

# **Parties at the European Level?**

**A ‘Comparative Politics Theory’ of the Development of the European Party  
Federations**

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Paper prepared for presentation in the panel on “Party Politics in the European Union”, at the bi-annual conference of the European Community Studies Association, 11-14 May 1995, Charleston, NC.

Political parties at the European level are important as a factor for integration within the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union.

Article 138A, Treaty on European Union, December 1991.

## 1. 'Parties at the European Level': Towards an Alternative Approach

Since its birth in the 1950s, the European Community (or European Union (EU)) has mainly been studied as an example of the supranational integration of, or intergovernmental co-operation between, (previously) sovereign nation-states. With this research focus, it is appropriate that the dominant theoretical assumptions used in the analysis of EU politics come from the field of International Relations (IR). If the IR framework is not used, either the research is distinctly atheoretical (as has been most academic work on EU politics!) or the EU can be treated as *sui generis*, and theory can be built through purely inductive analysis.

However, a number of recent approaches adopt an alternative strategy, which uses theories and methods from the field of Comparative Politics (cf. Hix, 1994). Despite their diversity of empirical focus these approaches share some basic research strategies: they deliberately distance themselves from the classic 'integration' theories; they concentrate on the 'internal' politics of the EU; and they analyse the EU as a "case study in comparative perspective" (Lijphart, 1975). For example, several approaches use a comparative theoretical framework to analyse the EU institutions (e.g. Wessels, 1991; Majone, 1993; Bulmer, 1994), or policy decisions (e.g. Garrett & Weingast, 1991; Lange, 1993); and there is a growing body of literature which analyses the structure of institutions and interests in the EU using comparative politics concepts: such as co-operative federalism (e.g. Pryce & Wessels, 1987; Sbragia, 1992), consociationalism (e.g. Taylor, 1991; Gabel, 1994), and pluralism or corporatism (Schmitter & Streek, 1991; Harlow, 1992).

The organisational and political development of the transnational party federations - the Party of European Socialists (PES), the European People's Party-Christian Democrats (EPP), the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR), and the European Federation of Green Parties (EFGP)<sup>1</sup> - is an ideal subject for the application of such a 'comparative politics approach'. Not only were political parties one of the first political organisations to be analysed in comparative perspective using general theoretical models, but after over one hundred years of research, the study of parties and party systems is still

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<sup>1</sup> The EFGP was not established until June 1993. Consequently, in a temporal analysis it is difficult to compare the development of the EFGP with the other three federations. In contrast, the PES was set up in April 1974 (called the Confederation of Socialist Parties in the EC (CSP) until December 1992), the ELDR was established in March 1976 (called the Federation of Liberal, Democrat and Reform Parties of the EC until December 1993), and the EPP was created in April 1976 (called the European People's Party Federation of Christian-Democratic Parties in the EC until November 1990).

one of the largest and most active sub-fields within the discipline of comparative politics (cf. Janda, 1993). There is thus a large body of theoretical knowledge and empirical techniques that have been developed specifically for the study of political parties, that can be used in the analysis of the development of parties at the European level. It is surprising, therefore, that the role and development of parties in the EU system has as yet only been approached from a traditional IR or *sui generis* perspective.

From the IR perspective, for example, the early ‘neo-functionalists’ placed great emphasis on the role of political parties in the European integration process.<sup>2</sup> Haas believed that “political parties are far more crucial carriers of political integration or disintegration than even supranationally organised interest groups” (Haas, 1958: 437). Neo-functionalism consequently argues that party integration arises from two separate “spill-over” processes: competition between national political elites (“political spillover”); and the desire to ‘up-grade’ the position of the European party elites in the European Parliament (EP) and the European Commission (“cultivated spillover”). Neo-functionalism hence predicts that parties become integrated into transnational groups to obtain an advantage in the national party arena (Haahr, 1992 & 1993; Ladrech, 1993). Integration within the party federations not only makes the European policy of a party more legitimate, but co-operation with the European party elites eases the development of often difficult and complex policies.<sup>3</sup> However, the application of Haas’s approach to party integration does not always hold. For example, neo-functional theory is unable to explain why the transnational party federations stagnated between 1979 and 1989, despite the existence of directly elected party elites in the EP and the transnational party secretariats, who according to the theory would have been able to cultivate further party integration.

Alternatively, from the *sui generis* perspective, in the build up to the first direct elections to the EP, it was popular to believe that the elections would lead to a “*Europe des partis*” (as opposed to de Gaulle’s “*Europe des patries*”) (Marquand, 1978). In 1971, Henk Vredeling suggested that a “common market of political parties ... [would] arise from the shift in the structure of power in the EU from the national to the European level” (Vredeling, 1971: 448 & 460). Similarly, Helen Wallace argued that party conflict would emerge at the EU level as a result of a ‘politicisation’ of EU business (Wallace, 1979; cf. Claeys & Loeb-Mayer, 1979; Ward, 1980). However, these early *sui generis* approaches only go some way towards explaining the development of the party federations. Firstly, the direct elections to the EP were not sufficient to create parties at the European level (Niedermeyer, 1983). Had a comparative approach been used, it would have been clear that the European elections cannot effect the make-up of the EU executive (the European

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<sup>2</sup> In Haas’ classic *Uniting of Europe* there are two full chapters dedicated to the role political parties in the integration process: chapter 4 on the national parties, and chapter 11 on the “supranational political parties” in the European Parliament and the Commission. See Haas (1958: 113-61 & 390-450)

<sup>3</sup> In the original formulation of neo-functionalism, parties (like government agencies) tend to delegate difficult problems to the European level. See Lindberg (1963: 10-11)

Commission) or fundamentally alter the legislative agenda - regardless of whether or not there is a uniform electoral procedure. Secondly, the 'politicisation' of EU business, such as the agenda of the Single Market programme, did not lead directly to the development of the transnational party federations. A comparative analysis of political conflict in the EU system reveals, however, that the main dimension of politics in the EU is still the 'national-territorial', which is already articulated by the organisation of the national governments in the main EU legislative arenas (the Council of Ministers) (Garrett, 1992).

However, also from a *sui generis* perspective, Geoffrey and Pippa Pridham proposed the most comprehensive theoretical framework for analysing transnational party development to date (Pridham & Pridham, 1981). They argue that the EU system is inherently unique, and hence that "European transnational [party] co-operation can only be measured by the criteria of European party development" (ibid.: 7). They consequently state that "the comparative-political approach is useful in highlighting characteristics of transnational party co-operation...although...it can only be applied to a restricted extent because owing to the uniqueness of European integration as a form of politics" (ibid.: 5). This approach subsequently produces two main results. Firstly, they proposed a set of five progressive criteria (thresholds) for measuring the unique case of transnational party development in the EU (Pridham & Pridham, 1979b: 64-5). Secondly, they predicted that party politics in the EU will develop according to a two-way process: where there is a "Europeanisation" of national party alignments in the EU arena, such as the development of a Left-Right divide at the European level; and an "Internalisation" of EU conflicts in the national arena, such as the development of a pro- and anti-European integration cleavage in domestic politics (Pridham & Pridham, 1979a; Pridham, 1986).

However, the Pridham-Pridham approach is also limited. For example, the five criteria for measuring the unique case of party development in the EU have proved to be inapplicable. As with the early *sui generis* approaches, the Pridhams' criteria are based on the assumption that the party federations are inherently office-seeking, through the process of European elections. Hence, according to the criteria, the party federations will only establish hierarchical decision-making structures after the federations have sole control over the selection of candidates for the EP elections. Because of the EU institutional system, however, where the European elections do not alter the direction of EU policy, the electoral arena is a less decisive sight of party competition than the European Council. Consequently, all the federations have established hierarchical structures (one of the final measures of party integration according to the Pridhams) to develop common policies towards the European Council, and have not attempted to influence the selection of candidates in the elections to the EP (cf. Hix, 1993).

Finally, there have been some initial comparative-political approaches to parties in the EU. Although they did not develop their points beyond simple observation, Haas likened the behaviour of parties in the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel

Community to parties in the US and Canada (Haas, 1958: 437), and Marquand mused that during the European elections, transnational parties in the EU would be similar to the US Whigs and Democrats in the 1830s (Marquand, 1979: 125-6). In addition, comparative politics theories have been used to analyse the nature of party relations between the national and European parliaments (Hearl & Sergeant, 1979), and to model the shape of the party system in the EP (Attinà, 1992, 1993).

The most significant development in the comparative politics approach, however, is the recent inclusion of the party federations in an extensive cross-national study of party organisational change (Bardi, 1992, 1994). However, one of the conclusions of this work was that it is difficult to apply classic models of party organisation (i.e. Duverger) to the transnational party federations. For example, it is not easy to compare the internal organisation of the party federations with parties in Britain, France or Germany. Nevertheless, this does not rule out the possibility of analysing parties at the European level from a more general comparative politics framework; which uses a *general* theory of party behaviour in the *particular* institutional environment of the EU system. A *comparative politics approach* to parties at the European level should thus view party leaders' behaviour in the EU as equivalent to party behaviour in any institutional or legislative environment, and compare EU party organisation to similarly 'non-classic' models of parties, such as in Switzerland and the United States.

## **2. A Comparative Politics Approach to Party Development in the EU**

Political parties are peculiarly torn between two competing logics: a dependence on institutional arrangements, such as the need to establish a level of organisational coherence; and a dependence on ideological commitments, such as the need to implement a policy programme (cf. Daalder, 1983). These rival logics consequently produced two fundamentally different 'comparative politics' explanations of party development (LaPalombara & Weiner, 1966). Firstly, the 'institutional' theory argues that parties develop as a direct result of the establishment of the institutions of democracy; particularly the creation of a government accountable to a legislature, and the introduction of universal suffrage (Duverger, 1954: 4-60). Secondly, the 'cleavage' theory argues that parties emerge to fill a gap in the 'cleavage-map' - the matrix of ideological and social conflicts (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967).

These competing theories can be deductively applied to the development of the transnational parties in the European Union. The institutional theory suggests that the establishment of political decision-making at the European level, particularly after the direct election of the EP, would facilitate the agglomeration of actors with similar institutional positions into political parties. Alternatively, the cleavage theory suggests that parties

would only emerge at the European level once political conflicts emerge in the EU agenda which directly effect different social groups. However, a straightforward application of these two main theories of party development is inaccurate. As regards the institutional model, a simple concentration on the structure of institutions at the European level does not really tell us anything about how party behaviour is constrained by the structure of rewards *between* the European and national levels, and *within* the different arenas at the European level. Similarly, with the cleavage model, the development of parties at the European level is not only dependent upon the existence of political conflicts, but on the existence of conflicts which relate directly to the domestic support base of the parties. For example, a conflict between national interests would *not* necessarily facilitate parties at the European level, as these interests are already articulated through the structure of territorial/national representation of national government in the Council of Ministers and European Council. Consequently, parties will only be able to fill gaps in the European cleavage structure where the cleavages divide social groups on party-political lines (i.e. Left-Right) rather than on national lines.

However, developing from the limitations of these two classic approaches, there have been two trends in comparative theories of party development: to integrate institutional and ideological logics in a single 'structural' approach; and to supplement these sociological theories with economic theories of party behaviour. Firstly, there is no inherent reason why institution-driven or ideology-driven theories are incompatible. Institutions and ideology are in fact different 'structural' determinants of party behaviour. In a structural approach to party behaviour, therefore, institutional and ideological factors should really be combined (cf. Kirchheimer, 1966; Wolinetz, 1979). For example, although Lipset and Rokkan are renowned for their cleavage model, it is often forgotten that Stein Rokkan also proposed a model of how "institutional thresholds" determine whether a cleavage remains a 'latent' societal division or becomes 'manifest' in the party system (Lipset & Rokkan, 1966: 26-33). Hence, it is this combination of structural constraints in a single theory of political parties that constitutes the theoretical core of the "European comparative politics" tradition in party research (Laver & Budge, 1993: xx).

Secondly, most contemporary theories of party behaviour integrate the methodological individualism of the 'rational choice' approaches with the European research's emphasis on structural factors (e.g. Harmel & Janda, 1994). This combination of structural and behavioural assumptions has consequently allowed party research to move away from theories relating to a particular area of party activity, such as electoral or coalition behaviour, towards a 'general theory' of how parties operate in all arenas of politics: from competitive elections, to legislative behaviour, coalition bargaining, campaign management, and public policy implementation (e.g. Budge & Keman, 1990).

Hence, the theoretical core of the contemporary 'comparative politics approach' to political parties is the perception of the interdependence between parties as egocentric

political actors and the constraints of the structural and strategic environment. The theory proposed here thus starts with a deductive analysis of the primary goals of parties in the EU, and the main structural constraint on these goals: the shape of the EU institutional system. From this theoretical framework, some hypotheses about the development of party organisations in the EU are proposed, which are subsequently empirically tested.

### ***2.1. Party Goals: Government Office and Public Policy***

The notion of party ‘goals’ originates in the application of models of economic competition to party behaviour. These ‘formal theories’ usually assume that the primary goals of parties are *either* political office *or* the implementation of a policy programme (cf. Budge & Laver, 1986). As Strom points out, however: “A more general behavioural theory of competitive political parties requires an understanding of the interrelations and trade-offs between different objectives” (Strom, 1990: 570). Under certain circumstances policy and office goals do not conflict. For example, this is the case when the ideal policy platform also secures government office. More often than not, however, office goals have to be traded-off with policy objectives. Even in the process of coalition formation, when party leaders are perhaps most tempted to simply secure political office, they are constrained by the policy commitments in their electoral programme.<sup>4</sup> In other words, *the primary goals of parties are political office and public policy*. These are pursued in all political situations. Sometimes these goals can be simultaneously secured. When they are in conflict, however, they are traded-off.

These assumptions can thus be applied to the behaviour of transnational parties in the EU system. Political office is rewarded through the control of the national government administrations (which secures representation in the Council of Ministers and the European Council), European Commission posts, and seats in the European Parliament. Policy goals, on the other hand, are secured through the outputs from the EU decision-making system: the short-term legislative agenda and decisions (from the Commission, the Council of Ministers, and the Parliament), which the electorates see from day-to-day; and the medium- and long-term agenda (from the key Council of Ministers meetings, and the European Council), on which parties will have to take policy stances in the future. The crucial question, therefore, is how parties in the EU weigh these office benefits against policy influence. This depends on two key factors: firstly, in the relative distribution of office rewards between these positions; and, secondly, in the way the short-term and long-term agendas have an effect on electoral competition. The answer to these questions consequently lie in the structural constraints on party behaviour in the EU.

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<sup>4</sup> For formal applications of the interaction between office and policy goals in coalition formation see Austen-Smith & Banks (1990) and Laver & Shepsle (1990)

## 2.2. *The EU Institutional System and Party Behaviour*

The institutional environment of the political system defines the “structure of political opportunities” for political actors: the structure of rewards; the rules for attaining these rewards; and the general patterns of behaviour surrounding their attainment.<sup>5</sup> For example, the institutional arrangements determine which arena provides the best opportunity for the attainment of goals: the crucial “sight of competition” (Dahl, 1966: 248-9). The way the institutional system shapes party behaviour in the EU can be analysed by comparing the EU institutional environment to similar systems, where we already know how parties are organised.

The structure of political opportunities in the EU operates on two dimensions: *vertically*, through the distribution of authority between hierarchical levels of government; and *horizontally*, through the allocation of power between the executive and legislature arenas, and the decision rules within these arenas. The ability to convert goals into rewards depends on whether these vertical and horizontal arrangements facilitate “majoritarian” or “consensual” behaviour.<sup>6</sup> At the majoritarian extreme, the success or failure of an objective is decided by a simple majority in a single arena; whereas at the consensual extreme, outcomes result from a series of ‘oversized majorities’ in several arenas. Consensual procedures thus create a higher degree of uncertainty about the level of congruence between policy objectives and outcomes than majoritarian structures.

On the vertical dimension, the EU is a *federal system*, in that it is “a political organisation in which the activities of government are divided between regional governments and a central government in such a way that each kind of government has some activities on which it makes final decisions” (Riker, 1975: 101). However, rather than implying that the EU is an explicit federation of states, we can use the concept of federalism as “a descriptive tool in the comparison of different forms of territorial organisation of government” (Elazar, 1987: 11). For example, in federalist theory, the territorial division of political organisation limits the possibility of power being concentrated in the hands of a single political party, faction, or individual.<sup>7</sup> This consequently has important implications for political parties, since the key determinant of party behaviour is the way political rewards are distributed *between* the various levels in this hierarchical system.<sup>8</sup> However, this distribution of rewards is actually determined by two independent factors: the level of centralisation or decentralisation; *and* the degree of

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<sup>5</sup> This concept originated in the study of political career paths, see Schlesinger (1966).

<sup>6</sup> On the division of ‘majoritarian’ and ‘non-majoritarian’ practices between the vertical (federal versus unitary) and horizontal (concentration versus separation of powers) dimensions of politics see, in particular, Steiner (1970), Lijphart (1979, 1984, 1985); and Elazar (1985).

<sup>7</sup> This is one of the classic normative arguments in Madison, Hamilton & Jay (1987, papers 17-22)

<sup>8</sup> Since the distribution of political rewards is a fundamental characteristic of federalism, Riker argues that “one can measure federalism by measuring parties”; Riker (1975: 137).



independence or interdependence between decision-making on each level (Riker, 1964: 125-35; Duchacek, 1970: 188-232).

On the *level of centralisation/decentralisation*, federalist theory suggests that in most cases the central institutions offer the most political rewards (e.g. Wheare, 1953). At the higher level politicians usually have power to decide on the prestigious 'high politics' issues (such as defence, security and foreign policy) and have most control over the allocation of public revenues. In most federal systems, party competition is thus most ferocious during the election of the federal executive, with the election of the federal legislature the next most important sight of electoral competition (Chandler, 1987: 152-5). In the EU, however, the national arena is the key level of decision-making on high politics issues, and the level where the majority of public resources are allocated. Moreover, the institutional structure of the EU means that the European elections do not lead to the "formation of government" or to the "formation of public policy": the two main functions of elections in most democratic systems (King, 1981). As a result, elections to the EP are far from separate national referenda on the performances of the domestic governments in office (e.g. Lodge & Herman, 1982: 264-82; Steed, 1984; Reif, 1984; Bogdanor, 1989). Consequently, whether parties seek office or policy, the rewards are higher as a result of controlling decision-making at the national level. The European arena is thus only a 'second order arena'.<sup>9</sup> Hence, concentrating on the vertical distribution of rewards *between* levels, the political system of the EU is perhaps best described as an "upside-down federal system".

On the second factor on the vertical dimension, the *degree of independence/interdependence* between hierarchical levels, competences in the EU are divided 'functionally' rather than 'jurisdictionally'. A jurisdictional division implies that the central institutions are responsible for *all* decision-making in a particular policy area, whereas the local institutions are wholly competent in another area. Under a functional division of competences, however, the upper level usually decides the general framework of legislation in co-operation with the representatives of the territorial units, and the lower level is responsible for the legislative detail and for the implementation of policy. The final political outputs in a functional system thus arise as a result of a process of 'joint decision-making' (*Politikverflechtung*) (Scharpf et. al., 1976; Bulmer, 1987). This consequently means that concentrating on the vertical interrelation of political rewards, the EU is a "co-operative federal system" (Wessels, 1985; Bulmer, 1991; Kirchner, 1992).

This functional division of competences means that EU decision-making sets the general macro-economic policy framework within which national governments operate (C.f. Barrell & Whitely, 1992). As a result, Cerny points out that:

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of Europe as a 'second order arena' of party behaviour was originally used in the analysis of elections to the European Parliament. However, it also holds in the general explanation for the way parties view EC politics, see Reif & Schmitt (1980).

...as transnational interpenetration of structures and the refocussing of the state along lines of international economic competition come to channel and even drive the dynamics of political agency along new lines, the opportunities for political officeholders at the nation-state level to fulfil the expectations which voters, in particular, are supposed to have of them are likely to shrink further (Cerny, 1990: 144).

Political parties are thus interested in securing a European legislative framework which is conducive to the policy promises made during national elections. If EU legislation is close to a party's ideological position it will be free to pursue its policy-agenda in the national legislative and governmental arenas. If the EU policy is closer to a rival party's policy stance, however, a party will be eager to alter the EU legislative framework, in the expectation that when it is elected to office it will need to implement the policy programme presented to the electorate. Political parties consequently have an interest in organising to influence EU decision-making with parties with similar policy interests.

Turning to the horizontal dimension of the institutional system, political behaviour is constrained by the 'rules of the game' *within* and *between* the executive and legislative bodies. The structure of these institutions in the EU is fundamentally 'consensual'.<sup>10</sup> All four classic decision-making characteristics that define a political system as a "consensus democracy" exist in the EU (Lijphart, 1977: 25-52).<sup>11</sup> Firstly, the federal-type division of competences between European and national institutions establishes a *segmental autonomy*, where the segments are defined by the cultural-territorial divisions between the European nation-states. As Lijphart states:

A special form of segmental autonomy is federalism ... federalism has a few significant parallels with consociational theory: not only in the granting of autonomy to constituent parts of the state ... but also the over-representation of the smaller subdivisions in the 'federal' chamber (ibid.: 42).

In the 'federal chambers' in the EU, the Council of Ministers and the European Council, representation is by national government. Moreover, in these institutional settings, under unanimity or 'qualified majority' voting rules the smaller Member States are over-represented (Attinà, 1994).

The second rule of consensus government, the principle of *proportionality*, is thus upheld in the EU in the system of territorial representation. However, proportionality also holds in civil service appointment, and in the allocation of public funds. Recruitment to the European Commission, the Council and the Parliament administrations is based on quotas

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<sup>10</sup> I prefer to describe the EC as a 'consensus' rather than 'consociational' democracy because, as Arend Lijphart states, "not just because the former is shorter - and easier to pronounce! - than the latter, but because . I start out with an analysis of the majoritarian model, from which I derive the consensus model as an opposite"; in Lijphart (1984: xiv).

<sup>11</sup> In the original theory of 'consociational democracy', Lijphart elaborated seven 'rules of the game', see Lijphart (1968: 122-38). However, these rules related more to the cultural behaviour of political elites than the institutional rules of decision-making; see Lijphart (1969).

for each Member State; and the allocation of resources under the EU Structural Funds, is consciously measured against national contributions to the EU budget. This proportionality constrains the development of cross-cutting systems of political representation and resource allocation. In territorially-divided systems, however, it is trans-national social group interests or ideological values, the normal bases of support and legitimacy for political parties, that are the cross-cutting political divisions. This thus presents a problem for transnational party organisation.

The third rule, of *mutual veto* when a decision threatens a special interest of a segment, was informally instituted into EU decision-making by the Luxembourg Compromise of January 1966. This agreement specified that on an issue deemed a 'vital national interest' to a particular Member State a decision requiring majority voting in the Council of Ministers could be postponed until unanimous agreement had been reached. In reality, however, there has been a decline in the use of the Luxembourg Compromise such that: "A Member State can no-longer veto a proposal unless unanimity is explicitly specified as the decision-making method" (Teasdale, 1993: 567). Nevertheless, the rules for decision-making under the EU's functional division of competences imply that central government decisions are dependent upon the agreement of all the constituent governments. This *de jure* right of veto hence creates a "joint-decision trap", where legislative outcomes are systematically sub-optimal (Scharpf, 1988). This decision-trap nonetheless ensures that the present institutional rules in the EU - which define the cooperative and consensual system - are difficult to changed.

Consequently, these first three formal rules facilitate the informal rule of government by *grand coalition*. The rules of segmental autonomy, mutual veto and proportionality make it impossible for simple majorities to win in the EU. This is formally instituted in the qualified majority and unanimity voting rules in the Council of Ministers, and in the 'consensus' style of decision-making in the European Council. However, government by grand coalition is also facilitated by the 'organic' separation of powers in the EU (Lenaerts, 1991, 1992). In a classic organic separation of powers, as in the United States, executive and legislative powers are divided *between* different institutions: the government and the parliament. In the EU, however, executive and legislative powers are divided *across* several institutions: executive powers are held jointly by the Commission and the Council, and legislative powers are jointly held by the European Council, the Commission, the Council of Ministers, and the EP. This system thus ensures that legislation can only pass with a series of oversized majorities in several institutional settings. For example, in many areas of Single Market legislation under the 'co-operation procedure' the medium-term legislative framework is informally set by the European Council and the precise details of legislation emerge as a result of a simple majority in the Commission, a qualified majority in the Council of Ministers, and a simple majority of those present in the EP (which in practice is a grand coalition between the Socialist and

Christian Democrat Groups). The institutional requirement of grand coalition thus effectively prevents policy competition in the EU between a 'government' and 'opposition', or between two rival political 'blocs'.

Finally, this structure of vertical and horizontal institutions in the EU has facilitated the establishment of a particular role for the European Council; as the "Provisional European Government: a collegial Legislative-Executive at the highest level" (Werts, 1992: 301; cf. Johnson, 1994: 1-17). The functional division of competences creates a need for a mechanism to allow territorial actors to participate in setting the overall legislative framework at the upper level. Moreover, consensual practices, and particularly the distribution of legislative powers across several institutional settings, creates a need for a mechanism to co-ordinate policy-making in a number of arenas. The European Council has thus taken on both these roles. As Jan Werts concludes, having closely watched the operation and influence of the European Council:

The European Council changed decision-making ... into a system of joint decision-making by the Member States and the [EU] Institutions...The thorough research focused upon the European Council unavoidably leaves one with the impression that nearly all the Community's major decisions are taken in the European Council...The European Council may be seen as the system's political and initiating spine...[providing] the political stimuli, to ensure progress and consistency, to pinpoint time limits, and to overcome the barricades developed at the lower levels of the Council (ibid.: 312-3).

In contrast, the directly elected EP - the traditional arena for party competition in any system - has very limited agenda-setting powers. Firstly, under the 'co-operation procedure' the EP can only set the agenda on very specific legislative proposals under certain "conditions": if the Commission supports the Parliament's position, if the Member States are divided, and if the Parliament's position is preferable to the status quo (Tsebelis, 1994). Moreover, under the 'co-decision procedure', introduced by the Maastricht Treaty, the EP only has the power to 'reject' a specific legislative position of the Council (Crombez, 1994). Under no circumstances can the EP alter the direction of the medium-term EU legislative programme. This authority rests exclusively with the European Council. Hence, in the EU institutional system, the European Council is likely to be the main institutional point of focus for the pursuit of party policy goals.

### ***2.3. Parties in Comparative Institutional Environments***

From the above analysis we can see that the structural phenomena of federalism and consensual decision-making rules "together furnish an importantly different environment for political parties...particularly when parties have emerged in a period before much centralisation" (Epstein, 1967: 32). However, the development of parties in the EU can also be analysed by looking at party organisations and behaviour under similar institutional arrangements.

For example, the division of political rewards between hierarchical levels (the first factor on the vertical institutional dimension) is a major hindrance to coherent party strategies in the United States. For most of American history the sub-national states have had more control of public revenues than the federal government, and of more than 500,000 elected offices in the US less than 600 are at the federal level (US Department of Commerce; 1991). It is thus not surprising that party political career histories suggest that state governorships are generally preferred to seats in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Katz and Kolodny hence conclude that “the most fundamental point about federalism as a factor conditioning the character of American parties is simply that the states are extremely important, both as loci for political careers and as independent decision-makers” (Katz & Kolodny, 1994). As a result, the US parties only exist at the federal level for Presidential elections, and during normal decision-making processes there are only very weak organisational links between party behaviour at the state and federal levels, and between the executive and legislative arenas at the federal level (Katz & Kolodny, 1992). Despite these constraints on the development of a classic ‘party government’ model in the US, however, the Democrat and Republican Parties remain the only political organisations that operate at all political levels and in every major decision-making arena (Fiorina, 1987).

Furthermore, jurisdictional and functional divisions of competence produce concomitant patterns of party behaviour. In jurisdictional federalism, as in the United States, party policy at the federal level often directly conflicts with party policy strategy at the state level. In functional federalism, however, as in Germany or Switzerland, political conflict at the upper level is about getting issues onto the political agenda and defining the general policy framework, whereas politics at the lower level is about the precise details of legislation within this framework (Lepsius, 1982; Frowein, 1986; Hodge, 1987). Consequently, the territorial party elites have an interest in shaping the policy of the party at the federal level, because the success or failure of the party on the higher level will alter the policy opportunities at the lower level (cf. von Beyme, 1981). As Chandler and Chandler point out, therefore, “a functional division of labour ... provides a strong incentive for co-ordinated party positions and alliances between levels of government” (Chandler & Chandler, 1987: 98).

Consequently, combining functional federalism with non-majoritarian horizontal institutions at the federal level creates a very specific pattern of party organisation and competition in the Swiss system. Switzerland has a fixed-member collegiate executive (the Federal Council), which controls an oversized majority in the directly elected chamber of parliament (the National Council). In addition, a strong territorially-elected second chamber of the parliament (the Council of States), effectively prevents the development of trans-territorial partisanship (Linder, 1993: 44-8). As a result of this institutional structure, parties are unable to compete for executive office. Moreover, executive dominance of the legislative process, means that party competition in the parliamentary arena is more about

“issue-saliency” (seeking to place more influence on some issues than others within a single political agenda) than about “issue-partisanship” (competition between issue-agendas) (Kerr, 1978). Moreover, the lack of clear connection in the executive or legislative structures means that Swiss parties suffer from “congenital institutional weakness: internal decentralisation, territorial fragmentation, underdeveloped infrastructure in terms of personnel and resources, and diffuse patterns of leadership and recruitment” (Kerr, 1987: 182). As Bogdanor consequently states, “there is, in Switzerland, hardly a *national* arena of party competition at all” (Bogdanor, 1988: 88).

Nevertheless, the policy-making incentives created by functional federalism have forced Swiss parties to develop an almost unique institutional strategy. Party elites were the main actors behind the establishment of the system of the ‘pre-parliamentary hearing’ (*Vernehmlassung*) (Lehner & Homann, 1987). This process, where parties negotiate with each other (and with non-partisan interests) to decide which issues need to be addressed in legislation, shapes the overall legislative agenda of both the Swiss executive and the two chambers of parliament. Moreover, the lack of institutional location of *Vernehmlassung* means that in this pre-legislative competition, electoral costs of party strategies are low. This thus allows the Swiss parties to pursue partisan policy-agendas without creating severe internal divisions between different territorial interests. Consequently, federal and consensus rules of the game mean that party competition in Switzerland proceeds through a “complex bargaining process” (*Verhandlung*) *between* institutional arenas, rather than through parties seeking to impose the will of a majority *within* the executive or the legislature (Lehmbruch, 1976). The procedures for competing over the pre-legislative agenda ensure, nonetheless, that “as in all competitive political systems, political parties in Switzerland play a critical role: they formulate alternative policies ... and fight to have them enacted” (Kerr, 1987: 181).

In sum, therefore, the EU and Switzerland have similar vertical and horizontal institutional structures. On the vertical side, both systems are “upside-down federations” (where the lower level has the highest office and policy rewards), and both systems have functional rather than jurisdictional divisions of competences between levels of government (where the overall legislative framework is set at the federal level, and the specific details and the implementation of legislation is carried out at the lower level). Moreover, on the horizontal side, both systems have consensual rules of decision-making (through mutual veto, segmental autonomy, proportionality, and grand coalition), and legislative-executive relations are divided ‘functionally’ rather than ‘organically’ (where the legislative and executive powers are shared across institutions rather than divided between them). It is thus not unlikely that similar patterns of party organisation and policy-competition to the Swiss system, where parties seek policy goals by organising across decision-making arenas at the pre-legislative stage, would develop in the EU system.

From this comparative-political framework several conclusions about how the EU institutional system structures party behaviour and competition have thus been derived:

- *The major office rewards for political parties are in the national arena.* National government office gives parties control of the large domestic legislative agenda and over the allocation of most public resources.
- *However, the functional division of competences in the EU means that for many areas of public policy the general legislative framework is set at the European level.* This imposes a constraint on the policy manoeuvrability of parties during electoral competition for the crucial national offices.
- *The 'rules of the game' at the European level facilitate consensus styles of decision-making and prevent the development of stable legislative-executive linkages.* Parties must thus seek to create 'grand coalitions' across institutional settings, rather than within the executive or the legislature. This is somewhat similar to the organisational strategy of parties in Switzerland in the pursuit of policy goals through structuring the pre-legislative agenda.
- *Precisely because of the problem of coordination, however, the European Council has emerged as the main 'sight of political competition' in the establishment of the general legislative agenda.* In contrast to the European Council, the European Parliament (the intuitive setting of party competition in any system) provides little incentive for the pursuit of transnational party policy goals, despite organising its internal decision-making along party-political lines.

On the basis of these deductive conclusions we can thus propose some propositions about the development of party organisations at the European level:

- *To secure policy rewards from the EU system, the party federations will increasingly organise around the key sights of policy competition.* The party federations are thus likely to concentrate most resources on influencing the agenda and outcomes of the European Council meetings. Parties will go where there power is! And in the EU, decisional power rests with the European Council and *not* the European Parliament.
- A subsidiary proposition, moreover, is that *if the organisational strategy of the federations is successful, more party elites and other national parties will seek to participate in their structures.* There is thus likely to be an increase involvement of national party leaders in party federation meetings, and an increase in the number of parties within each 'party family' that are members of the party federations.

But, do these propositions hold up to empirical scrutiny?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The empirical findings presented here are part of a larger analysis of the organisational *and* policy development of the EC party federations. The data has been compiled from the official archives of the party federations in Brussels, and of the member parties in London, The Hague and Bonn, and from all references to 'transnational party co-operation' in *Agence Europe*, from 1969 to 1994.

### **3. An Empirical Test of the Comparative Politics Framework: Party Federation Organisational Change, 1970-1994**

The organisational development of the party federations is intuitively separated into three distinct periods (cf. Hix, 1995). Firstly, there was a period of *optimism*, from the birth of the federations in the early 1970s to the first EP elections in June 1979; when the party federations developed in the expectation that following the European elections they would be a significant force in the 'new democratic Europe'. Secondly, however, there was a period of *stagnation*, from the aftermath of the first European elections to the third European elections in 1989; when without a clear institutional location in the EC system, the federations could not develop beyond umbrella organisations for the drafting of perfunctory EP election programmes. Finally, however, there was a period of *renaissance*, following the launch of the EC institutional reform process at the Madrid Summit in June 1990 (which led to the Treaty on European Union); when the party federations emerged as the only party-political channel for inputs into the Intergovernmental Conferences (IGCs). The party federations continued to develop after the end of the IGCs, however, in the expectation that the Maastricht Treaty 'party article' (Article 138A) could lead to a formal recognition of the role of the party federations in the EU decision-making framework.

In deductive-theoretical terms, moreover, these periods correspond to the changing structure of political incentives discussed in the previous section. In the first period, following the Hague Summit decision in December 1969 to hold direct elections to the European Parliament, party leaders expected to be able to secure new office and policy rewards at the European level through the new directly European Parliament. In the second period, however, the institutional 'stagnation' of European integration, and the increased use of intergovernmental bargaining practices, meant that the EC system operated less like a political system than an 'international organisation'. With the national governments as the dominant actors, the main dimension of politics in the EC was the division between the various 'national interests' of the European nation-states, and not the policy platforms of the rival European *familles spirituelles*. Finally, however, several factors meant that by the launch of the IGCs on EMU and Political Union, party-political differences had begun to emerge in the European arena. The acceleration of legislation for the completion of the Single Market programme established new European-wide regulatory regimes; the beginning of Stage One of Economic and Monetary Union in 1990 introduced a new level of macro-economic policy co-ordination at the European level; and the EC budgetary reforms in 1989 for the first time established significant powers of economic redistribution through the EC Structural Funds. These issues consequently came to a head in the IGCs, where the emerging institutions of European economic and political union constituted a fundamentally new structure of institutional and strategic opportunities for Europe's party leaders.



### 3.1. Party Leaders' and European Council Meetings

There has been a fundamental change in the role of party leaders in the internal decision-making arrangements of all the party federations. The original statutes of all the party federations make no reference to the role of party leaders (CSP, 1974; ELD, 1976; EPP, 1976). The internal executive authority in each federation was a collegiate body composed of the International Secretaries of the member parties. Supply and demand factors have meant, however, that the national party leadership's have increasingly taken on the main executive and legislative functions within each of the federations. On the supply side, the International Sections of the national parties do not possess the political authority to make credible (binding) commitments. For the approval of new organisational and policy strategies, therefore, the consent of each party leader, or at least a majority of party leaders, is essential. On the demand side, the organisational and informational resources of the party federations (such as access to the translation services of the European Parliament secretariat) are an excellent vehicle for the co-ordination of transnational policy goals through the EC decision-making system.

Consequently, in each party federation the role of the party leaders' summits has increasingly been formalised. The "Party Leaders' Conference" was instated for the first time as an official organ of the PES in the statutes adopted in November 1992 (PES, 1992: Art's 8, 16, 17 & 18). Similarly, the "Conference of Party Leaders and Heads of Government" was installed as an official organ of the EPP in the 1990 statutory reforms, with a special role for all "members of the European Council belonging to a member party" - that may or may not be the official party chairmen or secretaries-general (EPP, 1990: Art's 7 & 10). Finally, although the 1988 ELDR statutes make no official reference to the role of party leaders, the draft statutes to be adopted at the 1995 Congress are likely to introduce similar provisions to the other two federations; and the latest documentation of the ELDR 'Party' state that: "Leaders' meetings are convened twice a year...[and] are usually organised in connection with the European Council" (ELDR, 1994: 4).

**Table 1. Leaders' Meetings (2 years)**

Period	CSP/PES	EPP	ELDR
1971-72	1	0	2
1973-74	2	1	2
1975-76	1	0	3
1977-78	1	1	2
1979-80	3	3	1
1981-82	2	1	2
1983-84	2	3	5
1985-86	1	5	4
1987-88	4	4	3
1989-90	7	3	4
1991-92	7	9	4
1993-94	6	4	3
Total	37	34	35

**Table 2. Leaders' Meetings (5 years)**

Period	CSP/PES	EPP	ELDR
1970-74	3	1	4
1975-79	4	2	5
1980-84	5	6	8
1985-89	8	9	8
1990-94	17	16	10
Total	37	34	35

The growing importance of party leaders in the workings of the federations is also shown by the increased number of party leaders' meetings, as illustrated in Tables 1 and 2. Before 1990, there were several bi-lateral and tri-lateral meetings between various leaders of national parties, as well as informal leaders' meetings of the Socialist, Liberal and Christian Democrat 'Internationals'. In the 1990s, however, all the main party leaders now meet regularly under the statutes of the three party federations, for the specific purpose of co-ordinating the organisational and policy development of the federations.

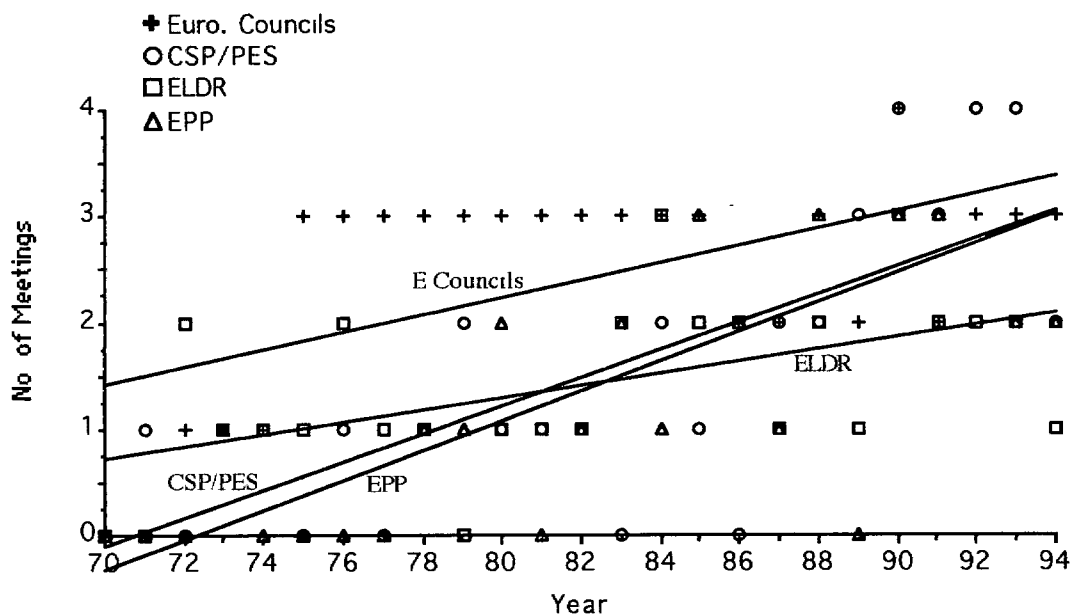
Furthermore, the party federation leader's summits are increasingly organised specifically to influence the agenda of the European Council meetings. Table 3 shows the increasing percentage of the total number of each party federations' leaders' meetings which are held in the weeks immediately before or after an EC summit. The rationale of meeting before an EC summit is that the non-governmental parties can put pressure on the party actors participating in the European Council (i.e. the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers). The incentive for governmental actors, on the other hand, is to form alliances with like minded actors prior to the European Council bargaining. Moreover, by meeting immediately prior to a European Council, the joint declarations adopted by the party leaders' will be reported in the European media, and may thus alter the agenda surrounding the meetings. Similarly, by arranging a meeting immediately after a European Council meeting, the party actors in EC decision-making will be aware that they will be forced to defend their positions taken at the EC summit to their fellow 'European Party' members. By the end of 1992, all the party federations had statutory provisions specifying that any decision adopted by an "absolute majority" of party leaders is 'binding' on the member parties (EPP, 1990: Art's 3 & 9; ELDR, 1992: Art's 3 & 18; PES, 1992: Art's 9 & 18).

**Table 3. Percentage of Party Leaders' Meetings in the Weeks Before or After ('Close'), and in the Same Venue (SV), as a European Council**

Period	CSP/PES		EPP		ELDR		Average	
	Close	SV	Close	SV	Close	SV	Close	SV
1970-74	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	0.0	12.5	0.0
1975-79	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	60.0	20.0	27.3	9.1
1980-84	0.0	0.0	16.7	0.0	12.5	0.0	10.5	0.0
1985-89	25.0	0.0	33.3	33.3	12.5	0.0	24.0	12.0
1990-94	70.6	52.9	56.3	18.8	70.0	20.0	65.1	32.6
Tot Avg:	37.8	24.3	38.2	20.6	37.1	8.6	37.7	17.9

The impact on European Council decisions is further enhanced by holding the party leaders' meetings in the same place as the EC Summit. This increases the attention of the European media, that have gathered for the European Council jamboree, and forces the party leaders' to directly address the issues under discussion in the EC meeting. The percentage of all party leaders' summits held in the same venue as a European Council meeting is shown in Table 3 in the brackets. As illustrated, this strategy has only been followed by *all three* federations since 1990.

**Figure 1. Frequency of Leaders' Meetings and European Councils**



However, the party federations could not have increased their overall impact on European Council decision-making if the increased activity of the Leaders' Summits is simply in line with a concomitant increase in the total number of European Councils. Consequently, nine party leaders' meetings in a year when there were four European Councils (as in 1990) is not much of a qualitative increase on four leaders' meeting in a year when there were only two European Councils (as in 1986). Moreover, the number of leaders' meetings per year did not increase at a significantly greater rate than the number of European Councils, as is shown by the slope of the regression lines in Figure 1. Similarly, although there is a fairly low level of correlation between the number of leaders' summits and European Council meetings in each the three periods outlined above, there is a relatively high correlation between the frequency of leaders' meetings and European Councils in the period as a whole (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Correlation of Annual No. of European Councils and Party Leaders' Meetings**

	1970-79	1980-89	1990-94	1970-94
CSP/PES	.175	-.267	.395	.346
ELDR	.445	.263	.500	.490**
EPP	.280	.319	.000	.420*
All Federations:	.320	.183	.272	.497**

\* = significant at the 90% level

\*\* = significant at the 98% level

all other relations are not significant

This is particularly true when taking the total number leaders' meetings each year by all three party federations. In relative terms, therefore, the increase in the frequency of party leaders' summits vis-à-vis European Councils is small.

Nevertheless, it is not the total number of leaders' summits vis-à-vis European Councils that is important. In terms of influencing the outcomes of the European Council, it is more significant that there should be a relative increase in the number of party leaders' meetings in close (temporal and territorial) proximity to the European Council meetings. Turning this around: for party federation organisation to have increasingly influenced the output of the European Councils, a growing proportion of European Councils should have had party leaders' summits in close proximity. This thus requires taking the European Council as the subject of analysis, rather than the party leaders' meetings. This subsequently reveals that there has been a dramatic increase in the number and proportion of European Council meetings where there has been either one or all groups of party leaders meeting immediately before or afterwards. As illustrated in Table 5, until 1985 over 80% of all European Councils did not have *any* 'close' party leaders' meetings. In contrast, between 1985 and 1989, one third of all European Councils had at least *one* party leader' meetings in close proximity. And, finally, from 1990 to 1994, 60% of all European Councils had at least *two* party leaders' meetings either immediately before or after them; and all three party federations held leaders' summits close to almost half of all the European Councils in this period. Furthermore, two thirds of all European Councils since 1990 have had at least one party leaders' meetings held at the same venue, in the days leading up to the EC meeting.

**Table 5. No. and Percentage of European Councils with 'Close' Party Leaders' Meetings**

Period	No Party Meetings		1 Party Meeting		2 Party Meetings		All Parties Meeting		Total E.Councils	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1975-79	12	80.0	3	20.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0
1980-84	13	86.7	2	13.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0
1985-89	8	66.7	2	16.7	2	16.7	0	0.0	12	100.0
1990-94	2	13.3	4	26.7	3	20.0	6	40.0	15	100.0
Total:	37	61.7	12	20.0	5	8.3	6	10.0	60	100.0

As a result, the evidence suggests quite clearly that parties at the European level have increasingly organised at the level of party elites around the key EC decision-making sight. The party leaders' conferences have progressively taken on the main decision-making functions in all three party federations. Compared to the 1980 to 1989 period, from 1990 to 1994 there was a dramatic increase in the number of party leaders' meetings for all three party federations. Furthermore, there has been an acceleration in the activity of these party leaders' meetings around the European Council summits. Prior to 1985, none of the federations pursued a deliberate organisational strategy to influence the EC summit

meetings. In contrast, since 1990, almost every European Council was surrounded by meetings of the Socialist, Christian Democrat and Liberal party leaders, within the organisational and policy framework of the three main European party federations. This does not necessarily mean, however, that this new organisational strategy was successful.

### ***3.2. Elite Involvement and Increasing Coherence of Party Membership***

One way of measuring the success of this organisational strategy is to analyse two central aspects of internal party organisational development: the level of political *involvement*; and the level of *coherence* (Janda, 1980: chapters 12 & 11). For the behaviour of parties in the European Union, these concepts can be operationalised as follows:

- *involvement* is the level of participation of party elites in the work of the party federations; i.e. the level of attendance of party leaders (rather than International Secretaries) at the party leaders' summits; and
- *coherence* is the proportion of all parties that are members of a federation that could viably be 'captured'; i.e. the proportion of each party family that are members of the party federation that they are most likely to join.

If the theory is correct, both these indicators should increase according to the level of party federation organisation around the European Councils

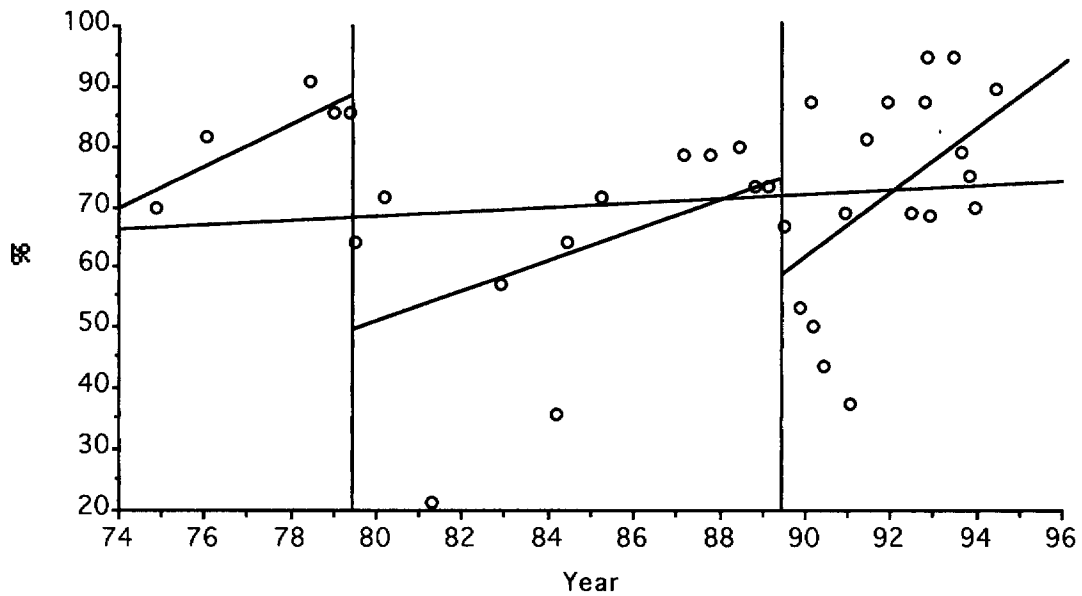
On the question of elite involvement, not all party leaders attend every leaders' meeting. When there are pressing matters in the domestic arena, there is little point in wasting a day (or even two days) going to a party leaders' meeting, unless it can clearly contribute to a party leader's competitive position. Consequently, the level of involvement of party leaders is a good indicator of how significantly the European party elites see the work of the federations. Consequently, as Figures 2 and 3 reveal, there has been an overall increase in the level of party leaders' attendance of leaders' meetings across the whole period in the case of the Socialist and Christian Democrat federations. Moreover, there is a correlation between the structure of political incentives in the EC system and the rate of increase in leadership attendance.

In the build up to the first direct elections, the proportion of party leaders attending CSP and EPP meetings was considerably high: an average of 82.5 percent of Socialist leaders, and 83.3 percent of Christian Democrat leaders. Moreover, in the case of the Socialist federation, the proportion of leaders attending the meetings increased rapidly from 1974 to 1979.<sup>13</sup>

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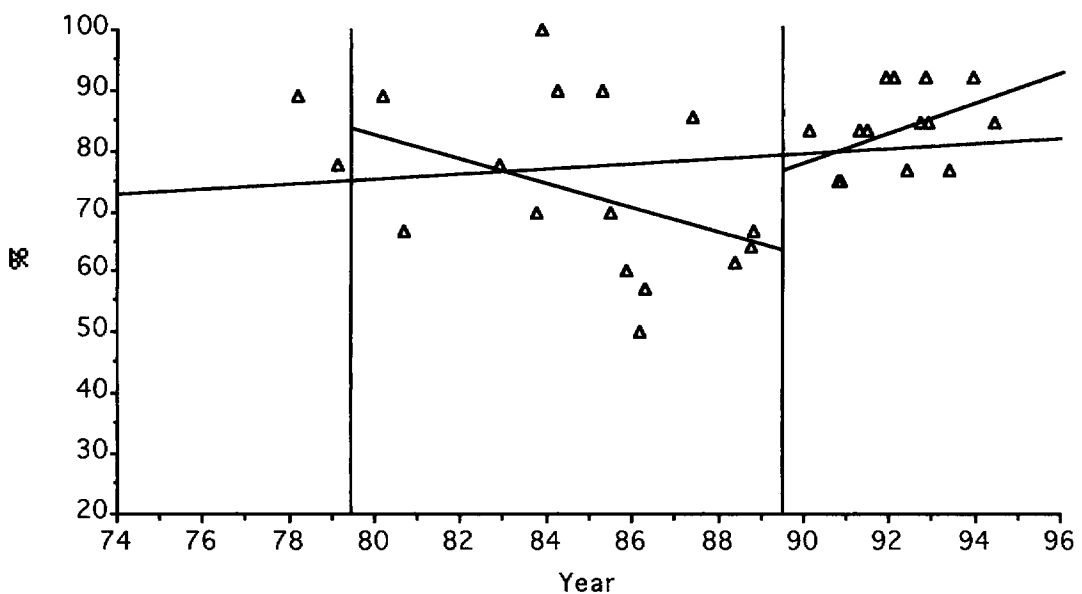
<sup>13</sup> Presumably if two leaders' meetings are close to each other, party leaders are less likely to be able to attend both meetings. To take the proximity of leaders' meetings into account when calculating the rate of increase within each period, the attendance figures must thus be plotted according to their precise yearly dates. This hence gives a 'truer' picture of the level of leadership participation than if the average attendance figures for each year had been used

**Figure 2. Attendance at CSP/PES Leaders' Meetings**



In contrast, in the period of 'stagnation', from 1980 to 1989, the proportion attending party leaders' meetings fell for both federations: an average of 76.8 percent of Socialist leaders, and 73.2 percent of Christian Democrat leaders. Nevertheless, as shown by the regression line between June 1980 and 1990, there was a gradual increase in the level of Socialist leadership attendance in this interregnum period.

**Figure 3. Attendance at EPP Leaders' Meetings**

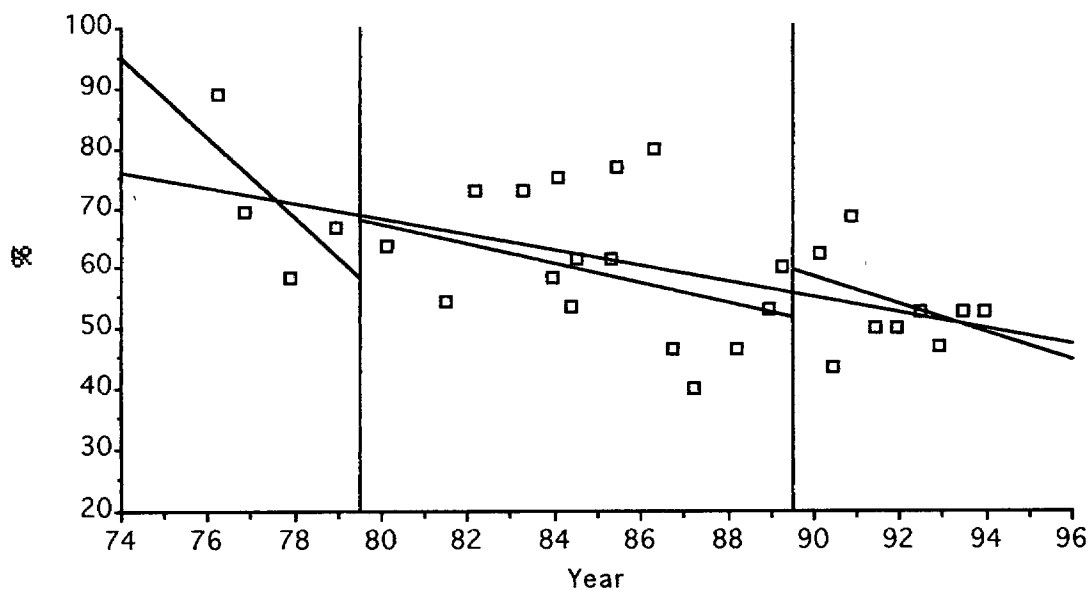


Finally, between 1990 and 1995, the level of attendance at CSP/PES and EPP leaders' meetings increased to an average of 74.0 and 83.0 percent respectively. Moreover, as the

regression lines show, after June 1989 both the EPP and the CSP/PES experienced a faster rate of growth in the attendance at leaders' meetings than in any of the earlier periods.

However, as Figure 4 shows, the Liberal federation does not follow the same pattern. Firstly, unlike the EPP and CSP, there was a fall in the overall proportion of party leaders at Liberal federation leaders' meetings between 1970 and 1994. Like the other two federations, the proportion of Liberal leaders in attendance at ELDR meetings was relatively high prior to the first direct elections to the EP; an average of 70.8 percent. However, as shown by the first regression line, the level of attendance fell during this period. Moreover, between 1979 and 1989, the average attendance at ELDR leaders' meetings was only 61.1 percent; and there was a decline across this intermediate period. Moreover, between 1990 and the end of 1994, the average proportion of party leaders at ELDR summits was only 53.4 percent; and again there was a downward trend for this period. The only contrary point that could be highlighted is that the speed of decline in the level of leaders' attendance was lower in each successive period; as the reduced slope of three period-specific regression lines show. Clearly, however, the strategy of organising leaders' summits around European Council meetings did not produce a pay-off for the ELDR federation in terms of increased elite involvement.

**Figure 4. Attendance at ELDR Leaders' Meetings**



However, the different levels of 'involvement' pay-offs between the three federations can be explained through the theory. Although each federation may pursue the same organisational strategy, of increasingly organising around the European Councils, each federation has a differential impact on the outcome of the EC summits. Between 1990 and 1995, the EPP federation leaders' meetings were attended by between four and six Heads of Government (Kohl (CDU), Martens or Dehaene (both CVP), Santer (CSV) and

Lubbers (CDA), and at different times Mitsotakis (ND) and Andreotti (DC)) and between one and three Foreign Ministers (Van Den Broek or Kooijmans (both CDA), and two of Eyskens (CVP), Samaras (ND) and Colombo or Andreatta (both DC)).<sup>14</sup> Similarly, for most of the period between 1990 and 1995, the Socialist federation had between two and four Heads of State or Prime Ministers (Mitterrand (PS-F) and González (PSOE), and at different times Rasmussen (SD), Amato (PSI), Papandreou (PASOK) and Kok (PvdA)<sup>15</sup> and between four and five Foreign Ministers (Poos (POSL) and Fernández or Solana Madariaga (both PSOE), and at different times Claes or Vandembroucke (both SP), Papoulias (PASOK), De Michelis (PSI), Dumas (PS-F) and Spring (LP-I)<sup>16</sup> in every European Council meeting. Consequently, in this period, the EPP and CSP/PES together represented about 60 percent of all the participants in every European Council meeting. In these meetings, the Socialist federation also had the additional influence of EC Commission President Jacques Delors (PS-F), who was present at all seventeen CSP/PES leaders' meetings between 1990 and 1995. In contrast, the ELDR could only muster the support of one Prime Minister (Cavaço Silva (PSD)) and three Foreign Ministers (Deus Pinheiro or Manuel Durão Barroso (both PSD), Genscher or Kinkel (both FDP), and Ellemann-Jensen (V) or Petersen (RV)). This thus constituted only 16 percent of the European Council participants. Moreover, the possibility of these ELDR participants influencing European Council outcomes was further exacerbated by the fact that the FDP, V and RV were all very minor partners in coalition governments, where the 'European policy' of the government was presumably dominated by the parties holding the Prime Ministers' offices (i.e. the CDU and the KP-D or SD).

Turning to the question of membership coherence, however, the ELDR has secured pay-offs at approximately the same rate as the Socialist and Christian Democrat federations. In order to survive and compete more effectively for the office and policy goals of the leaderships, the party federations must constantly seek increased economic resources. The main sources of revenue for the federations are the membership dues of the member parties, and the subventions from the groups in the EP. To secure these resources, the party federations constantly need to attract more member parties. However, the party federations do not simply want *any* party to join. Because of the importance of policy pursuit in the European arena, a party federation must be careful only to include parties that adhere to its basic 'policy goals'. Realistically, therefore, the party federations can only

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<sup>14</sup> Mitsotakis (ND) was Greek Prime Minister from April 1990 to October 1993, and Andreotti (DC) was Italian Prime Minister until July 1992. With the change of government in the Netherlands, the CDA leaders (Lubbers and Kooijmans) ceased to be members of the European Council in August 1994.

<sup>15</sup> Rasmussen became Danish Prime Minister in January 1993, Amato was Italian Prime Minister between July 1992 and April 1993, and Papandreou and Kok became the Greek and Dutch Prime Ministers in October 1993 and August 1994 respectively.

<sup>16</sup> Claes was Belgian Foreign Minister from March 1992, Papoulias was Greek Foreign Minister from October 1993, De Michelis was Italian Foreign Minister until July 1992, Dumas was French Foreign Minister until March 1993, and Spring was Irish Foreign Minister from January 1993.



'target' parties that they perceive to be of the same "political family" (*famille spirituelle*); i.e. Socialist, Liberal, and Christian Democrat.<sup>17</sup> The changing membership of the three party federations among their 'targeted' parties is shown in Table 6.

**Table 6. Political Families and the Membership of the Party Federations**

<b>Family:</b>	<b>Socialist</b> date of joining CSP/PES	<b>Liberal</b> date of joining ELDR	<b>Christian Democrat</b> <b>and other 'Right'</b> date of joining EPP (EUCD & EDU membership)
<b>M. State:</b>			
<b>Belgium</b>	PS-B, 4 74 SP, 4 74	PLB/PRLW/PRL, 3.76 PVV/VLD, 3.76	PSC, 4 76 (EUCD) CVP, 4 76 (EUCD)
<b>Denmark</b>	SD, 4.74	V, 3.76 RV, 11 76-5.78 & 3.92	KP-D (Observer), 1 94 (EP Grp), 4 92 (EDU) CD (EP Grp), 6 79 KFP (EUCD)
<b>France</b>	PS-F, 4.74	PRS/RAD, 3 76 MRG, 3.76-11 76 PR, 11 76	CDS-F, 4 76 (EUCD) RPR (EDU)
<b>Germany</b>	SPD, 4.74	FDP, 3.76	CDU, 4 76 (EUCD/EDU) CSU, 4 76 (EUCD/EDU)
<b>Ireland</b>	LP-Ir, 4.74	PD, 5.88 (est 12 85)	FG, 4 76 (EUCD) FF, ---
<b>Italy</b>	PSDI, 4 74-6.94 PSI, 4 74 PDS, 11.92 (est 3 91)	PLI/FLI, 3 76 PRI, 11.76 Rad (EP Grp), 6.84-6.94	DC/PPI, 4 76 (EUCD/EDU) SVP (EP Grp), 6 79 P.Seg, (EP Grp), 6 94 (est 2 94) Forzà, --- (est 3 94)
<b>Luxembourg</b>	POSL, 4 74	DP, 3 76	CSV, 4 76 (EUCD/EDU)
<b>Netherlands</b>	PvdA, 4 74	VVD, 3.76 D'66, 12 94	CDA, 4 76 (EUCD)
<b>U.Kingdom</b>	LP-GB, 1 76 SDLP, 1 76	LP/SLD, 11 76 APNI, 1.84	OUP (EP Grp) 6 79 CP-GB (EP Grp), 4 92 (EDU)
<b>Greece (1 81)</b>	PASOK, 2 89	HLP, 12.83	ND, 9 83 (EUCD/EDU)
<b>Portugal (1 86)</b>	PS-P, 1 79	PSD, 1 86	CDS-P, 1 86-3 88 (EUCD/EDU)
<b>Spain (1 86)</b>	PSOE, 1 79	PRD/CDS-Sp, 12.85 CDC (EP Grp), 4 86 FORO, 7.93 (est 7 93)	PNV, 1 86 (EUCD) UDC, 1.86 (EUCD) PDP, 1.86-6.89 (joined PP, 6 89) AP/PP, 10.91 (EUCD/EDU)
<b>Austria (1.95)</b>	SPO, 2 90	LF, 12 93 (est 6 93)	OVP, 1 95 (EUCD/EDU)
<b>Finland (1.95)</b>	SSDP, 11 92	KP-F, 1 95 SFP, 1 95 SKDL, 1 95	KK (Observer), 11 92 (EDU) SKL (EUCD)
<b>Sweden (1 95)</b>	SAP, 11.92	FPL, 1.95 CP-Sw, ---	KDS, 1.95 (EUCD) MS (Observer), 11 92 (EDU)

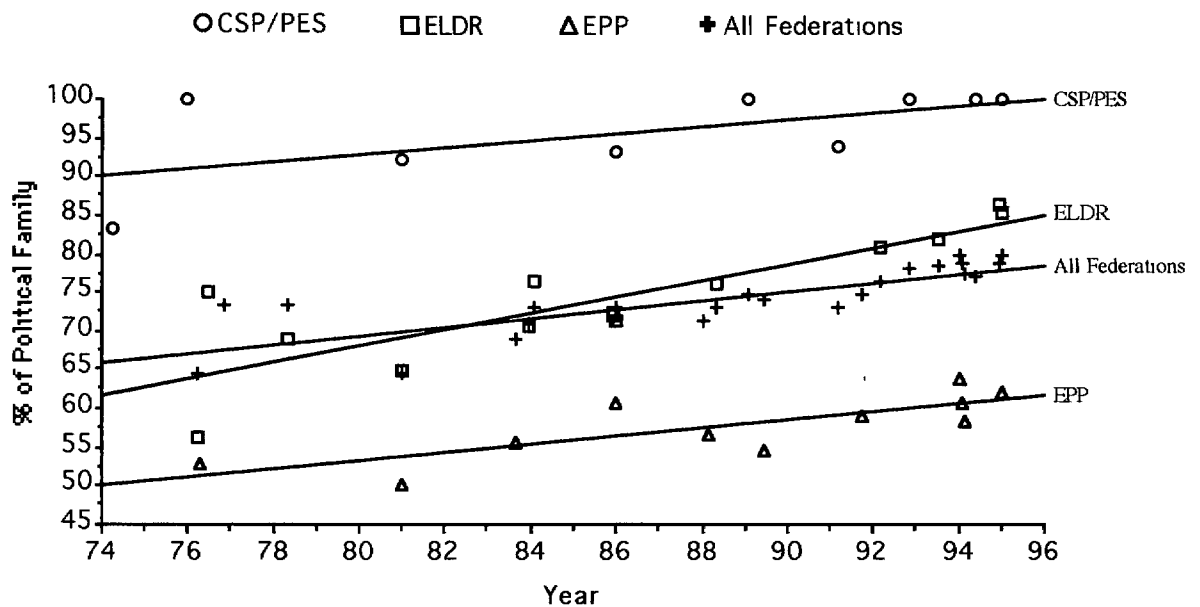
Between the birth of the federations in 1974 and 1976 and the fourth EC/EU enlargement in January 1995, there was thus an increase in the total (net) number of member parties in each federation. The number of parties in the CSP/PES increased from

<sup>17</sup> This thus does not include the Green/Left-Libertarian, Ethnic/Regionalist, Communist/Independent Socialist, and Radical Right party families (cf. Smith, 1990 122-4)

10 in April 1974 to 19 by the end of 1994.<sup>18</sup> The membership of the ELDR increased from 8 parties in March 1976 to 24 parties at the beginning of 1995. Finally, EPP membership increased from 9 parties in April 1976 to 15 parties in January 1995.

However, as Figure 5 illustrates, each federation has also managed to capture an increased proportion of the parties it was targeting. Whereas in 1974, the British and Irish Labour Parties refused to participate in the work of the CSP, by the beginning of 1995 there was not a single member party of the Socialist International in the EU that was not a full member of the PES. Similarly, whereas in 1976, the ELDR was plagued with debates about whether it should be a 'centrist' or 'radical' Liberal organisation, by the beginning of 1995 parties ranging from the more 'left' Liberal RV, D'66 and SLD to the 'economic' Liberal FDP, PR, VVD and V saw benefits of being members of the ELDR. Finally, whereas in 1976 the EPP comprised the core 'Christian-democrat' parties, by 1995 its membership had broadened to engulf a large number of traditionally non-confessional 'Conservative' parties.

**Figure 5. Political Family Membership of the Party Federations**

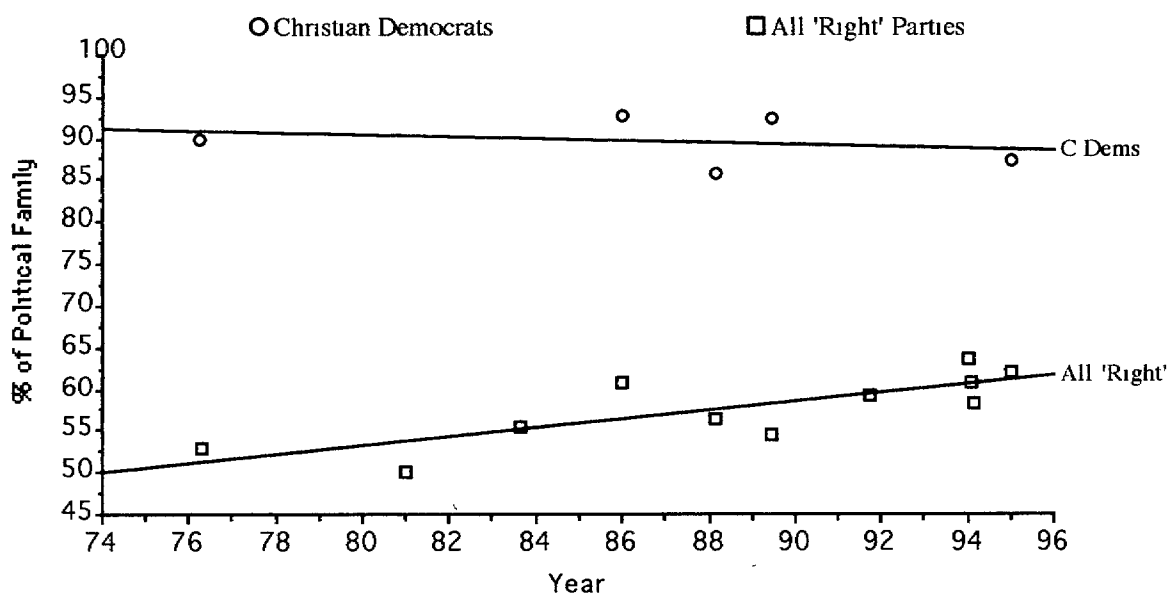


It may also be tempting to conclude from Figure 5 that because of the different levels of success among the targeted populations the organisational strategy of the CSP/PES was the most successful, and that the EPP was the least successful. However, this conclusion is false. There is a fundamental difference in the nature of the group each federation can reasonably attract. The definition of the Socialist 'family' excludes such 'Independent Socialists' as the Danish Socialist People's Party. However, this narrow

<sup>18</sup> The table only shows eighteen of these parties. The Norwegian Labour Party is also a full-member of the PES, having joined in December 1993, but is not shown in the table because Norway is not a member of the EU.

definition does not produce an institutional weakness for the Socialist federation because in every EC member state the most significant left-wing party is a member of the Socialist International.<sup>19</sup> The problem for the ELDR, in contrast, is that the Liberal family is very diffuse: encompassing diverse 'social', 'economic', 'national' and 'radical' elements (Kirchner, 1988). Consequently, unlike the CSP/PES, the ELDR has never required applicant parties to be members of the Liberal International; which, like the Socialist International, has a narrow ideological definition of the political family it represents.

**Figure 6. Christian-Democrat and 'Right' Party Membership of the EPP**



The EPP, however, has faced a different problem. The Christian Democrat family is fairly homogeneous, and most Christian Democratic parties are the largest parties on the 'Right' of the political spectrum. However, Christian Democrat parties do not exist in every member state. Moreover, whereas in 1976 traditional Christian Democrat parties were the hegemonic party on the 'Right' in two-thirds of the EC member states, by 1995 this had been reduced to only one-third of all EU countries. In 1976, the EPP sort to solve this organisational problem by allowing the formation of the European Democratic Union (EDU); which served as an umbrella organisation for all mainstream Right-wing parties in the EC. However, whereas the EPP has established a role in the EC decision-making system, by the beginning of the 1990s the EDU was practically a moribund organisation. Consequently, there has been an incentive for non-confessional parties to join the EPP. In return, the EPP has relaxed the criteria of requiring all applicant parties to join the European Union of Christian Democrats (EUCD). As a result, as Figure 6 shows, this strategy has proved to be successful for the EPP; with an increasing proportion of all centre-right parties

<sup>19</sup> The only exception, however, was the period when the Italian Communist Party (before the establishment of the PDS) was the largest left-wing party in Italy

in Europe choosing to become full members. In 1994, moreover, with the new governments in Italy and France (and the consequent changing representation in the European Council) there was even discussion of the RPR and Forza Italia becoming at least “observer” members of the EPP federation.

The trade-off, however, appears to be a watering down of the ‘Christian’ proportion of EPP membership. Contrary to this assumption, however, the EPP has *not* watered down the ideological requirements for EPP entry. The EPP statutes still state that, “The EPP shall be composed of Christian Democratic parties ... [who] shall subscribe to the political programme of the EPP” (EPP, 1990: Art. 4). And, Page 1 of Chapter 1 of the EPP programme states that, “we regard every human being as...open to transcendence”; that “what lies behind this commitment is the belief that we are called on to contribute to God’s work”; and that “every individual has the duty to...share responsibility vis-à-vis Creation” (EPP, 1992: 1). To take advantage of the organisational structure of the EPP federation, these words have been signed by such non-Christian Democrat parties as the Greek ND, the Spanish PP, the Danish KP, the Swedish MS, the Finish KK, and the British CP MEPs.<sup>20</sup> The strategy of the EPP thus appears to have succeeded in securing increased organisational resources without a trade-off of basic policy goals.

#### **4. Conclusion: Useful Framework, But Need for More Explanation/Proof!**

In sum, therefore, the empirical analysis of the organisational development of the party federations in the last twenty-five years appears to confirm the initial hypotheses. Firstly, all the party federations have increasingly concentrated their organisational strategy on influencing the agenda of the key medium-term agenda-setting and legislative-co-ordinating sight in the EU decision-making system: the European Council. This is thus a fundamental change from the initial (and intuitive) concentration of the role of parties at the European level in the EP. Secondly, in all three party federations there has been a significant increase in the involvement of the party elites in pursuit of the highest office-rewards in the EU system: the national party leaders. This rising involvement has been quantitative (through the growing role of party leaders’ meetings in the internal decision-making structure, and through the increase in the number of leaders’ meetings each year) as well as qualitative (through the specific organisation of leaders’ meetings immediately before or after European Council meetings, and through the growing proportion of leaders in attendance despite the increased frequency of the meetings).

There is, moreover, evidence to suggest that this developing organisational strategy has been successful. These organisational changes have coincided with a growing internal

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<sup>20</sup> The British Conservative MEPs have become “individual members” of the EPP Federation. This thus allowed them to sit in the EPP Group in the European Parliament, without the national party organisation having to become a full member of the EPP.

institutionalisation of the party federations. Firstly, between 1990 and 1995 the CSP/PES and the EPP experienced a rapid increase in the proportion of party leaders participating in party federation decision-making. Secondly, there has been an increase in the total number of parties that are members of the three federations. More significantly, however, all three federations managed to involve an increased number of parties from the groups they were targeting. Finally, the success of this organisational strategy is indicated by the fact that there has been a convergence in the general organisational pattern among the party federations. Political parties tend to converge on the organisational structure of the most successful party in the system (Mair, 1995). In the case of the party federations, this organisational structure is thus the institutionalisation of the party leaders' meetings as the main decision-making organ; and the deliberate organisation of these meetings around the European Council summits.

However, this picture of the structure of party behaviour in the EU system is fundamentally different to the classic conception of the "European Party Government Model", where: decisions are made by elected party officials or by those under their control; policy is decided within parties, which act cohesively to enact it; and officials are recruited, and held accountable through parties (Katz, 1986). However, in the EC system, parties have begun to partially fulfil these criteria. Firstly, decision-makers in all EU institutional settings (the European Council, the Council of Ministers, the European Commission, and the EP) have obtained their positions through party membership and party-competitive election to political office. Moreover, through the corporate membership of the national parties in the party federations, an ever increasing majority of these office-holders are members of the three main party federations. Secondly, the medium-term legislative agenda is increasingly co-ordinated across the EU institutional arenas, and between the national parties, through the organisations of the party federations. And, finally, new structures of party-political accountability have begun to emerge, through the constraints on the actors in the European Council presented by the party federations' activities around the crucial European Council meetings. The emerging picture, therefore, is of a low level of "party-ness of government" (ibid.) in the EU, but of a specific role for the party federations which is not dissimilar to that of parties in comparable institutional environments: as in Switzerland and the United States.

An application of the 'comparative politics approach' thus explains how the party federations can develop as policy-seeking party-political organisations, without the existence of the classic institutions of European parliamentary democracy in the EU system; such as the emergence of a 'Government' and an 'Opposition' through elections to a directly elected chamber. In contrast, all other approaches to the party federations have been unable to explain the organisational development of party federations when they have not become integrated organisations for fighting European Parliament elections. The comparative politics approach shows, however, that as long as the EP elections do not

change the medium-term policy-direction of EU legislation, there is very little incentive for the European party federations to spend resources undermining the dominant role of national parties in these elections. In their activity around European Council meetings, in contrast, all the party federations have actively sought to establish common positions, by a simple majority of the party leaders, and to enforce these positions on the member parties.

However, there are some limitations to this theoretical framework, and to the empirical tests. Firstly, the theoretical framework does not as yet explain why parties in government in the member states appear to participate at the same rate as parties in opposition. This is particularly important if one considers that in European Council decision-making, parties in government (i.e. who have secured their basic office goal) can voluntarily choose whether to support or oppose a party federation's position without giving up any policy-making autonomy. Nevertheless, the answer to this basic problem may be found in explanations of why political decision-makers form parties in the first place: how party organisations solve classic 'collective action' problems. A recent body of literature could thus be integrated into the existing theoretical framework, which tries to explain why actors with similar ideological and policy goals establish organisational constraints on their action (e.g. Hinich & Munger, 1993; Cox & McCubbins, 1994).

Secondly, however, there needs to be a more thorough empirical test of the theoretical framework. The above empirical analysis proves that the party federations have changed their organisational strategy and that there has been a concomitant increase in internal organisational institutionalisation. However, this does not prove that the organisational changes have secured the rewards for which the changes were designed. The theory suggests that the party federations will change their organisations to secure *policy* goals from the EU system. Consequently, a more substantive test of the theoretical framework should analyse the level of party federation impact on the precise European Council decisions. If the new organisational strategies are successful, the outputs from the EC summits should reflect the overall "balance of party political forces" in the EC, as represented by the policy positions and representational strengths federations, rather than the "balance of national forces", as represented by the national governments. A possible research strategy would thus be to compare the general outcome of European Councils in the 1990s, with the outcomes from the six European Councils where the PES, the ELDR and the EPP leaders have all met immediately before or after the meetings: June 1991, in Luxembourg; December 1991, in Maastricht; December 1992, in Edinburgh; June 1993, in Copenhagen; December 1993, in Brussels; and December 1994, in Essen.

Consequently, although some important conclusions can already be drawn, until these theoretical and empirical issues have been tackled, it is not possible to accurately judge the applicability of the 'comparative politics approach' to the development of the European party federations.

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## Appendix: Key to Party Abbreviations

### Parties at the European Level.

CSP	Confederation of Socialist Parties of the European Community
EDU	European Democratic Union
EFGP	European Federation of Green Parties
ELD	Federation of Liberal and Democratic Parties of the European Community
ELDR	Federation of Liberal, Democrat and Reform Parties of the European Community/ European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party
EPP	European People's Party- Federation of Christian-Democratic Parties in the European Community/ European People's Party-Christian Democrats
EUCD	European Union of Christian Democrats
PES	Party of European Socialists

### Parties at the National Level

APNI	Alliance Party of N Ireland (UK/N Ire)	PLB	Parti Libéral Bruxellois (Bel/Brussels)
AP	Allianza Popular (Spa)	PLI	Partito Liberale Italiano (Ita)
CD	Centrum-Demokraterne (Den)	PNV	Partido Nacionalista Vasco (Spa/Basque)
CDA	Christen Democratisch Appèl (Net)	POSL	Parti Ouvrier Socialiste Luxembourgeois(Lux)
CDC	Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya (Spa/Catalonia)	PP	Partido Popular (Spa)
CDS-F	Centre des Démocrates-Sociaux (Fra)	PPI	Partito Popolare Italiano (Ita)
CDS-P	Partido do Centro Democrático Social (Por)	PR	Parti Républicain (Fra)
CDS=Sp	Centro Democrático y Social (Spa)	PRD	Partido Reformista Democrático (Spa)
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union (Ger)	PRI	Partito Repubblicano Italiano (Ita)
CP-GB	Conservative Party (UK)	PRL	Parti Réformateur Libéral (Bel/Wallonia)
CP-Sw	Centerpartiet (Swe)	PRLW	Parti des Réformes et de la Liberté de Wallonie (Bel/Wallonia)
CSU	Christlich Soziale Union (Ger)	PRS	Parti Radicale Socialiste (Fra)
CSV	Christlich-Soziale Volkspartei (Lux)	PS-B	Parti Socialiste (Bel/Wallonia)
CVP	Christelijke Volkspartij (Bel/Flanders)	PS-F	Parti Socialiste (Fra)
DC	Democrazia Cristiana (Ita)	PS-P	Partido Socialista (Por)
D '66	Democraten '66 (Net)	PSC	Parti Social Chrétien (Bel/Wallonia)
DP	Demokratesch Partei (Lux)	PSD	Partido Social Democrata (Por)
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei (Ger)	PSDI	Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano (Ita)
FF	Fianna Fáil (Ire)	P Seg	Patto Segni (Ita)
FG	Fine Gael (Ire)	PSI	Partito Socialista Italiano (Ita)
FLI	Federazione dei Liberali Italiani (Ita)	PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spa)
FORO	FORO (Spa)	PvdA	Partij van de Arbeid (Net)
Forza	Forza Italia (Ita)	PVV	Partij voor Vrijheid en Vooruitgang (Bel/Fl )
FPL	Folkpartiet Liberalerna (Swe)	Rad.	Radicale (Ita)
HLP	Hellenic Liberal Party (Gre)	RAD	Parti Radical (Fra)
KDS	Kristdemokratiska Samhallspartiet (Swe)	RPR	Rassemblement pour la République (Fra)
KFP	Kristeligt Folkeparti (Den)	RV	Det Radikale Venstre (Den)
KK	Kansallinen Kokoomus (Fin)	SAP	Socialdemokratistiska Arbetarparti (Swe)
KP-D	Konservative Folkeparti (Den)	SD	Socialdemokratiet (Den)
KP-F	Keskustapolue (Fin)	SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party (UK/Nl)
LF	Liberal Forum (Aus)	SFP	Svenska Folkpartiet (Fin)
LP	Liberal Party (UK)	SKDL	Soumen Kansan Demokraattinen Liitto (Fin)
LP-GB	Labour Party (UK)	SKL	Soumen Kristillinen Liitto (Fin)
LP-Ir	Labour Party (Ire)	SLD	Social and Liberal Democrats (UK)
MRG	Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche (Fra)	SP	Socialistische Partij (Bel/Flanders)
MS	Moderata Samlingspartiet (Swe)	SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Ger)
ND	Nea Demokratia (Gre)	SPO	Sozialistische Partei Osterreichs (Aus)
OUP	Official Unionist Party (UK/N Ireland)	SSDP	Soumen Socialidemokraattinen Puolue (Fin)
OVP	Osterreichische Volkspartei (Aus)	SVP	Sudtiroler Volkspartei (Ita/South Tyrol)
PASOK	Panhellenio Socialistiko Kinema (Gre)	UDC	Unió Democràtica de Catalunya (Spa/Catal)
PD	Progressive Democrats (Ire)	V	Venstre: Danmarks Liberale Parti (Den)
PDS	Partito Democratico di Sinistra (Ita)	VLD	Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (Bel/Fl.)
PDP	Partido Democràta Popular (Spa)	VVD	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (Net)