Parliamentary competition in the Community will affect competition in the national (electoral, parliamentary, coalitional) arenas? Or will it be affected by national competitions? EP party competition dominance may be expected as much as the (federal) trend to attribute larger competences on macro-policies (monetary, fiscal, foreign and security policy) to Community authorities continues. But this may be an apparent dominance since both the present Party Groups and the expected organized party co-operation (directive boards) have national foundations; the predominance of those national party systems whose greater parties are the largest members of the 'core' Party Groups in the EP may, then,

be expected. The issue of the EP seats re-distribution among the member states and that of the uniformity of the electoral system come again on the forefront. There is no doubt that such a development will result in serious strains in EC politics; it is most probable that national resistance will strongly manifest, especially in the states whose largest parties are not members of essential Party Groups. By all means, the federal future of the European Community faces the unavoidable problem of making representative democracy working in the over-coming of twelve political systems and also political parties are requested to find out appropriate strategies.

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1 See Attinà (1978).

2 The experience of Party Group before the first direct election was analyzed by Fitzmaurice (1975). On the Groups of the directly elected Parliament see Bardi (1989); Kirchner (1985); Jacobs and Corbett (1990).

3 See, for example, Seiler (1980) and especially the analyses - here not cited - inspired by Rokkan's (1970) cleavage analysis.

4 On the concept of 'split' party system see Smith (1989 b; pp. 165-6).

5 On this aspect see more in Attinà (1990).

6 On the process leading to the European direct elections see Scalingi (1980); on the recent parliamentary initiatives on the uniform electoral system see Jacobs and Corbett (1990), pp. 22-25.

7 On such aspects see, among others, Rae (1971), Taagepera and Shugart (1989), Lijphart (1990).

8 The causal association - originally enunciated by Duverger (1964) - is not absolutely free from counter-arguments. France, for example, has changed the electoral law many times with no considerable consequence on its high number of parties.

9 On this point see, for example, Sartori (1976) and Smith (1989 b).

10 Party alignments and coalitional lineups are the instruments adopted, for example, by Smith (1989 a). Other solutions to the problem of positioning parties on the left-right axis are adopted, for example, by Castels and Mair (1984), who rely on experts judgement, and by Budge and Robertson (1987), who rely on the empirical analysis of party programmes.

11 Objections may be moved to the adopted location of the ecologist stream - see, for example, Mair (1989; pp. 174-175) who, citing Inglehart's data, asserts the plausibility of locating ecologist parties on the left side of the axis. The matter may be re-considered in the future; but now it seems premature to consider Greens' 'new politics' sufficiently similar to that of the leftist political families especially regarding economic and social issues.

12 Attinà (1990).

<sup>13</sup> It is here adopted Sartori's scheme for party system classification (Sartori, 1976).

<sup>14</sup> See Attin  (1986) and (1990).

<sup>15</sup> On federalism see, for example, Friedrich (1968), Davis (1978), Forsyth (1989), Watts (1970).

<sup>16</sup> The proposal by Kirchner and Stefanou (1990) of making the Commission elected only by national parliaments gives the Commission only a national legitimacy with detriment of its federal nature. Moreover, it keeps the executive unaccountable to the Parliament which will continue to be an institution destitute of the important democratic power of controlling the executive by the sanction of dismissing it.

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Table n.1  
*Groups and seats (absolute values and percentages)*

Groups	1st Parliament		2nd Parliament		3rd Parliament	
S	124	28,5 %	172	33,2 %	180	34,7 %
EPP	117	26,9	117	22,5	121	23,3
LDR	39	8,9	42	8,1	49	9,4
ED	63	14,5	63	12,1	34	6,5
G					29	5,5
EUL					28	5,4
EDA	22	5,0	34	6,5	22	3,8
ER			17	3,2	17	3,2
LU					14	2,7
R			20	3,8	14	2,7
NA	10	2,5	7	1,3	10	1,9
COM	48	11,0	46	8,8		
CDA	11	2,3				
tot	434		518		518	

S: Socialist Group; EPP: Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democratic Group); LDR: Liberal, Democratic and Reformist Group; ED: European Democratic Group; G: Green Group; EUL: Group of the European Unitary Left; EDA: Group of the European Democratic Alliance; ER: Technical Group of the European Right; LU: Left Unity Group; R: Rainbow Group; NA: Non-attached MEPs; Com: Communist Group; CDI: Technical Group of Coordination and Defense of the Independent MEPs.

Table n.2  
 Party Groups and seats of the first, second and third Parliament:  
 composition by state

	S	EPP	ED	COM	LU	EUL	LDR	EDA	R	ER	G	CDA	NI
B	7	10					4		4		2		1
	8	3					5		5				1
	8	7					4		1	1	3		
Dk	4	1	2	1			3	1					
	3	1	4	2			2		4			4	1
	4	2	2			1	3		4				
D	35	42					4		7				
	33	41					4		7				
	31	32					4		1	6	7		
E	36	6	14				2		1				1
	27	16				4	6	2	2		1		2
F	22	9		19			16	15					
	20	9		10			12	20		10			
	22	6			7		13	13	1	10	8		1
Gr	10	8		4									
	10	8		4				1		1			2
	9	10			3	1		1					
Ir	4	4					1	5				1	
		6					1	8					
	1	4			1		2	6	1				
It	14	30		24			5					4	4
	12	27		27			5		2	5			3
	14	27				22	3		3		7		5
L	1	3					2						
	2	3					1						
	2	3					1						
Nl	9	10					4						2
	9	8					5		2				1
	8	10					4				2		1
P	6	2		3			9	4		1			1
	8	3			3		9				1		
Uk	18		61					1					1
	33		45					1		1			1
	46	1	32						1				1

B: Belgium, Dk: Denmark, D: Germany, E: Spain, F: France, Gr: Greece, Ir: Ireland, I: Italy, L: Luxemburg, Nl: Netherland, P: Portugal, Uk: United Kingdom.

Table n.3  
EP seat distribution among the member states

	(a) present number of seats	(b) population (million) 987	(c) (b)/(a) rate (x1.000)	(d) revised number of seats	(e) (b)/(d) rate (x1.000)	(f) elevated number of seats
Germany	81	79,2	977	109 (+28)	727	109
(West Ger.)	81	61,2	755)			
Italy	81	57,3	707	81 ( 0)	707	81
United King.	81	56,9	702	80 (-1)	711	81
France	81	55,6	686	79 (-2)	704	81
Spain	60	38,8	646	57 (-3)	681	60
Netherland	25	14,7	588	25 ( 0)	588	25
Portugal	24	10,3	429	19 (-5)	542	24
Greece	24	10,0	416	19 (-5)	526	24
Belgium	24	9,9	412	19 (-5)	521	24
Denmark	16	5,1	318	13 (-3)	392	16
Ireland	15	3,5	233	11 (-4)	318	15
Luxembourg	6	0,4	66	6 ( 0)	66	6
Comunity	518	341,7		518		546

Table n.4  
EP party system: the left sector

LEFT (216)		
Streams		
Comunist (43)	Socialist (170)	Liberal-radical (9)
Bel.		PS/SP(8) <sup>S</sup>
Den.	SFP(1) <sup>SU</sup>	S(4) <sup>S</sup>
Fra.	PCF(7) <sup>LU</sup>	PS(22) <sup>S</sup>
Ger.		SPD(31) <sup>S</sup>
Gre.	KKE(3) <sup>LU</sup> KKEes(1) <sup>EUL</sup>	Pasok(9) <sup>S</sup>
Hol.		PvdA(8) <sup>S</sup>
Ire.	PdeiL(1) <sup>LU</sup>	Labour(1) <sup>S</sup>
Ita.	DP(1) <sup>G</sup> PCI(22) <sup>EUL</sup>	PSI(12) <sup>S</sup> Pr(1) <sup>NI</sup>
Lux.		PSOL(2) <sup>S</sup>
Por.	PCP(3) <sup>LU</sup>	PS(8)
Spa.	IP(1) <sup>G</sup> IU(4) <sup>EUL</sup>	PSOE(27) <sup>S</sup>
U.K:		Labour(45) <sup>S</sup> SDLP(1) <sup>S</sup>

- The full names of the parties are reported in the Appendix.
- The number in parenthesis is the number of party seats in the third Parliament.
- The exponent is Party Group affiliation.

Table n.5  
*EP party system: the centre sector*

CENTRE (159)		
<i>Streams</i>		
Lib.-radical (9)	Christian (103)	Lib.-conservative (44)
Bel.	CVP/PSC(7) <sup>EPP</sup>	PVV/PRL(4) <sup>LDR</sup>
Den. CD(2) <sup>EPP</sup>		V(3) <sup>LDR</sup>
Fra.	CDS(6) <sup>EPP</sup> CDS(1) <sup>NI</sup>	UDF(13) <sup>LDR</sup>
Ger.	CDU/CSU(32) <sup>EPP</sup>	FDP(4) <sup>LDR</sup>
Gre.		ND(10) <sup>EPP</sup>
Hol. D'66(1) <sup>LDR</sup>	SPG(1) <sup>NI</sup> CDA(10) <sup>EPP</sup>	VVD(3) <sup>LDR</sup>
Ire.	FG(4) <sup>EPP</sup>	Ind(1) <sup>LDR</sup> PD(1) <sup>LDR</sup>
Ita. PRI(3) <sup>LDR</sup> PSDI(2) <sup>S</sup>	DC(26) <sup>EPP</sup>	
Lux. PD(1) <sup>LDR</sup>	PCS(3) <sup>EPP</sup>	
Por.	CDS(3) <sup>EPP</sup>	PSD(9) <sup>LDR</sup>
Spa.		CDS(5) <sup>LDR</sup>
U.K.		OUP(1) <sup>EPP</sup>

- The full names of the parties are reported in the Appendix.
- The number in parenthesis is the number of party seats in the third Parliament.
- The exponent is Party Group affiliation.

Table n.6  
*EP party system: the right sector*

RIGHT (85)		
<i>Streams</i>		
Lib.-conservative	Nationalist-Extreme	
Bel.		
Den. KF(2) <sup>ED</sup>		
Fra. RPR(13) <sup>EDA</sup>		FN(10) <sup>ER</sup>
Ger.		Rep(6) <sup>ER</sup>
Gre. DiAna(1) <sup>EDA</sup>		
Hol.		
Ire. FF(6) <sup>ED</sup>		
Ita.		MSI(4) <sup>NI</sup>
Lux.		
Por.		
Spa. PP(15) <sup>EPP</sup>		
U.k. Cons.(32) <sup>ED</sup>		

- The full names of the parties are reported in the Appendix.
- The number in parenthesis is the number of party seats in the third Parliament.
- The exponent is Party Group affiliation.

Table n.7  
*Ep party system: regionalist and ecologist lists*

----- Streams -----		
	Regionalist (15)	Ecologist (29)
-----		
Bel.	VU(1) <sup>R</sup> VB(1) <sup>ER</sup>	Agalev/Ecolo(3) <sup>G</sup>
Den.	AntiCEE(4) <sup>R</sup>	
Fra.	Corso(1) <sup>R</sup>	Verts(8) <sup>G</sup>
Ger.		Grunen(8) <sup>G</sup>
Gre		
Hol.		Groenen(2) <sup>G</sup>
Ire.		
Ita	SVP(1) <sup>EPP</sup> Lega(2) <sup>R</sup> UV(1) <sup>R</sup>	Verdi(5) <sup>G</sup> Antiprob.(1) <sup>G</sup>
Lux.		
Por.		Verdes(1) <sup>G</sup>
Spa.	EA(1) <sup>R</sup> PA(1) <sup>R</sup> HB(1) <sup>NI</sup> CN(1) <sup>NI</sup> CiU(1) <sup>LDR</sup> CiU(1) <sup>EPP</sup>	
U.K.	SNP(1) <sup>R</sup> DUP(1) <sup>NI</sup>	
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- The full names of the parties are reported in the Appendix.
- The number in parenthesis is the number of party seats in the third Parliament.
- The exponent is Party Group affiliation.

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#### APPENDIX

#### List of the national parties represented in the European Parliament

##### BELGIUM

SP/PS Socialistische Partij (Flemish)/Parti Socialiste (Walloon)  
 CVP/PSC Christelijke Volkspartij (Flemish)/Parti Social Chrétien (Walloon)  
 PVV/PRL Partij voor Vrijheid Vooruitgang (Flemish)/Parti Réformateur Libéral (Walloon)  
 VU Volksunie  
 VB Vlaams Blok  
 Agalev/Ecolo

##### DENMARK

S Socialdemokratiet  
 SFP Socialistisk Folkeparti  
 CD Centrum-Demokraterne  
 V Venstre  
 KF Det Konservative Folkparti  
 Anti-CEE

##### FRANCE

PCF Parti Communiste Français  
 PS Parti Socialiste

CDS Centre des Démocrates Sociaux  
 UDF-RPR Union pour la Démocratie Françaises-Rassemblement pour la République  
 FN Front National  
 Les Verts

## GERMANY

SPD Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland  
 CDU/CSU Christlich-Demokratische Union/Christlich-Soziale Union  
 FDP Freie Demokratische Partei  
 REP Die Republikaner  
 Die Grunen

## GREECE

KKE Kommunistiko Komma Ellados  
 PASOK Panellenio Sosialistiko Kinima  
 ND Nea Demokratia  
 DI-ANA Komma Dimokratikis Ananeosis

## IRELAND

Pdeil Paorti na nOibri  
 Labour Party  
 FG Fine Gael  
 DP Progressive Democrats  
 FF Fianna Fáil

## ITALY

DP Democrazia proletaria  
 PCI Partito comunista italiano (Now PDS Partito democratico della sinistra)  
 PSI Partito socialista italiano  
 PRI Partito repubblicano italiano  
 PSDI Partito socialdemocratico italiano  
 DC Democrazia cristiana  
 MSI Movimento sociale italiano  
 SVP Sudtiroler Volkspartei  
 Verdi  
 Lega Lombarda  
 UV Union Valdotaïne

## LUXEMBOURG

POSL Parti Ouvrier Socialiste Luxembourgeois  
 PCS Parti Chretien Social  
 PD Parti democratique

## NETHERLAND

PvdA Partij van de Arbeid  
 D66 Democraten 66  
 CDA Christen Democratisch Appel  
 VVD Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie  
 SGP Staatkundig Gereformeerd Partij  
 De Groenen

## PORTUGAL

PCP Partido comunista português

PS Partido socialista  
CDS Partido do Centro Democrtico Social  
PSD Partido social democrata  
Os Verdes

## SPAIN

IP Izquierda Popular  
IU Izquierda Unida  
PSOE Partido socialista obrero espanol  
PP Partido popular  
CDS Centro democratico y social  
CEP-EA Coalicion por la Europa de los pueblos. Eusko Alkartasuna  
HB Herri Batasuna  
PA Partido andalucista  
CiU Convergència i Unió (Cataluna)  
CN Coalicion nacionalista

## UNITED KINGDOM

Labour party  
SDLP Social Democratic and Labour party (Ulster)  
Conservative and Unionist party  
OUP Official Ulster Unionist Party  
DUP Democratic unionist party (Ulster)  
SNP Scottish national party