Editorial

Europarties: Between the processes of ‘deepening’ and ‘widening’

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In 1992 the so-called party paper was added to the Treaty on European Union (EU). This gave an impetus to the development of what are commonly known as Europarties – political parties at the EU level. Supporters of a more democratic EU often call for a *Europe des partis* rather than a *Europe des patries* (Marquand, 1978). Yet, historically, the organizational development of Europarties has been slow and linked to EU Treaty change. Their role in EU decision making has evolved since the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), the Treaty of Nice (2000) and the recent Lisbon Treaty, particularly in relation to policy-shaping and fighting elections. Europarties have historically had a limited office-seeking role, because access to the major office roles in the EU is fundamentally controlled by national parties (see Lightfoot, 2005) but can play a role in shaping Union’s policy. These Europarties exist at the supranational level and can be differentiated from European Parliament (EP) Groups (Poguntke *et al*, 2007). Understanding the roles played by the two sets of organizations is crucial as although there are close links between transnational party federations and political groups, they perform different functions (see Delwit *et al*, 2004). The transnational party federations act more like extra-parliamentary parties coordinating member party positions and shaping agendas. The distinction between party groups and Europarties has become clearer since the EU party regulation in 2003/2004, which asked for a separation of the two organizations, with Europarties required to become separate legal entities with their own funding sources and staff (see Lightfoot, 2006). A revision to the regulation in 2007 permitted transnational party federations to campaign in elections for the EP, something they did for the first time in the 2009 campaign (Johannson, 2009), providing a vote-seeking role for the first time.

Given these perceived weaknesses, why should we care about Europarties? Schmitter (2000, p. 67) argues that Europarties are often nothing more than ‘loose confederations adopting a least-common denominator program and possessing virtually no organizational distinctiveness’. Peter Mair also questions whether Europarties can be ‘regarded as genuinely European parties – and hence as a core element within the institutionalization of European governance’. The reason he makes this claim is linked to his question – to what extent Europarties ‘remain tied to the terms of reference established by the organizations in national politics from which they originally derive?’ (Mair, 2006). However, it is clear that the Europarties are developing partisan structures and attempt to perform some of the functions traditionally associated with political parties (Magnette, 2005, pp. 157–163). Bartolini (2012) argues that the EU’s institutional environment remains unfriendly to

Europarties, yet since the Treaty on EU's party paper there have been numerous attempts to provide the Europarties with a more clearly defined role. Papers highlighting the specific influence of Europarties have shown they can play a role in the integration process (see Johansson and Raunio, 2005; Johansson, 2009; Külahci, 2010). There is therefore a clear literature that states that Europarties should be studied (see Hix, 2002; Raunio, 2006; Hanley, 2008; Priestly, 2011 for excellent overviews). Van Hecke (2010, p. 407) develops this by arguing that studying Europarties is worthwhile for a variety of reasons. First, because transnational party federations have the potential to influence the EU's decision-making process they are worth studying, because a small impact on a very important process could generate major consequences. He goes on to argue that they form bridges between politicians in the three main EU institutions. The Europarties are worth studying particularly in the light of the recent Lisbon Treaty, which changes some important parts of the EU institutional design in a way that could strengthen transnational party politics. Last, but not least, the EU party regulation in 2003/2004 has triggered optimism and the belief that this legal provision might open up new opportunities for Europarty development.

Two major challenges potentially temper this optimism. The first is that recent reforms have forced all Europarties to undergo internal changes in order to increase their organizational cohesiveness and affirm themselves as important players in the EU policymaking. The second is that the process of European integration and the successive waves of enlargement have directly affected the structure and the shape of Europarties. The accession of new EU members represented a unique opportunity of recruiting more member parties and increasing the political representation in the EP. However, a negative consequence of this recruiting strategy is the ideological dilution and the decrease in Europarty cohesiveness regarding their political principles.

This special issue contributes twofold to the existing academic research. First, it aims at advancing the theoretical research on Europarties by bridging the comparative politics (CP), public administration and international relations (IR) approaches. The main goal is to analyze and reflect on recent developments of Europarties by (i) analyzing internal organizational transformations and (ii) the external dimensions of Europarties' activity within the EU political system and as international actors. Second, this issue brings an empirical contribution to the study of Europarties by examining the opportunities and challenges that these are facing as a result of recent EU developments as well as regional and international processes.

The present collection of papers covers two main aspects of Europarties' activity: the internal organizational developments (deepening) and the external expansion and the accession of new members (widening). The first section of the special issue investigates the 'deepening' process that the Europarties have been undergoing, analyzing internal organizational reforms, the development of the European party system, as well as the role of Europarties within the EU policy-making process. A special attention is paid to the challenges that the Europarties are facing in the post-Lisbon Treaty period and the activities of the political foundations affiliated to Europarties.

The contribution by *Stephen Day* seeks to assess theoretically and empirically two developmental strategies that Europarties are confronted with in the light of EU party regulation from 2003/2004. The first one is driven by a desire to contain developments, which the author believes would result into weakly organized Europarties.

The second one – ‘transnationalization’ strategy – emanates from a collaborative dynamic within and across the Europarties, and if adopted it would lead to a series of extra-party and inter-party reforms.

The two following papers explore into more detail Europarties’ developmental trajectories by providing case studies of the Party of European Socialists (PES) and the European Liberal Democrat and Reform (ELDR) Party. *Simon Lightfoot* and *Erol Kūlahci* are addressing the more general question of why Europarties have so far failed to shape European policy by focusing on one of the main Europarties – PES. The paper tests a number of claims about the factors responsible for Europarty influence over EU governance. The contribution of *Julie Smith* adds on to this volume with the case study of the ELDR, focusing on the evolution of party ties and party formation among Liberal parties in Europe. Apart from examining important questions regarding the organizational development of the ELDR, the paper also investigates the relationship between the ELDR and the EP group – the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, as well as their expansion beyond EU’s borders.

In the subsequent paper, *Wojciech Gagalek* and *Steven Van Hecke* discuss a novel Europarty-related development: the establishment of European political foundations. The authors are asking how exactly these European political foundations perform their tasks, focusing on the purposes European political foundations serve and the nature of their relationship with Europarties.

The second section of this special issue tackles the ‘widening’ process of Europarties, regarding them as international actors and, more specifically, democracy promoters outside EU borders. The papers of *Geoffrey Pridham* and *Natalia Timuş* contribute to the existing theoretical and empirical ‘niche’ on Europarties as regional players by examining the transnational linkages between Europarties and national parties from EU candidates and the East European neighborhood. *Geoffrey Pridham* advances a comparative framework for analysis of Europarties’ promotion of party development in post-Communist Europe by examining the direct and indirect transnational linkages. The author argues that Europarties enjoyed exceptional scope in EU candidates thanks to EU’s accession leverage and led to rather specific effects on party developments in the region.

The paper of *Natalia Timuş* concludes this volume by offering an insightful analysis into the Europeanization through transnational cooperation in the case of accession of Ukrainian parties to the European People’s Party (EPP). It applies an original theoretical framework combining CP and IR approaches for the analysis of national party affiliation to the Europarties as a specific case of party Europeanization. The essay shows that the EPP has a direct, though weak, influence on aspiring Ukrainian members and that the German Konrad Adenauer Stiftung represents an informal channel for the Europeanization of Ukrainian center-right parties.

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