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Enlightening the Debate on Good Governance

Pan-European Political Parties

Thomas Jansen



European Essay No. 14

A Definition of Federalism

Federalism is defined as 'a system of government in which central and regional authorities are linked in an interdependent political relationship, in which powers and functions are distributed to achieve a substantial degree of autonomy and integrity in the regional units. In theory, a federal system seeks to maintain a balance such that neither level of government becomes sufficiently dominant to dictate the decision of the other, unlike in a unitary system, in which the central authorities hold primacy to the extent even of redesigning or abolishing regional and local units of government at will.'

(New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought)

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Introduction

THIS IS an important, a timely, and a difficult essay. It appears just as the European Commission has brought forward proposals for the recognition and financing of European political parties, even before the ink is dry on the Treaty of Nice and before any national parliament has ratified it. It points in an unequivocal direction, toward the closer integration of national political parties into pan-European parties, and it welcomes the pressures, which are calling forth this response.

The Essay analyses the recent history of party co-operation at European level in theoretical as well as practical terms. It surveys developments in the party groups in the European Parliament, underlining the incremental progress made in the direction of fully-fledged European parties over recent years. And it illuminates the background to the key clauses both in the Maastricht Treaty and in the Treaty of Nice which have opened the door to the Commission's latest initiative.

Europe-wide political parties are part of the civic fabric of the emerging Union. With enlargement shortly to more than twenty-five states, the need for democratic mechanisms and structures for aggregating interests at a continental level grows more pressing. Within the European Parliament and throughout the political fabric of the Member States Europe-wide parties will play that role.

This Essay looks at an important building block of the future structure of the Union — and it is a future that is surprisingly close. Political parties at a pan-European level will both shape and reflect public opinion, articulated increasingly at a level beyond the individual Member States.

Martyn Bond

Director

February 2001



Pan-European Political Parties

Thomas Jansen

'POST-NICE' DISCUSSION about the future constitution of the European Union is gaining momentum. In that discussion the role and status of pan-European political parties has come back onto the agenda. The general public may not have registered the fact, but the Commission put a proposal to the Intergovernmental Conference in July this year to create a specific legal basis for the statute of European parties. The IGC in Nice in December last year agreed. Article 191 of the TEC states:

Political parties at 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.

The Council, acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 251, shall lay down the regulations governing political parties at European level and in particular the rules regarding their funding.

They added a declaration to be included in the Final Act of the Conference on Article 191 TEC. It reads:

The Conference recalls that the provisions of Article 191 do not imply any transfer of competence to the European Community and do not affect the application of the relevant national constitutional rules.

The funding for political parties at European level provided out of the Community budget may not be used to fund, either directly or indirectly, political parties at national level.

The provisions on the funding for political parties shall apply on the same basis to all the political forces represented in the European Parliament.

This proposal has a history. It stems from a joint effort of all the transnational political families represented by political groups in the European Parliament which resulted in a unanimous invitation to the European Council in Feira in June 2000 to add an article to the Treaty. This is what the IGC in Nice has now done.

The leadership of all substantial parties represented in the European Parliament, i.e. the European People's Party (EEP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR), the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) and Europe of Democracies and Diversities (EDD) and their parliamentary groups were prepared to act together primarily because of the difficult position they have all found themselves in as a result of a warning by the Court of Auditors.

The Court of Auditors had concluded that the partially direct, partially indirect allowances paid to the parties from their groups' budgets, — i.e. the European Parliament's budget —

was illicit and had to be discontinued. This finding raised the question about the regulation of party financing at European level, a question that cannot be answered, however, without solving another issue first: the definition of the parties' legal status — the parties' statute — within the EU's political and institutional order.

Attempt at defining European political parties

The Treaty, in its post-Maastricht form, reads 'political parties at 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.' (Art. 191, ex 138a).

But what are these 'political parties at European level' or 'European political parties'? Any definition has to rely on an assessment of the political bodies that have emerged during the 1990s carrying this tag, but whose origins date back — as we will see — to the 1970s.

Here is an attempt at such a definition: 'European parties are federations of national or regional parties from several European Union Member States which share common objectives and which have committed themselves to permanent co-operation on the basis of an agreed statute and programme for the realisation of common policies. These have been endorsed by their competent authorities; they act within the EU system and their representatives form parliamentary groups in the European Parliament.'

At the moment and based on that definition, only those associations of the classic political families of Social Democrats, Christian Democrats and Liberal Democrats which

have organisational structures at Union level clearly qualify as European parties. They are transnational in the way they are structured as well as with respect to their goals and activities; their self-perception as well as their actions make them important players in the Union's political system for whose design and development they take responsibility. To a limited extent this now also holds true for the Greens and the European Free Alliance. Other political forces represented in the European Parliament have so far not managed to organise themselves adequately due to the fact that they generally focus on a specific national situation or for ideological or political reasons do not fit into sustainable transnational associations.

The constitutional status of European parties

In view of the current efforts to give meaning to Art. 191, it is worth looking at earlier initiatives which tried to target the same aim.

Immediately after the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty two problems came to the forefront of discussions: creating a 'law for political parties' or a 'party statute' and making use of the possibility opened up in the Treaty for financing European parties from the Community budget.

For reasons of legal certainty as well as political culture the question regarding finance from the Budget was not addressed before the organisation, activities and mode of operation of European parties had been decided in an unequivocal and legally binding way. And those who argued for further integration urgently wanted a regulation of this kind.

They argued that such a European party statute would have to define the meaning of 'European parties', their specific tasks

and their structural, operational and financial regulation. They also wanted clarification regarding their public or official recognition as 'political parties at European level' and regarding the competent body to grant this recognition.

The efforts made back in 1992/3 by the party leaders of the PES, EEP and ELDR to persuade the Commission to draft a proposal for a party statute on the basis of the Treaty provision on European parties were, however, unsuccessful. The wording of the Article on European parties in the Maastricht Treaty did not, in the Commission's opinion, provide an adequate legal basis. Furthermore, the leading figures in the national parliamentary groups were not prepared actively to support the European parties' efforts to move towards an autonomous status at the European level.

Later attempts at adopting a regulation on the basis of the European party provision in the context of the 1996/7 IGC leading to the signing of the Amsterdam Treaty were equally unsuccessful, but it is instructive to look at them, too, and see why they failed.

In September 1996, the Greek government presented a proposal to amend the Article by adding the following sentence: 'To clarify their legal status and to improve the factual conditions for the fulfilment of their mission, legislation may be adopted pursuant to the co-decision procedure.'

Soon after this, the Italian and Austrian delegations in a joint memorandum proposed inserting the following paragraph into the Treaty chapter on citizenship of the Union:

'Citizens of the Union shall have the right to freely associate in the form of political parties operating at European level which are based on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and

fundamental freedoms and of the rule of law. Such parties shall contribute by democratic means to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union.’

These proposals did not, however, gain much support from the representatives of the other governments. There were probably several reasons for their reluctance: the issue might not have seemed sufficiently important to some of them; others might have been concerned about possible financial implications; and a third group might not have agreed with those elements implicitly leading towards a constitutionalisation of the Treaty.

The Institutional Affairs Committee of the European Parliament also felt called upon to react and in May 1996 requested the Social Democrat MEP Dimitros Tsatsos to draft a report on this matter; Tsatsos tabled his report in the summer of 1996. Following discussions and amendments in the Committee, the report was debated in plenary on 10 December and subsequently adopted by a large majority (336 to 63 votes and 19 abstentions).

The resolution accompanying the Tsatsos report demanded — ‘regardless of the outcome of the Intergovernmental Conference’ — regulations both on the ‘legal status’ and ‘the financial circumstances’ of European parties. But this stipulation, too, remained without effect. Tsatsos’ work, however, greatly helped to rationalise the debate in the European Parliament between the parliamentary groups and the parties and to prepare the common stance they have now, four years later, been able to reach. Since the Heads of Government in Nice, in part as a result of this agreement in the European Parliament, have accepted the Commission’s

proposal and incorporated the relevant dispositions in the Treaty, the road is now open for the regulations the European Parliament has called for.

But several questions arise about the character and function of these European parties. Finding an answer will require a look at their emergence and development, their structure and organisation, the way they have gained ground in the political system of the Union and, finally, their relationship with their national member parties, as well as their European parliamentary groups.

The association of parties at the European level

The most important parties in the countries that took part in the process of European integration after The Second World War started to co-operate with like-minded sister parties from the other Community Member States quite early on. Families of European parties developed out of this co-operation by the end of the 1940s. Throughout the 1950s they co-ordinated their positions and increasingly embarked on common initiatives.

As European representatives started building European parliamentary groups in the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952 and in the appointed European Parliament after the founding of the European Economic Community (EEC) and EURATOM (EAG) in 1958, they considered it increasingly necessary to rely on 'European parties'.

With the first Euro election on the horizon, in the mid 1970s national parties saw an additional interest in running a co-ordinated Europe-wide campaign. They hoped to profit from the positive marketing effects that membership of a

transnational alliance might have for them. They also foresaw the potential benefits such an association could have for improved common policy-making. Real party alliances emerged as a consequence of closer integration in the run-up to the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979. The Liberals as well as the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats all felt the need to prepare themselves for the challenges of the Euro elections by establishing European organisational structures.

This intensive programmatic co-operation of the party alliances prior to the first Euro election was continued in the preparations for subsequent elections taking place every five years. Since then, the MEPs in the parliamentary groups — which have been tied in with the staff and organisational structure of the European party associations from the outset — have based their co-operation more and more on common policy programmes or manifestos. This closeness between the respective member parties has had effects on the self-perception and presentation of the individual national parties. A good example of this was the merger into the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) of the three traditionally competing ‘Christian’ parties (Catholic People’s Party, Christian Humanitarian Union and Anti-Revolutionary Party) in the Netherlands, which was clearly inspired and accelerated by the parties’ representatives’ common membership in the European Parliament’s Christian Democratic Group (CD).

The emergence of European parties

Even the leaders of the national parties were increasingly faced with the need to discuss general political issues with their partners on a transnational basis in order to reach common

views and positions. They are many examples of such issues regarding the future of European integration: foreign and security policy, developments in civil society and their implications for national as well as European manifestos and the organisation of the parties' transnational co-operation. All these were questions that could not be finally resolved individually or in the respective parliamentary groups in the European Parliament but needed the imprimatur of national political leaders working together.

This co-operation began on an ad-hoc basis but has become more and more systematic. It resulted also in the growth of organisational and communication structures. The Article inserted into the Maastricht Treaty in the early 1990s, assigning a special role within the integration process to 'political parties at European level,' followed this same logic. This provision also constitutionally acknowledged the importance of European party structures for the future of European unification and an effective transnational political system.

In anticipation of the European Community's evolution into a political Union, several 'European parties' developed out of the party associations in the early 1990s:

- The Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community was established as early as 1974 but gave itself a new statutory base in autumn 1992 as the Party of European Socialists (PES).
- The European People's Party (EEP), which had committed itself to becoming a European party at its foundation in 1976, adopted a new statute in November 1990 emphasising this claim.
- The Federation of Liberal and Democratic Parties, founded in 1976, became the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party in December 1993.

- The European Alliance of Green Parties was formed as a pan-European federation in summer 1993 but provided for the possibility of a subsequent closer association at Union level.

At the same time, new alliances were formed, changing the composition of these parliamentary groups. The Conservative parties of the UK and Scandinavia were increasingly attracted to the EEP, which was inspired by Christian Democrat values, and finally joined it. The Italian EuroCommunists found their way into the Social Democrat or Socialist-oriented PES. Reformers and Radicals built ties with the Liberal Democrat ELDR. The former Liberal Party of Portugal, despite calling itself a Social Democrat Party, changed alliance and joined — as did the French Liberals — the EEP. There was — and still is — a sense of growth and development around the various groupings at European level as each national party tests where it really belongs.

The parties in the political system of the Union

The activities of the European parties have not — or not yet — reached the same level of effectiveness as those of their national counterparts in the Member States. This is due to the fact that the balance of political power in the Union does not — or not yet — lie with the European Parliament, but still with the national governments whose legitimacy and power is derived from their national parliaments. Consequently, the European parties' ability to influence the constitutional and legal development in a transnational European framework remains, for the time being, limited compared to any national context.

The national governments acting as the EU's main legislative body in the Council have managed so far to contain the European Parliament's influence. They benefit to some extent

from the fact that European affairs still fall under the responsibility of Foreign Ministries rather than Prime Ministers' offices, even though decisions in Brussels affect so many different aspects of citizen's lives. The co-ordination of European policy thus remains — ambiguously — a matter of foreign policy, a specialist reserve outside the mainstream of domestic politics in most countries.

In consolidating their structures and using their resources political parties do, however, respond to constitutional developments. That is to say, their efforts at building common transnational structures and establishing independent operational capabilities at the European level go hand in hand with the requirements imposed at home by the ongoing process of integration and institutionalisation. Each works on the other and a consideration of the process of Europeanisation the political parties have been subjected to over the last decades shows that the individual national parties and party formations still have a dominant say about the pace and direction of their own development. This manifests itself primarily in the degree of consensus about the ongoing process which, in turn, determines the parties' ability to actively shape the process. It is further apparent in the role and ability of the political groups in the European Parliament to articulate common political positions. Finally, it is expressed in the elaboration of policy concepts and the corresponding ability of politicians to create a transnational consensus involving civil society in each country.

The structure and organisation of European political parties

The gradual emergence of a European political culture and a corresponding awareness of this process has had clearly

detectable and generally favourable consequences for the Europeanisation of the party system as well as for EU integration. Not to be underestimated in this context are the effects this institutionalised transnational co-operation among European parties has had on the behaviour of the national parties' leadership. For them, it has become increasingly self-evident that the political parties, too, need to have a presence at EU level in order to preserve their interests, exercise influence and actively shape the emerging federal European Union.

This is achieved by parties that were formerly restricted to the national level developing a European outreach. They join forces and act together as European parties. In doing so they adopt organisational structures mirroring that of most of their member parties: a congress of delegates decides on the policy programme, an executive board deals with current issues and day-to-day business, a party leader (supported by a committee) acts as a spokesperson and represents the party externally, a General Secretary (supported by a Secretariat) is responsible for internal communications and provides the technical and organisational backup for the work of the committees as well as the implementation of their results.

Copying similar structures in some of their member parties, the European parties have also started to establish transnational co-operative alliances for specific categories of members; for example, European Social Democrat or Christian Democrat youth, women's and employers' associations. They are intended to provide a broader base for the European parties in civil society and amongst members by assisting the dissemination of the agreed policy programme to different groups traditionally associated with the national parties.

The European parties not only form groups in the European Parliament, but also in the Committee of Regions and the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly. In these institutions, too, they work towards raising the profile of their respective parties' programmes, and gain experience of transitional political work as local/regional representatives and as delegated national parliamentarians.

Furthermore, the European parties regularly bring together the national party leaders as well as the associated heads of government or foreign ministers in order to give them the opportunity for consultation on the agenda for European Council meetings or other issues which require high-level discussion and decision-making. These 'caucus' meetings gained in importance during the 1990s, thereby reinforcing the increased relevance of European parties. Party leaders thus find themselves more and more in a position to organise unified action by their members.

The characteristics of European parties

European parties neither can nor would wish to follow a single model as they are not — in contrast to national parties — organised according to a unified pattern at national, regional and local level. They respect their national member parties' well-established structures which provide their foundation and support, but they are federal parties aiming to organise and politically promote the unified action of their members at the European level.

In the statute of the European People's Party, for example, this finds expression in the provision that the member parties retain 'their name, identity and freedom of action in respect of their national competences' (Art. 2)

The organisational model that European parties choose to adopt as this development progresses is largely dependent on the constitutional development of the European Union. Previous experience suggests that — if models are to be relied upon at all for future decisions regarding their structure — those models from European party history and current reality which correspond with a federal constitutional order are likely to be favoured.

The definition of European parties as ‘federal’ suggested above is consistent with developments so far. Currently European parties are, in fact, federations whose members ‘have committed themselves to permanent co-operation on the basis of an agreed statute and programme for the realisation of a common policies. These have been endorsed by their competent authorities; they act within the EU system and their representatives form parliamentary groups in the European Parliament.’

It seems safe to assume that other groups planning or establishing themselves as organisations at the European level in future will, to mirror the Union’s developing constitutional order, choose a federal structure. It certainly appears quite out of the question for a European party to survive and fulfil its role on a long-term basis if it does not, at the same time, both have a strong European presence and operate also through independent associations in the subsystems, particularly at Member State level.

The other elements of the definition proposed earlier also match actual developments to date, as well as a theoretical requirement: a European political party that did not have a base in several Member States in organisations with ‘common orientations and objectives’ — and that would therefore not be in a position to unite their member parties’ representatives

in a single group — would not deserve the name. And the inclusion over the past ten years or so of parties from countries not (yet) part of the Union as observers or associates does not alter the fact that the political system of the European Union remains the key sphere of action for European parties.

Member parties and their European organisation

A European party's development is essentially dependent on the ability of its national (or regional) member parties to articulate a common will and on their willingness to act together in a united manner. A European party cannot, in fact, be more than what its member parties make of it by common action. And this is of course not necessarily consistent with what the individual member parties would *like* to make of it. The outcome is always a result of compromise and constraint. Not all of those involved have come to the same understanding at the same time. Views about what a European party should be and should achieve are various in the member parties as each usually looks to his or her own party in his or her own country as a model and as a measure of European or transnational awareness.

Even the concept of a 'party' varies from one country to another. Each political party's internal organisation mirrors its unique history, but it also reflects the constitution of the state it operates in. Highly relevant for the attitudes of the member parties' representatives towards their European party, for example, is whether they have a federal tradition or culture at home. There is also a broad spectrum of possibilities regarding the role of the Party Chairman: he or she could be managing director, moderator, animator, president or party leader. And the role of the General Secretary is also interpreted differently: in some parties he or she is simply an executive

official, administrator or organiser, while, in others, he or she exercises political leadership.

It is for these practical reasons that existing European parties cannot, in reality, match any ideal type. They are developing subject to a variety of diverging forces and impulses. It is unrealistic therefore to perceive them simply as images of the national parties one is more familiar with back home. Aspects of all these models do, of course, influence the European parties but what really characterises them has to be something different.

Nevertheless, the expectation that a European party ought to be like a national party remains more or less alive in the member parties. There is often a tendency to judge self-perception and performance in relation to these familiar criteria. Along with this comes the tendency to harness the European party to current national party interests or else to measure the European party's worth with reference to the immediate benefits it promises to bring in specific circumstances back home. These are typical reactions in the transitional phase towards a new political system in which the new modes of operation have not yet settled in and — as always — only previous experience is available.

The problem of communication between the national and the European level

One of the main problems the European parties have to face — both in their efforts to assert themselves and fulfil their role as well as in developing their structures — lies in the difficulty of organising communication between national and European levels.

The number of politicians and officials who are active at the European level is still relatively small, as is the number of journalists who can actually draw on first-hand knowledge and experience when reporting on European affairs. The national party headquarters have far larger human, material and financial resources than the European parties' secretariats. And a similar picture can be drawn with respect to political correspondents' media offices in the national capitals on the one hand, and the European capitals (Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg) on the other.

The political and legislative processes on the EU's political stage are extremely complex. Comprehending, gaining insight and evaluating them requires knowledge and experience that actors involved in national politics would not normally acquire. In addition, politicians and officials acting at European level necessarily develop other priorities than their counterparts at national or regional level — and vice versa.

Their European consciousness, which requires them to consider the circumstances in several countries, frequently leads European politicians to adopt positions that are or appear to be inconsistent with those held by their fellow party members in their home countries. The fact that they are usually more inclined to and capable of compromise — a quality that is important for successful European policy-making — also frequently meets with incomprehension at home. Only slowly, and as a result of increasing interconnectedness between national and European politics, will it become natural for national parliamentarians to take the European dimension into consideration automatically in their efforts to reach decisions.

The committees of the European parties, in turn, often feel let down by their member parties. Poor coverage in the national media frequently means that the relevant contribution by the

'Europeans' is not recognised, and thus not acknowledged in the national context. This supports a tendency among some national politicians to consider commitment to their European party and its activities in some ways as a luxury and to view the transnational party structures as decorative rather than functional.

The parties in the European Parliament

This assessment is confirmed by the course the Euro election campaigns that take every five years. The national (and/or regional) party leadership in the Member States cannot resist the temptation to use these occasions for their current, local needs. This leaves little opportunity for creating an image of the European parties which are thus hardly recognisable as actors and are not able to profile themselves. The campaigning member parties of the individual party federations may have commonly drafted and agreed manifestos that are loyally promoted, but European policy remains low-key, not often a salient issue, at least on the continent.

The results of the European elections have regularly confirmed the dominant positions of the party families with organisational structures at the European level, in particular the PES and the EEP. The three groups in the European Parliament that are rooted in the classical European parties (PES, EEP, ELDR) currently have 464 MEPs while the other five groups together can account only for 216 mandates. And this trend towards traditional political forces seems to be reinforced from election to election. The down side of this concentration in the Parliament's centre is a certain fragmentation at the periphery that leads to extremely heterogeneous groups without a clear identity to the right of the EEP and to the left of the PES.

The reasons for this appear to lie in Member States' domestic policies. Europhobe or Eurosceptic groups that are emerging in various countries do not have a major role to play at the European level. As a result of their entrenchment in the 'national' scene and their fixation on the single-issue policy of Europe in their domestic context they appear to be largely incapable of pooling resources and forming coherent European parties.

The groups of the two big parties enjoy a near two-thirds majority in the European Parliament, a majority which Parliament as an institution needs in order to stand its ground vis-à-vis the Council of Ministers in the legislative process. As neither the PES nor the EEP can regularly achieve a similar majority with other politically reliable parties, the functioning of Parliament de facto has depended to a large degree on their co-operation. This corresponding responsibility has, in the past, led the leadership of both groups time and again to conclude agreements of constructive co-operation, including arrangements regarding the election of the Parliament's President. 1999 was the first-time that such an arrangement could not be found and the EEP candidate, Nicole Fontaine, was pushed through in a knockout vote against the Socialist candidate, Mario Soares. Since then even disputes about less highly profiled factual issues are now dealt with in a more conflictual manner, causing a great deal more controversy than they used to. This suggests that the creation of a political profile by the European parties has begun to result in a politicisation of the European Parliament.

The relationship between party and group at European level

In every parliamentary democracy which presupposes the existence and activity of political parties an antagonism can

be observed in the relationship between the parties in the country and the representatives through whom they operate in Parliament. This causes a tension whose intensity is dependent on a number of factors. Both the specific personalities involved and whether the groups are in opposition or in government play a role, as do the institutional conditions and requirements of political culture in the particular country.

Such tension between the parties at large and their parliamentary representatives exists also at the European level. However, the balance here is clearly shifted in favour of the representatives as the European parties as such still have no say in selecting candidates and organising elections to the European Parliament. As long as the voting procedures for the European elections remain national, it is up to the national parties in the Member States to select candidates and organise the election campaigns. But once elected, MEPs then enjoy considerable autonomy of action, reflected in the relatively independent way they vote within their political groups.

An additional factor is the organisational weakness of the European parties which will remain financially dependent on their national components as long as their legal status within the Union's political system stays unclear. This reliance is, in legal terms, unproblematic, as the national parties do after all constitute the European parties. But given the notorious reluctance on the part of member parties to provide the European parties with adequate financial means for their effective work, the European Parties have turned more and more to their European parliamentary representatives, whose political groups have shown greater understanding and willingness to help financially.

The special role of the parliamentary groups within and in relation to the European parties is also historically conditioned.

From an early stage, the European affairs experts came together in the groups. And it was these experts who persuaded their party leaders at home of the importance of a closer co-operation with their partners in other Member States and thus provided the initiative for European party formation.

From the start — a time when the national parties had hardly yet realised the need for it — the groups provided the means and structures to pave the way for the first organisational alliances in the European Parliament. Their financial and material contributions continued to remain significantly more substantial than those of the individual member parties.

European parties initially were children of the groups in the European Parliament. This parenthood has from the outset ensured the groups' strong influence on party life. As co-founders they are, in addition to the member parties, also constituent members of the European parties. This finds its expression not least in the strong position they have been given in the statutes, particularly the generous allocation of representational and participatory rights.

This formal aspect of the connection between European party and European Parliament group is particularly important as it underlines and legitimises the resultant heavy reliance by the European Parties on material and political support from their parliamentary groups for the realisation of their projects.

This dependence on parliamentary group support on the other hand can lead to tensions and problems, especially when priorities or interests do not coincide. This happens, and has to happen, as the remit and very nature of parties and groups differ and they have rather different functions. And European party dependence on parliamentary groups can become problematic if this is (mis)used for parliamentary or group purposes — as happens, of course, from time to time.

Prospects for the development of European parties

In the process of Europeanisation of political life — even at the national and regional level — the tendency to underestimate the potential of the European parties will certainly diminish. Serious problems affecting Member States' domestic affairs and social policies will increasingly require European solutions. This will change the perception of the role and relevance of the Union's institutions as well as attitudes towards the European Parliament.

The European Parliament has already managed to enhance its position over the last decade. It is not only capable of directly taking up and articulating citizens' concerns; because it takes majority decisions by vote in public, it can also speak a clear language and agree on specific measures — often with greater clarity than diplomats in the Council of Ministers meetings in camera. Its influence will continue to increase in the context of the debate about Europe's constitution which has been sparked in recent months by the German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, the French President Jacques Chirac and various other influential public figures. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights — which also contains a paragraph on 'political parties at Union level' in Art. 12 concerning freedom of assembly and of association — points in the same direction. Finally, even the debate on future European governance, initiated by Commission President Romano Prodi, will necessarily increase the scope of the European Parliament — and the parties with it — since it will amount to enhanced transparency and closeness to the citizen, that is, a revitalisation of democracy in the Union.

It is now a commonplace that migratory pressures, environmental problems, organised crime or international drug trafficking require common solutions, i.e. action within the

political framework and using the instruments of the European Union. As a result of this awareness, an understanding of the meaning and importance of European parties is also growing among the political class throughout Europe. This is happening first and foremost in the national parliaments and the national parties, but also — if more slowly — in the wider public of the Member States.

The Europeanisation of the party system will progress in line with the constitutional development of the Union. The two big camps — the Social Democrat or Socialist-oriented one and the Christian Democrat or Conservative-oriented one — will continue to have a strong appeal for the respective forces which are close to them. The moderate forces, which range from the left towards the centre, will gravitate towards the PES and the moderate right-wing forces, ranging from the right towards the centre, will be attracted to the EPP.

Political issues at European level depend a broad supranational consensus that can only be brought about by transnational parties and groups firmly based in their member states' societies and cultures, operating more widely at the level of the Union.

This, finally, corresponds to the new political circumstances. The era of ideology has come to an end. The evolution of mass political parties under largely ideology-free banners is on the agenda. It is less the ideological convictions of party leaders and more the socio-economic interests and politico-cultural demands of the electorate which are now the decisive factors for political parties' profiles.

Left versus right, conservative versus progressive, Social Democrat versus Christian Democrat, Liberal versus Socialist: these opposites are becoming ideologically blurred in the European dimension under these new conditions. They are increasingly understood as different points on a spectrum of

practical politico-cultural possibilities on offer. From this perspective cultural differences within the left-wing as well as the right-wing camps — as, for example, between Liberal and Conservative or Socialist and Communist — are also increasingly being lost.

All this explains why the Social Democrats could not avoid incorporating post-Communist and other left-wing forces in their European organisations and why the EPP has engaged in involving Conservative, Liberal and other ‘bourgeois’ forces.

The politicisation of the debate on EU reform

As a result of the introduction of the single currency and as a precondition for EU enlargement to include new Member States, major changes in the Union’s political system are to be expected in the years to come. There will bring more influence and power for the European Parliament and hence for European parties.

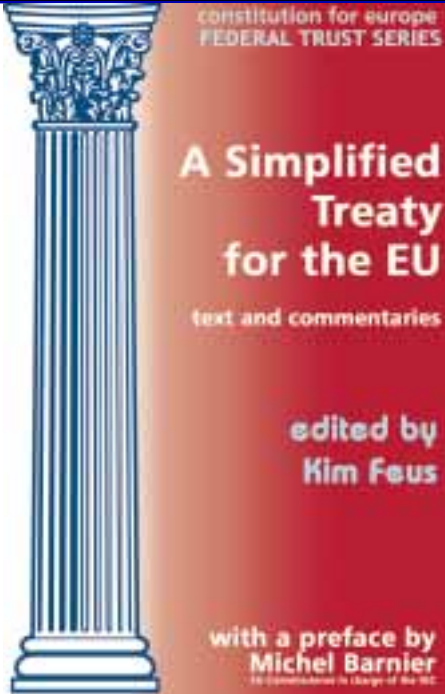
Even if the Amsterdam Treaty did not bring major progress with respect to the legal basis and status of European parties in the Union’s political order, some of its provisions are none the less relevant to this development. The Union’s commitment to democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms and to the rule of law (Art. 6 TEU), for example, is a further step on the road, embarked on in the Maastricht Treaty, from a union of states to a union of peoples.

Moreover, the new provisions on freedom of movement, asylum and immigration point in the same direction. In conjunction with the concept of securing law and order within a Union framework, they form another important element in making Union citizenship a reality.

Similar arguments can be made about the provisions intended to give Parliament a greater say, more democracy, the simplification of decision-making procedures (more transparency) and, finally, also the elaboration of the rules governing the allocation of tasks and competences to the different levels of government in the Union (more subsidiarity).

All these elements will also lead to a further politicisation of the debate on the European Union — thus meaning also a stronger democratisation and transnationalisation. It is evident that the role of European parties will consequently become more prominent as this debate will have to be carried out within the structures provided by the European parties.

Legally pinning down the nature of European parties and the conditions that have to be fulfilled for recognition as a 'European party' — a prerequisite, in turn, for receiving Community funding — will greatly enhance the potential for action of these parties. Important impulses can also be expected from this development for the consolidation of the European Union as a democratic and federal political system.



THE IDEA for such a reorganisation was originally presented in the Commission's opinion on the last IGC at Amsterdam and then taken up in the Dehaene/Weizenäcker/Simon (The Three Wise Men) report on the institutional implications of enlargement. The European Commission subsequently requested the European University Institute in Florence to carry out a feasibility study on the idea of a Simplified Treaty. The EUI produced a draft Basic Treaty of the European Union - a simplified, coherent Treaty which incorporates the essential constituent elements of the Union.

As a result of various changes and additions over many years, the Treaties undoubtedly are lacking in transparency and clarity in their present state. The proposed Treaty text does not make any changes to the substance of current Treaty provisions, but restructures and consolidates in a more accessible way the articles setting out the institutional framework and the operating rules of the Union and the EU's policy objectives. The contributions in this volume analyse the draft Basic Treaty and comment on whether this reorganisation actually makes the Treaties clearer and more accessible to Europe's citizens. In doing so, they pose another question: is a simplification sufficient or has the time come for a Basic Treaty that provides the EU with a proper constitution?

CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE: **Michel Barnier**, Commissioner in charge of the IGC; **Christopher Beazley MEP**; **Prof Clive Church** and **Dr David Phinnemore**, UKC/QUB; **Richard Corbett MEP**; **Prof Claus-Dieter Ehlermann** and **Prof Yves Mény**, European University Institute Florence; **Stanislaw Komorowski**, Ambassador of Poland; **Alain Lamassoure MEP**; **Jo Leinen MEP**; **Giorgio Napolitano MEP**; **John Pinder**, Chairman of the Federal Trust; **Frank Vibert**, European Policy Forum.

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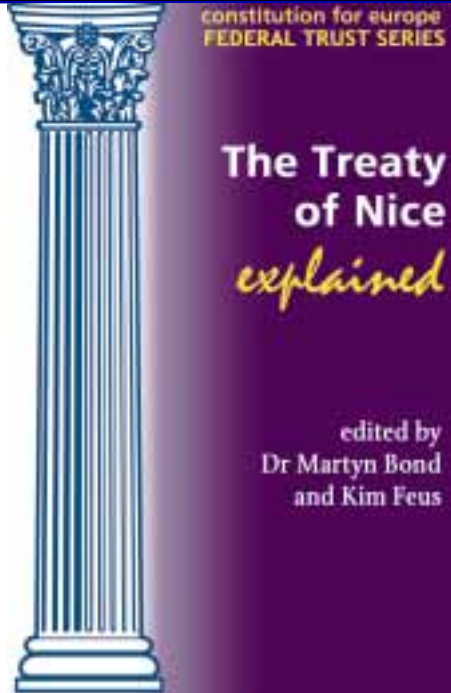
EVERY FEW years the European Union grows larger and more complex as new states join and members revise the Treaties to adjust to new circumstances.

The Treaty of Nice is the latest such adjustment, and it comes at a critical time for the European Union as it prepares for the next enlargement. This may add as many as twelve new states, many formerly behind the Iron Curtain in Central and Eastern Europe, and the Treaty of Nice attempts to ensure the existing Union is functioning well enough to absorb them. Member states have revised the composition of the Commission, the way the Council votes, the rules of

the Court of Justice and the role of the European Parliament. Fundamental changes, say some, enough to prepare for enlargement. Merely superficial, say others, and another Intergovernmental Conference will be needed before the Union can enlarge.

This volume analyses the changes brought by the Treaty and soberly assesses how far they go to ensure the enlarged Union can function efficiently in the future.

CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE: **Michel Barnier**, European Commission; **Dr Martyn Bond**, The Federal Trust; **Keith Vaz MP**, Minister for Europe, FCO; **Prof Jo Shaw**, University of Leeds; **Prof Clive Church**, University of Kent at Canterbury; **Kim Feus**, The Federal Trust; **SE Pierre Vimont**, French Embassy, Brussels; **Josef Janning**, CAP, München; **Dr Alfred Pijpers**, University of Amsterdam; **Dr Jackie Gower**, University of Kent at Canterbury; **Dr Eduard Kusters**, European Integration Bureau, Riga; **Prof Richard T Griffiths**, University of Leiden; **Andrew Duff** MEP.

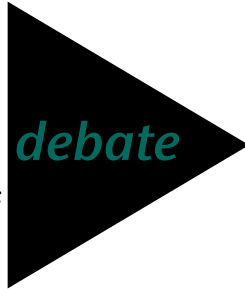


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