

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND ETHNOREGIONALIST PARTIES

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact of Europeanization on ethnoregionalist parties in Europe. In contrast to other European party families, traditionally this family has been characterized by the lack of ideological affinity and major differences in two dimensions – demands for political autonomy and traditional ideological orientations – that in the past jeopardized collective action and political cooperation. We argue that the process of Europeanization allowed the very constitution of a European party family from scratch. The article singles out the effects of Europeanization: the creation of a new structure of political opportunities for nationalist parties, changes in party behaviour at the European level, the definition of a new European internationalism and a common political European agenda based on the principle of the lowest common denominator.

KEY WORDS ■ ethnoregionalist ■ Europeanization ■ party family ■ peripheral nationalism

Introduction

With the exception of Lynch's seminal work, the impact of European integration on ethnoregionalist, peripheral nationalist or regionalist parties in Europe has received very little scholarly attention up until now.¹ This lacuna is partially due to the lack of comparative research treating this group of parties as a single party family. Most comparative analyses of European parties simply omit it. This neglect is reinforced by their small representation – in terms of seats – in the European Parliament, which is due to several factors, including the relatively small size of the regions in which they compete, and the fragmentation of the party family (De Winter and Türsan, 1998). Yet the Democratic Party of the Peoples of Europe/European Free Alliance defines itself (along with the EPP, PES, ELDR, EFGP) as a genuine

European political party (conforming to Article 191A of the European Union Treaty), while the other four Europarties treat the DPPE-EFA as a Europarty.²

Peripheral nationalism in European polities is often viewed as an anachronism – many authors still talk about the ‘survival’ of these parties – given the gradual functional disappearance of the old nation-state within the context of an integrated Europe and globalization. Over the past 30 years, devolution processes in Belgium, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and, currently, France have changed the political and institutional map of single member states. The European regions have increasingly become the object of academic attention. The same is not true for regional parties, party politics and party alignments, which are rarely taken into consideration. Briefly, regional institutional actors are often incorporated into the discussion of multilevel government in the European Union (EU), yet the ethnoregionalist party family is usually neglected in debates about Europeanization.

However, crucial changes have been taking place in this party family, especially in the last two waves of political mobilization – the 1970s and the 1990s. First, the political space for these parties has been growing, as reflected in the electoral results for the entire family and disregarding single party individual trajectories. Second, political parties are simply being created anew (the Italian Lega Nord), or gaining political representation for the first time (the Galician BNG). Third, electoral success is not bringing about more homogeneity to the party family, but rather the opposite. The Lega Nord and Vlaams Blok, while usually classified as belonging to the new radical right or extreme right, also fall under our definition of ethno-regionalist or peripheral nationalist party. Briefly, this party family is clearly expanding in size, membership and internal diversity.

Some changes are a direct or indirect result of Europeanization. European integration strikes at the heart of the cleavage (the ethno-territorial or centre-periphery cleavage on which this party family is grounded, i.e. the empowerment/disempowerment of higher levels of decision-making in the centre and the regional periphery). The process of Europeanization is particularly relevant to ethnoregionalist parties that, so to speak, ‘own’ problems related to centre-periphery cleavages and the division of policy competencies between territorial decision-making levels.

Drawing from a variety of approaches to the study of Europeanization and of party change, we define Europeanization as the dual process of emergence of a distinctive European polity as well as the adaptation of national and sub-national political systems to the EU (Ladrech, 2000). In this article, we concentrate on the first process: the emergence of a distinctive European polity. The article examines these two ‘classical’ aspects of Europeanization. Institutionally, it focuses on the formation of a transparty federation in the European Parliament. We observe the impact of European integration in political attitudes and behaviour of nationalist and regionalist parties as they adapt to the impact of Europeanization.

We aim to show that it is precisely in this party family that we can grasp the more direct and visible effects of the impact of Europeanization. We argue that for this party family European integration is highly significant, as this process modifies the very definition of territorial conflict and the very structure of political opportunities for these parties. Unlike the other main party families, the process of Europeanization has provided the political space for building up a truly 'European' family from scratch. While the other main party families could rely on ideological affinity or cohesiveness and pre-existing party federations (Mudde, 2000), the nationalist or regionalist parties, in contrast, have been characterized by main ideological differences and problems of collective action and cooperation. Weak institutionalization is a defining feature of this party family. Yet institutionalization must be measured at its starting point. In the period between the first direct European elections and recent elections (1979–99), the party family has experienced its membership increasing. In 1979 there was no party family to speak of. Since the creation of the European Free Alliance in 1981 – signed by six parties – membership in this European party has increased dramatically to include over 20 parties.

Two structural factors must be taken into consideration before we explore the impact of Europeanization on ethnoregionalist parties. First, these are 'minor' or 'small' parties. While the other four party families have privileged extraparliamentary access to the EU decision-making bodies (Council and Commission), owing to their participation in national executives and their nomination influence on the Commission, such channels of influence and coordination are not usually open to this party family. Currently, no ethno-regionalist party (apart from the *Lega*) participates in national government, and very few have done so in the past, at least for any significant length of time (De Winter, 1998: 236). Owing to this absence in the major EU decision-making bodies, the DPPE-EFA does not hold Europarty summits before the European Council, and therefore lacks a forum for informal integration of party leaders and their strategies. It also misses an opportunity to gain visibility as a party family, for voicing its vision on EU and for claiming credibility.³ Thus, their political action, resources and visibility are dramatically reduced by size and structural opposition status.

Second, the ideological cohesiveness of this party family has traditionally been low. Comparative analysis of the party family on two dimensions (the autonomy–independence) and the traditional ideological scale (left–right) has shown wide disparities between these political parties (De Winter, 1998). There have therefore been structural constraints on the very possibility of cooperation and collective action as a single party family.

We argue that these parties may exhibit significant differences not only with regard to the two dimensions outlined above, but also in their attitudes pro and con the EU. Some parties have advocated the launching of European integration, while others, at the launch of this process, have firmly opposed European integration (Lynch, 1998).

Table 1. The Democratic Party of the Peoples of Europe/European Free Alliance as a representative of a European political family (*August 2001*) (in brackets the number of MEPs, and for non-members of the DPPE-EFA, the parliamentary groups to which they belong)

<i>DPPE-EFA members</i>	
<i>BNG: Bloque Nacionalista Galego</i>	Galician Nationalist Bloc
<i>EA: Eusko Alkartasuna</i>	Basque Solidarity
<i>ERC: Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya</i>	Left Republican Party (1)
<i>FNP: Fryske Nasjonale Partij</i>	Frisean National Party
<i>MRV: Mouvement Région Savoie</i>	Savoie Regional Movement
<i>PDB: Partei Deutschsprachiger Belgier</i>	Party of German Speakers in Belgium
<i>PSd'A: Partito Sardo d'Azione</i>	Sardinian Action Party
<i>PO: Partit Occitan</i>	Occitanian Party
<i>PC: Plaid Cymru (2)</i>	The Party of Wales
<i>SNP</i>	Scottish National Party (2)
<i>SS:</i>	Slovenska Skupnost
<i>UDB: Union Démocratique Bretonne</i>	Breton Democratic Union
<i>UfS: Union für Südtirol</i>	Union for Southern Tirol
<i>UPA: Union du Peuple Alsacien</i>	Union of the Alsatian People
<i>UV: Union Valdôtaine (1)*</i>	Union of Valdôtaines
<i>UP/SN: Unione du Populu Corsu/Scelta Nova</i>	Union of the Corsican People/ New Choices
<i>UC: Unitat Catalana</i>	Catalan Unity
<i>VU: Volksunie (2)</i>	Peoples' Union
<i>EAJ: Eusko Alderdi Jertzailea – Partido Nacionalista Vasco (1)</i>	Basque Nationalist Party
<i>PA: Partido Andalucista (1)</i>	Andalucian Party
<i>LS: Ligue Savoissienne</i>	Savoy League
<i>VE: Veneti d'Europa</i>	Venetians of Europe
<i>LE-NE: Libertà Emiliana-Nazione Emilia Vinhozito-</i>	Rainbow

* In July 2000, Mr Caveri, the leader of the Union Valdôtaine (founding member of the EFA) succeeded a MEP on the Prodi list. He decided to continue to sit with the group of his predecessor, the ELDR.

** The PNV abandoned the EPP in 1999 and obtained observer status in the EFA, while Partit Socialista de Mallorca-Entesa Nacionalista has become observer in August 2001. It has also asked for observer status: Bloc Nacionalista Valencià.

In this article, we first present general hypotheses regarding the positive and negative effects that European integration may have on ethnoregionalist parties, i.e. effects typical for this party family. We omit theories and hypotheses on the general impact of EU on all types of domestic parties as formulated by Ladrech (2000), Bartolini (1999), Katz (1999) and others. We present party attitudes (both elites and voters) towards Europe and

Table 2. Non DPPE-EFA members

<i>CDC: Convergencia Democrática de Catalunya (2, ELDR)</i>	Democratic convergence of Catalonia
<i>CC: Coalición Canaria (1, ELDR)</i>	Canaries Coalition
<i>EH: Euskal Herritarrok (1, non-attached)</i>	
<i>LN: Lega Nord</i>	Northern League (4, Technical group and non-attached)
<i>SVP: Svenska Folkpartiet (1, ELDR)</i>	Swedish People's Party
<i>StVP: Süd-tiroler Volkspartei (1, EPP)</i>	South-Tyrolean People's Party
<i>VB: Vlaams Blok (2, non-attached)</i>	Flemish Block

examine the process of Europeanization by focusing on party behaviour in the form of cooperative action and common programmatic objectives.

The European polity has provided the space in which the wide disparities in political projects about autonomy, sovereignty and devolution advanced by these parties can be overcome. The use of the EU as a resource is in fact considered as one of the defining and innovative aspects of 'neo-nationalism' (McCrone, 1998). We outline the unique effects of European elections on this party family: multiplying opportunities for mobilization and electoral success, bringing cooperation in electoral alliances instead of competition, and gaining political visibility and legitimacy.

Mixed Effects of European Integration on the Party Family

All party families have had to adjust their goals and programmes to European integration. However, for the family of ethno-regionalist parties, the dramatic changes that the process of European integration has stimulated must be highlighted. The main effects of the process of Europeanization have emerged from the possibility of defining new grievances, creating new political space, and in enlarging and accentuating differences (in attitudes pro or con Europe and in behaviour) within the family of ethno-regionalists.

Redefining the Centre-Periphery Cleavage

The centre-periphery cleavage was the first in the developmental sequence introduced by Lipset and Rokkan to explain the emergence of national party systems (1967). It was also one that varied along particular historical trajectories of nation-state formation, contributing, unlike the class cleavage, to the differentiation of European party systems (Bartolini and Mair, 1990). European integration is changing the political scenario in which these parties operate in two main ways: by altering traditional functions on

nation-states and their sovereignty, and by redefining centres and peripheries in new ways.

The very notion of political sovereignty is being redefined to take into account current political and institutional developments in Europe. Historically, the founding fathers of European integration were strongly anti-nationalist, as nationalism was considered the main cause of the 'European civil war' that ran from 1933 to 1945 (Hobsbawm, 1992). The European Coal and Steel Community intended to put the basic industry necessary for (French and German) rearmament under supranational control, while the nuclear resources were pooled in Euratom. As such, European integration essentially aimed at diminishing the sovereignty of the national state in vital sectors. Thus, the traditional enemy of peripheral nationalism, the nation-state, changed its nature with European integration.

In this new scenario, the ambition of some historic regions to become new nation-states in the classical nineteenth-century sense may appear anachronistic. Yet one has to consider that the process of European integration and its enlargement of competencies taking traditional state functions can weaken classical arguments against *Kleinstaaterei* (Hobsbawm, 1992: 31) and at the same time make the quest for statehood more feasible and attractive. In some views, the new international institutional context has been a successful answer to the incapacity of West European nation-states to guarantee their physical and economic security, permitting old nation-states to survive and prosper (Milward, 1992). It has also reduced the economic and military costs of the option of 'independence within Europe'.

European integration changes the nature of the relationship between centres and peripheries. First, the widening of regional disparities and the occurrence of asymmetrical shocks can no longer be countered by public intervention: EU competition policy prohibits state subsidies to ailing industrial sectors concentrated in certain regions and the use of deficit spending and the manipulation of interest rates have been severely restricted by the EMU convergence criteria (De Grauwe, 2000). Despite efforts for EU structural funds policy, the budget for reducing regional disparities remains on average below 2% of GDP of EU member states. Second, they might also exacerbate territorial disparities and further peripheralize marginal regions. Thus, the regional gap between winners and losers can be more easily identified as the process of European integration unfolds. Moreover, the emergence of new winners and new losers can alter established relationships between centres and peripheries.

The European Union and multilevel government

European integration is a process of centralization of the decision-making process, spreading from economic activities linked to rearmament, then into other sectors of economic and monetary policy-making, and recently

starting to include aspects of foreign policy, defence and internal security. Viewed from the perspective of a process of transfers of competencies from the national level to a higher level, European integration constitutes an amplification of the 'democratic deficit' defined in terms of distance between decision-makers and the beneficiaries of public policies. This also holds true for the regional level of decision-making. The process should logically widen the gap between, on the one hand, regional populations and beneficiaries of public policies, and, on the other, 'Brussels' – the new decision-making centres regarding policies relevant to the populations.

Yet the emphasis is usually placed on the positive effects of an emerging regional polity at the European level. Europe has invested in regional policies that grant substantial economic support to the poorest regions. These European programmes have reinforced the regions at a relevant decision-making level, even in states where regions lacked significant competencies (Keating, 1998: 176). The European Commission's regional policies require the involvement not only of political partners (like regional and local executives), but also of interest groups to participate in the policy preparation and implementation. The regions are thus forced to constitute themselves as competent actors representing their regional interests in Brussels, and this through a multitude of channels of access to EU decision-making (Commission, Council, Parliament, Committee of the Regions and other forms of cooperation between regions and cities, lobbies, etc.). This decision-making model facilitates policy networks between political, socio-economic, administrative actors at the regional level as well as at the (inter-)communal, transregional and transborder level.

In addition, the principle of subsidiarity, launched originally to regulate the division of competencies between the EU and the member states, has been seized by the Committee of the Regions and other regional platforms. It has become applicable also to the division of competencies between regions, on the one hand, and the EU as well as the national states on the other. Finally, at the symbolic level, this decision-making process has projected regions and regional politicians into the European arena, presenting them as important participants in the EU policy process. They allow regional politicians to take credit for attracting EU subsidies, even those that would have come in any case simply by the working of the relevant eligibility rules (Keating, 1998: 170).

European integration, however, poses a series of political and constitutional challenges to regions with wide-ranging legislative powers for two reasons. First, the EU also erodes competencies in policy domains in the hands of the regions in federal states. Second, a new pattern is emerging, where some member states are acting as gatekeepers of European policies, creating new grievances at the domestic level between centres and peripheries.

In this section we have sought to outline the complex effects that Europeanization brings to the centre-periphery cleavage in Europe. The process of Europeanization has the potential to accentuate the observable

socio-economic differences between regions, and create new territorial grievances. In addition, the potential of European integration to alter party politics and behaviour within the family of regionalist parties should be highlighted. This reinforces the lack of cohesiveness of the party family in attitudes towards or against Europe, and further hinders the very possibility of collective action at the European level.

Pro-European or Eurosceptical? European Integration and the Party Family

In studying the Europeanization of political parties, data and evidence must capture the effects of longitudinal change. Unfortunately, evidence for this party family is scant, given the usual small size of nationalist parties. There are no data available for this party family that can trace changes over time. For instance, we lack a comparative content analysis of party programmes on EU integration, although we are in the process of collecting data.

We start by presenting general hypotheses about the positive or negative effects of European integration on the party family. A first hypothesis suggests that nationalist parties are Eurosceptical. European integration implies a variety of changes that constrain the empowerment of the sub-national level or the small 'nations without states'. Thus, there are negative attitudes towards the EU, but they would also increase as the process unfolds. With the exception of a very small number of parties that govern in their regions, these political parties are generally in opposition. The 'government thesis' suggests that ethnoregionalist party voters would be more Eurosceptical, while voters in favour of the government parties would tend to be more pro-EU, given the fact that their parties and leaders play a prominent role in intergovernmental decision-making in the EU, while opposition party leaders are excluded.

A second hypothesis posits, on the contrary, that European integration can increase the pro-European attitudes of nationalist parties. For instance, Bartolini (1999) formulates the hypothesis that electorates of traditional parties are more divided than electorates of ethnoregionalist parties on the EU integration dimension than on other dimensions, such as the left-right wing. So, ethnoregionalist parties should profit from the politicization of the new EU 'cleavage'. From arguments regarding the predominantly positive effect of the EU on ethnoregionalist parties, one could assume that – compared with their main competitors – most ethnoregionalist parties would tend to be more pro-EU, given the fact that the EU offers added value in terms of offices (seats in the EP and Committee of the Regions), votes (following their pro-EU electorates), and policy (empowerment of regional actors, and the development of an EU regional policy).

In the next section, we verify these two general hypotheses about the

impact of Europeanization by examining attitudinal change, looking at the scant evidence available: expert placements of ethnoregionalist parties and their competitors on an EU integration scale, and the EU attitudes of party electorates.

Expert Survey Data

Ray's (1999) retrospective expert survey data⁴ on EU attitudes in the 1984–96 period allow some comparisons between European party families. First, on average, the regionalist party family is the most pro-European of all European party families, with an average, for the entire period, of 5.82 on a 7-point scale (ranging from 1 for 'strongly opposed', to 7 for 'strongly in favour'). This pro-European profile, already present in 1984 and 1988, changes over time. In 1992, the ethnoregionalist parties lagged behind Conservative parties and Social Democrats, the latter remaining ahead also in 1996 as the most pro-European party family. If we look just at the five EU countries in which regionalist parties regularly have MEPs (Belgium, Finland, Italy, Spain and the UK), the most outspoken pro-EU attitudes of ethnoregionalist parties are confirmed only for 1984. Since 1988, nationalists and regionalists are systematically behind Social Democrats in their pro-European scores.

Second, in none of these five countries did nationalist parties display the most pro-EU attitudes over the entire period. In Belgium, the three traditional parties are more pro-EU than the VU and FDF; in Spain, the regionalist family comes after the Conservatives, Liberals and Social Democrats; in Italy, they are preceded by the Liberals, Christian Democrats and Social Democrats; in the UK, by the Liberals; and in Finland, by the Conservatives. Thus, if we study negative or positive attitudes by country, nationalist and regionalist no longer appear as the champions of Europe.

Third, if we take all EU countries together, the regionalists are the most homogeneous party family in terms of standard deviations of their EU attitudes. However, in the five countries in which regionalist parties exist, the Greens are the most cohesive, followed by the Social Democrats and, after that, the regionalists.

Finally, the regionalist party family has grown gradually more pro-European (5.65 in 1984, 5.73 in 1988, 5.96 in 1992 and 1996). Apart from the Greens (who have become more sceptical in these countries) and the Christian Democratic family, which remain the same, all other party families have become more pro-EU.

To conclude, on the basis of this evidence we can consider ethnoregionalist parties as pro-European. Taking into account the five countries where they are relevant, these parties were proper 'EU champions' only at the very beginning. Over time, differences with traditional parties on the European dimension have declined.

Party Voters' Attitudes

When comparing ethno-regionalist parties as the party-in-the-electorate with other party families, one should use data collected at the regional level, i.e. at the level of the ethno-regionalist parties' target electorate, rather than national level data (De Winter, 1998). This is even more necessary when comparing the EU attitudes of voters. Given the small number of ethno-regionalist parties' voters in national surveys of the eurobarometers, we lack data on voters to examine longitudinally changes over time. Only the magnum eurobarometer of 1996 offers sufficient numbers for most ethno-regionalist parties (overall sample size equals 65.178). So, only for 1996 can we test systematically whether the hypothesis of more pro-EU ethno-regionalist party electorates holds in comparison with the electorates of statewide parties.⁵

The hypothesis is confirmed for Flanders, where Volkunie voters display the most pro-EU attitudes (but the Greens obtain about the same score), while in Brussels the FDF is clearly behind all traditional Francophone parties! For Finland, the SFP is clearly beaten by the Conservatives, but also by the Social Democrats and the Greens. In Italy's northern regions, the Lega Nord is clearly beaten by the various Christian Democrat formations, the Greens, the PDS as well as Forza Italia. Thus Lega Nord is the most Eurosceptic of the main formations. In Scotland, the electorate of the SNP is more Eurosceptical than that of the traditional parties. By contrast, in Wales PC is the most pro-EU party along with the Liberal Democrats. In Spain, the PA is the most pro-EU party in Andalusia (along with the PSOE); in the Canary Islands, the CC is the least pro-EU party; in Catalonia, the most pro-EU party is the PSC-PSOE followed by the CiU, while ERC is the least (along with the IU); in Galicia, the BNG is behind the PSOE; in Valencia, the UV is the least pro-EU party; in the Basque country, the EA is the most pro-EU party, followed by the PSOE. Then comes the PNV, while HB is the least pro-EU party.

The analysis of target electorates shows that most ethno-regionalist parties are not EU champions at all.⁶ If, for instance, we consider the scant evidence on the positive and negative attitudes of this party family on European integration, a mismatch can be seen between the expert placement of the parties and the party electorates. The ideological profile and discourse of their leaders might be out of line with their electorates. The disparity between the positive attitudes held by parties (or party elites) and the more negative attitudes exhibited by party electorates can be explained either by the fact that EU issues represent a 'low saliency' dimension (might not be of central concern to party electorates), or that the party leadership exhibits considerable autonomy to define European matters. Below, we show the increasing Europeanization of these parties and consider the differences in attitudes between party electorates (that seem to hold more negative attitudes than party elites) and party elites, emphasizing the significant political autonomy exhibited by members of the EFA.

The next section shows how emerging European institutions have provided the space for creating a truly 'European' party family from scratch. Membership in EFA has turned the most Eurosceptical parties, such as the Scottish SNP in the 1980s (after two decades of opposition to British membership) or, more recently, the Galician BNG, into what we might call 'Eurorealists'.

The Constitution of a European Party Family

European Elections as a Springboard for Mobilization

The European elections are crucial to the very constitution of a European party family. Before 1979, international relations were practically non-existent. In some regionalist movements, European federalism has been an essential part of their ideology, sometimes going back as far as the pre-war period (Lynch, 1996: 11–12), and for some parties and movements the links reach back into the 1930s. But most parties had only bilateral contacts, and others were integrated in larger ideological families, such as the Christian Democrats. International conferences took place during the post-war period, but they were marginal and not always organized on party-basis (Lynch, 1996: 136–8). The presence of a previous transnational party federation, such as those existing for the four main European parties, cannot be taken for granted. It is precisely through European elections and the European Parliament that a party family could be constituted.

The European elections have provided a new political space with distinctive effects. First, many ethno-regionalist parties obtain better results at the European elections than at the parliamentary elections in their country, for a variety of reasons (electoral system, electoral coalition opportunities, lower turnout, anti-incumbent party voting and lower campaign costs). De Winter's (2002) analysis shows that for the entire 1979–99 period, most ethno-regionalist parties indeed obtained better results at European than at general elections. For instance, if one compares the degree of disproportionality (the percentage in terms of votes minus the percentage in terms of seats) at the 1999 European elections with the preceding general elections, the degree of disproportionality is – for all ethno-regionalist parties except the SFP – lower at the European elections. Ethno-regionalist parties also seem to obtain a larger proportional share of offices in the Committee of the Regions.⁷

European elections have provided the political space for formation of electoral alliances between ethno-regionalist parties of different regions, often actively stimulated by EFA bridge-builders.⁸ These electoral alliances for European elections are typical of parties in Spain and Italy. They are distinctively European in flavour in that they are not replicated at the national level.

An emerging European polity has thus facilitated the development of contacts and has transformed party cooperation into standard practice. In addition, European elections have a special relevance for these political parties. The so-called second-order elections nevertheless have primary-order effects in the successful launching of new political parties. Gomez-Reino (2000) has shown the importance of European elections in the north of Italy in the creation of new political parties (Lega Nord after an electoral coalition for European elections).

Interviews with MEPs show that for nationalist parties European elections are not secondary. Rather, they are increasingly privileged as an arena in which to gain political visibility and legitimacy at the European level. There is an increasing ability of EFA to attract party leaders at regional level to European meetings and summits. There is also a clear pattern of increasing involvement of party leaders at EFA meetings because it reinforces the legitimacy and increases the visibility of their claims. Finally, the EFA also tries to improve contacts with ethno-regionalist parties outside the EFA through the recent foundation of the 'stateless nations' intergroup in the EP.

In this party family, transnational demonstration effects are increasingly mediated by, and articulated in, the European Parliament. At the European level, these demonstration effects are mostly diffused through the EFA. The European Parliament offers the ethno-regionalist parties an arena for organizing meetings, for cooperation and the elaboration and articulation of a common programme. Such cross-national networks can provide weaker movements with logistics, administrative support, development of party programmes, electoral manifestos and party constitutions, proper organizational structures, political status and prestige, and, last but not least, boost their morale.

Evolution of the European Party Family

The DPPE-EFA is neither inclusive as a transnational party nor predominant in the definition of the political outlook of the parliamentary group to which it belongs. This constitutes a serious handicap in comparison with other European party families that are clearly more inclusive and homogeneous, and thus more representative of the ideological tendency they articulate. This weakness, however, should be measured with the starting point of the party family in 1979.

After the 1979 elections, the members of the DPPE-EFA formed a technical group with some extreme-left parties. In the following legislature, this group was enlarged with the Greens (the 'Rainbow' group). In the 1989–94 legislature, the Greens went their own way, and the 'Rainbow' group now contained a majority (9 out of 15) of ethno-regionalist MEPs. The 1994 elections were disastrous, and the remaining three MEPs representing DPPE-EFA parties joined the French and Italian Radicals (to form the European Radical Alliance group), while in the current parliament, the 10 MEPs of

the DPPE-EFA joined the Green group (in total 48 MEPs). In short, the DPPE-EFA representation in the European Parliament has never been sufficiently strong to form a genuine ethno-regionalist parliamentary group. In addition, in most cases, the ethno-regionalist MEPs constituted a small minority in the group they joined. Hence, as most parties of the DPPE-EFA have not managed regularly to capture a seat in the European Parliament, they have been excluded from the party integration opportunities that the parliamentary arena offers (Hix and Lord, 1997).⁹

The cooperation between ethno-regionalist parties in the European Parliament underwent phases illustrating their unique problems in creating a trans-European party (Lynch, 1998). It is not our purpose here to trace the historical evolution of the EFA, but two factors should be highlighted. First, there was no proper 'International' of peripheral nationalism in Europe to speak of.¹⁰ Development of the EFA is intrinsically linked to the internationalist views of the Flemish VU and the crucial role played by VU MEPs – from Maurits Coppieters in 1979 to the current president of the EFA, Nelly Maes. Second, EFA membership with representation in the European Parliament has grown in size, and overall membership in EFA has grown from 6 members in 1981 to the current 20 parties.

The existence of the EFA at the European level was defined by the struggle against traditional party families for membership. Interviews with all the Volksunie MEPs reveal that most of their political activities were concentrated on creating a single family of regionalists and nationalists, and on becoming an attractive political option for parties that collaborated within the larger party families. After the 1999 elections, there are still 12 MEPs belonging to ethno-regionalist parties that are not members of the DPPE, thus marginally more than those that currently belong to DPPE-EFA parties. The most notorious outsiders are the Lega Nord, the Vlaams Blok, the CiU, the SFP, the SVP and EH. However, the current numerical balance between DPPE-EFA members and non-members is unprecedented, indicating an evolution in favour of the DPPE-EFA. The preceding parliament, for example, counted only 3 ethno-regionalist MEPs belonging to the DPPE-EFA against 13 non-members.

Unlike the other European party families, the existence of a party family was challenged by differences in the traditional two dimensions outlined above. Regionalists, nationalists and autonomists differed in their claims for self-government. They still do now, ranging from moderate claims of political autonomy to outright independence. Ideological distance was a crucial factor underlying the lack of cohesion within this party family: options have ranged in the past from Conservative Christian Democratic parties such as the PNV to extreme-left wing parties, such as many party organizations in Spain and France. These political parties competed among themselves at the state level and reflected very different electoral and institutional trajectories within member states. Thus, cooperative action suffered major obstacles.

The evolution of party positions in a three-dimensional space (type of autonomy sought, left-right, European integration) requires more detailed content analysis of party documents and elite surveys. However, we present evidence here on how the definition of nationalists and regionalists as a 'European' family has allowed the reduction of political differences on the other two dimensions (autonomy-independence and left-right). Our interviews with MEPs show that differences in these dimensions have not disappeared. Rather, they can be overcome by the emergence of a new European agenda defined by the principle of the lowest common denominator.

The outcome of this process has been the possibility of defining a common European inter-nationalism from a variety of different regionalisms and nationalisms present within the EFA. In the Declaration of Brussels of the DPPE, the essential characteristics of a European inter-nationalism (which is defined as *both* a regionalism and a nationalism) are described and summarized. The EFA is committed to a democratic and constitutionalist nationalism that is defined as 'universalistic' (in asserting the right of self-determination for all), and yet 'contextual' (not asserting a single model of constitutional development for all cases). In addition, the European party puts forward a self-defined civic and inclusive nationalism committed exclusively to peaceful means in the pursuit of political objectives.

The presence in the European Parliament of Radicals and Greens has offered the opportunity to overcome traditional ideological differences and the 'old' party families in which some of these parties were and are entrenched. The presence in the EFA of those parties with a clear Socialist profile, such as the Welsh PC, working side-by-side with traditional Christian Democrats, such as the Basque PNV, shows the variety of ideological orientations. The process of Europeanization has two clear effects. First, it moderates the ideological distance that in the past had rendered common political goals or collective action in the form of transnational party federations difficult. Second, it highlights and gives political visibility to the common 'new' agenda of these parties on issues such as ecology and the environment, the democratization of the European Union, or the adoption of multiculturalism and defence of new migrants. Our interviews show that political parties still define themselves on this dimension: traditional ideologies are considered important and a distinctive feature of all parties. Yet the common definition of a 'progressive' nationalism favours the low salience of traditional ideological differences and at the same time gives visibility to EFA as a representative of new issues and 'alternative' politics.

The ideological moderation within the EFA exists alongside a new ideological polarization visible in the European Parliament. Over time, ideological differences have increased between this type of nationalism and the nationalism of the extreme-right represented by Lega Nord and Vlaams Blok. Membership of Lega Nord in EFA was terminated in 1994 with the

participation of Lega Nord in the Italian government with Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale.

The evolution of the party family on the pro-integration scale of Ray shows that ethnoregionalist parties that were part of the EFA group after the 1999 elections already had high pro-European attitudes in the 1984–98 period. The non-EFA regionalist parties however, are much more divided and significantly less pro-European.¹¹ Thus EFA membership has a high correlation with support for European integration. Today, almost all ethno-regionalist parties defend European integration, yet large divergences exist between the party positions concerning the model of further integration the EU should pursue. It is important to highlight, however, that in some cases overt rejection has evolved into critical positions on the current institutional structure and shape of a united Europe.

In this sense, the European party has produced a new political agenda reflecting the Europeanization of party goals. Agenda-setting is characterized by use of the principle of the lowest common denominator that allows all parties to cooperate and define a common European agenda despite their differences. The pro-integrationist and federalist objectives of the DPPE-EFA are formulated in the EFA's manifesto prepared for the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference: a federal union with more supranational decision-making, a social Europe parallel to the EMU; a supranational common defence and foreign policy; enlargement of the EU (but in concentric circles, allowing the association of countries that cannot immediately fulfil all criteria of the 'centre', i.e. the eurozone); bicameralism with a directly elected Senate of the Peoples and Regions (a combination of the Committee of the Regions and the Council of the Regions); an elected European government by a majority in each chamber; the right of legislative initiative of European, national and regional parliaments and the Committee of the Regions; in the short-term, representation of the regions in the Council of Ministers for matters devolved in their country to the regional level; direct access of regional authorities and the Committee of the Regions to the European Court of Justice, etc.

In addition, the EFA now defines application of the subsidiarity principle as the recognition and sharing of sovereignty. As far as the division of competencies between Europe, the state and the region are concerned, most ethnoregionalist parties voice a pincer strategy: on the one hand, the desire to transfer entire policy sectors to the European level (generally competencies that at this moment are still exercised by the states, but whose scope is too transnational or comprehensive to be efficiently exercised at the regional level, such as defence and foreign policy, monetary and fiscal policy, large-scale public works, the environment, security, etc.). On the other hand, they favour expansion of the competencies of the regions at the cost of the states, but generally not at the cost of the EU.

The importance of the creation of a truly European party family and its end results – a European internationalism, a 'new' progressive nationalism

and a Europeanization of party goals – should be put in the context of the weak institutionalization of the EFA. Moreover, the history of the EFA can be read as an ongoing struggle for new membership. Today, several important nationalist parties still prefer to adhere to other parliamentary groups. Some of the ethnoregionalist parties that are members of one of the main Europarties are equally in favour of European integration and in general more strongly so than the official line of their host party (like the CDC, SVP and SFP). In contrast, the two extreme or radical right parties, Lega Nord and Vlaams Blok, are clearly characterized by their anti-European attitudes.

After each European election, the EFA group had to start from scratch, given the high turnover of MEPs, of parties represented in the EP, and of parliamentary alliances with other unaffiliated groups. Since 1979, the source of stability has been the *Volksumie*, which usually had one or two MEPs and invested numerous efforts in creating and sustaining the EFA in terms of ideological sophistication, strategic insight, material resources (finance and personnel) and delegating skilled and multilingual leaders. The internal crisis of the VU in the 1990s that resulted in dissolution of the party threatens the survival of the EFA cooperation (De Winter, 1998).¹²

Although in this article we have investigated party change along the first dimension of Europeanization, that is, the emergence of a distinctive European polity relatively autonomous from regional and state political systems, there are also numerous examples of how national and domestic politics are being influenced by the process of Europeanization. The Welsh PC came under heavy fire for its association with some strange bedfellows of the EFA (cf. the criticism formulated by Labour when the Lega was still an EFA member and joined a government with the post-Fascist Alleanza Nazionale; more recently, when a former ERC leader endorsed xenophobic views, and a VU minister attended an ex-Nazi meeting). Also for non-EFA ethnoregionalist parties, alliances formed at the EU level become relevant for ‘national’ electoral politics. When the Partido Popular was admitted to the European People’s Party and rapidly became one of its leading members, the PNV, a founding member of the EPP, decided to leave. They felt that in view of the 2001 regional elections, this European association with the EPP cum PP would harm their image as defenders of Basque interests, especially towards their radical competitors.¹³

Organizational Change

Although we have concentrated in this article on examining the emergence of a distinctive European polity, we might also have expected to find adaptation at the domestic level in the form of organizational change – in particular the empowerment of EU officeholders as European integration proceeds. These are MEPs, members of the Committee of the Regions, national MPs specializing in EU questions, and other EU party experts and spokesmen

included in the leading party bodies (Raunio, 2000). Unfortunately, because of the traditional neglect of ethnoregionalist parties in the comparative study of political parties, we do not yet have sufficient data to verify these hypotheses comprehensively.

In the 1960–2000 period, organizational empowerment of EU officials in the VU is reflected in the inclusion of the Party Executive (*Partijbestuur*) in the more powerful Party Council (*Partijraad*). But most other Flemish parties have included their MEPs or their delegate in their highest decision-making body, and usually the main parties did so earlier than the VU. In the FDF, the MEPs have been empowered since the beginning, as party statutes have always included all MPs of any type in the *Comité Permanent*.

In the Catalan parties, the spokesperson of the EP group sits in the *Comité Executiu Nacional* of the CDC, while the ERC statutes include MEPs¹⁴ only from this year. The statutes of the Basque PNV do not mention this matter (neither for the executive nor for the national congress) and the present MEP is not a member of the national or regional party executives. According to the EA party statutes, the *Ejecutiva Nacional* includes a delegate for each type of legislative group. The current MEP is also Secretary General of the Party. In the BNG, the current MEP is a member of the executive *Comision Permanente* (as well as of the *Consello Nacional*). In the SNP, one of the two MEPs is member of the NEC (as one of the 10 elected members, but contrary to ‘national office bearers’ not *ex officio*). In the Lega Nord, an EP group representative sits in the *Consiglio Federale*. In the UV, their only MEP is a member of the *Comité Fédéral* (but, not *ex officio*). In the SVP, all categories of MPs are members of the Party Commission (*Parteiausschuss*), but not of the leadership (*Parteileitung*). In the PsdAz, MEPs are not officially members of *Direzione Nazionale*, but a representation of MEPs is granted for the *Consiglio Nazionale*. Finally, in the SFP, the current MEP is not a member of the *Centralstyrelsen*.

Thus, in general, MEPs of ethnoregionalist parties are members of their party’s top leadership organs, but often not *ex officio*. Still, our interviews indicate that all MEPs serve as the specialist, policy initiator and spokesperson for their party on European matters, and that they exhibit, to different degrees, a relative political autonomy from party executives that fosters the autonomy of the EFA. As in most traditional parties, there seems to be little communication between the party on the ground and its representatives in Brussels.¹⁵

Conclusion

Regarding the Europeanization of the nationalist and regionalist party family, the article has uncovered three aspects. First, the definition of a common European internationalism and European agenda that, historically, has been absent in this party family. Second, the emergence of a new political

agenda following the principle of the lowest common denominator, one that gives salience to issues of 'new' politics and reduces the visibility of traditional ideological differences. Third, a real Europeanization of party goals has provided a common platform on European institutional reform.

EFA membership has provided the opportunity to turn Eurosceptics into moderate Eurocritics. At the elite level, changing attitudes towards the EU are, we believe, due to the new political opportunities for ethnoregionalist parties at the European level. These factors outweigh the constraints that Europeanization imposes. This pro-European stance can be clearly identified in multilevel federalist institutional proposals and the positive attitudes towards European integration of party elites. Yet, Europeanization of the party family at the elite level might not have a direct impact at the state or regional level, nor on the pro- or anti-European attitudes of their electorates.

Notes

- 1 We define ethnoregionalist or peripheral nationalist parties on the basis of two common denominators: 1) a sub-national territorial division; and 2) a population the ethnoregionalist party claims constitutes a culturally distinct category (Türsan, 1998: 5). Their defining programmatic characteristic is a demand for empowerment and self-government for the substate territorial collectivity (De Winter, 1998).
- 2 Cf. the co-signing of the five party secretary-generals of the appeal to the Commission for drafting a European Party Statute (17/2/2000) and the inclusion of the DPPE-EFA in the subsequent negotiations with the European Commission, Council and Parliament on the public financing of Europarties.
- 3 The DPPE-EFA organized its first conference of party leaders and ministers in regional and big city executives only in November 2000.
- 4 Ray asked a variety of experts in European politics to place the main parties on a European integration scale, with a 4-year interval. The reliability of retrospective expert surveys has been questioned and therefore they clearly have to be complemented by longitudinal content analysis of party policy statements, e.g. manifestos for the European elections since 1979.
- 5 Voters are defined in terms of voting intention for the next general election, except for the FDF, where party proximity was used, because this produced more FDF sympathizers. For Finland, we selected the two mega-regions in which the SFP is clearly strongly represented – Uusimaa and Voili-Suomi.
- 6 Analysis at the national level increases the pro-European attitudes of many ethnoregionalist parties, yet they are not the outspoken champions, as is often claimed. In Spain, the CiU is the most pro-EU party along with the PSOE. In the UK, the PC, along with the Labour Party is the most pro-EU, followed by the SNP *ex aqua* with the Liberal Democrats. In Belgium, the VU is the most pro-EU, along with the two Green parties, but the FDF remains the most sceptical (but less so than the Vlaams Blok). In Finland, the SFP stands *ex aqua* with the Greens, but the Conservatives and Social Democrats exhibit more positive

- attitudes. In Italy, the LN is *ex aequo* with AN, which has the most negative attitudes towards European integration.
- 7 In many countries the 'centre' parties have generously allotted seats disproportionately (in comparison with regional population size) to the smallest historical regions (such as Val d'Aoste). These seats are usually allotted to the main ethnoregionalist party.
 - 8 At the 1989 European elections, the Corsican Unione du Populu Corsu and Brussels FDF ethnoregionalist parties formed an electoral alliance with green lists. At the 1984 European elections, the UV formed an electoral alliance with the PSd'A. At the 1999 elections, one finds two significant (in terms of seats) ethnoregionalist electoral alliances: the Coalicion Europa (comprising the Coalicion Canaria, the Partido Andalucista, the Union Valenciana and the Partido Aragonès) and the Coalicion Nacianalista Europa de los Pueblos (comprising the Basque PNV and EA, as well as the Catalan ERC and the Unio Mallorquina).
 - 9 Given the fact that the same parliamentary work is shared by fewer MEPs in the EFA than in the PES or EPP, all parliamentary assistants allotted to EFA MEPs are overloaded with genuine parliamentary tasks for their MEPs, while in the larger Europarties often one or two dozen parliamentary assistants work exclusively for development of the Europarty. As EFA parliamentary assistants perform party work in addition to their parliamentary work, the EFA has comparatively fewer resources to invest in development of the party organization at European level.
 - 10 There were initiatives of interregional cooperation, e.g. the Congress of European Communities and Regions in the late 1940s, that had an elected permanent bureau but whose members were mainly non-partisan. There was the short-lived Bureau of Unrepresented European Nations in the 1970s, mainly a lobby of regionalist parties without formal representation in the non-elected parliament (Lynch, 1996: 136–38).
 - 11 Authors' calculations on the basis of Ray's data comparing the EU attitudes of 17 regionalist parties' members or non-members of the EFA.
 - 12 This dependency is weakening, because the numerical weight of VU in the EFA has declined in relative terms, and a number of key positions in the EFA have now shifted to other parties.
 - 13 Although they were pleased to welcome a predominant party in their ranks, the EFA itself did not play a role in the shift of allegiance of the PNV.
 - 14 At this moment, they do not have any, but the person in charge of International Contacts is currently a member of the *Executiva Nacional*, as well as alderman of Barcelona and former delegate to the EFA.
 - 15 As is the case with the study of the effects of Europeanization on other party families, some major data-collection work on organizational changes is still to be done, along the lines of Katz and Mair (1992), especially for the earlier periods. In addition, the formal inclusion of EU officials in the leading party bodies is just a very small part of the picture. It does not tell us the extent to which their actual influence increased in the party. EU officials may be *ex officio* unimportant, but, *de facto*, important through interlocking directorates. They may hold an 'insignificant' seat in the European Parliament, but at the same time important national or regional offices. As such, they may be represented in the parties' highest decision-making bodies and therefore contribute to oligarchization of the party decision-making in EU matters.

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