Transnational Parties and Advocacy in European Integration

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This book is the product of joint research conducted over several decades within various research projects. Questions about transnational relations between political parties and political group dynamics in the European Parliament have remained important to us throughout our academic careers. We have been following these topics—transnational party cooperation inside or outside the European Parliament—for over 30 years. In fact, then as doctoral students, we first met in the mid-1990s in the context of a book project about representation in transnational parliamentary assemblies.

In this book, we consider the nature and significance of transnational parties in the European Union, called Europarties, as actors in their own right and their relevance for the development of European integration. The book revolves around their influence as well as limitations of such influence. In the book, we also reflect on what the Europarties' track record tells us about the future of the EU. At the time of finalizing our book, the Europarties were preparing for the 2024 European Parliament elections and there were debates among the EU institutions and national governments about potential Treaty revisions—with the Europarties themselves actively advocating further integration. Such advocacy is at the heart of our book. The book deliberately focuses on broader patterns and avenues of influence related to advocacy and agenda-setting rather than on specific issues or policy processes. The rationale for this choice lies in the fundamental challenge facing students of Europarties:

party politics is ever-present in EU governance, but measuring its precise impact vis-à-vis other factors is inherently difficult. For every issue where Europarties have directly shaped outcomes, there are other processes where such partisan influence is weak or indirect. However, European integration simply cannot be understood without paying attention to the agenda-setting and continuous advocacy of the Europarties.

Earlier versions of Chapter 5 that focuses on the Conference on the Future of Europe were presented at the annual conference of the University Association for Contemporary European Studies (UACES) in Lille in September 2022, in a report presented at a webinar organized by the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS) in March 2022, and in a chapter in an edited volume in 2022 (*European Parliament's Political Groups in Turbulent Times*, edited by Petra Ahrens, Anna Elomäki and Johanna Kantola), part of the book series *Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics*. We are grateful to SIEPS for assistance in the preparation of the report and would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions. Ralf Drachenberg, European Parliamentary Research Service, provided valuable data for which we are very grateful. We are also indebted to our colleagues studying Europarties with whom we have exchanged ideas and arguments throughout our careers. They are too numerous to be listed here, but their support and insightful feedback are much appreciated.

Finally, we would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and the editorial team of Palgrave Macmillan for constructive comments and support.

Stockholm, Sweden — Karl Magnus Johansson
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Europarties—Ubiquitous Yet Rarely Noticed

Introduction

European integration has an important transnational partisan dimension, which is often overlooked as the prime ministers and presidents of the member states get most of the media coverage. The key institutions of the European Union (EU) are in turn mainly presented as unitary actors, even though they consist of politicians representing different party families. Indeed, Europarties are most likely unknown entities even among the majority of activists of their national member parties. In the end, this is not surprising. In European Parliament (EP) election campaigns the political groups of the Europarties remain firmly in the background, and Europarties and the EP groups seldom feature in national media. Europarties and their EP groups are officially independent of each other, but it is nonetheless more realistic to view them as part of the same Europarty organization. Political groups exist in the Parliament, while Europarties are extra-parliamentary organizations that bring together national parties across the EU to pursue shared political objectives and to field candidates for leading positions in EU institutions, not least the post of Commission president (the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism).

Through their national heads of government, EP groups, and Commission portfolios, Europarties are in a powerful position to shape the laws and policies of the EU as well as the broader development of European

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integration. Europarties and their EP groups have also decades of experience from Treaty amendments and inter-institutional bargaining. In these constitutional processes the Europarties have successfully campaigned in favour of deeper integration, the empowerment of the Parliament, and also the consolidation of their own position in the EU's political regime. But when scholars analyse Treaty reforms, they tend to either completely ignore Europarties or maybe just include occasional references to such party-political networks. Yet, the central argument of our book is that Europarties are ubiquitous but rarely noticed: they are present nearly everywhere and almost all the time, and while their influence is difficult to measure it is much stronger than previously recognized.

There are valid reasons why the party-political dimension of European integration has remained in the background. Member states are the key actors in bargaining about the future of Europe: their signatures are required for Treaty amendments and each country holds the power of veto. Thereby national governments and leaders, not least the German chancellor or the French president, are in the limelight and also get most of the scholarly attention in analyses of Intergovernmental Conferences (IGC). At the same time, there is a range of studies detailing how the main Europarties—those whose national member parties hold executive power in the member states—have shaped Treaty outcomes, particularly through coordinating positions ahead of and during the IGCs.

Heads of government or party leaders may also prefer not to talk about their transnational partisan networks. In IGCs or negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the bargaining is primarily framed in the media as a battleground of national interests, where governments are expected not to appear too soft vis-à-vis the other member states. In such an environment, leaders probably are not incentivized to reveal the true weight of partisan ties. The same applies also to European elections, where particularly national parties whose ideological profiles do not match those of their EP groups—with, for example, the EP group being considerably more pro-integrationist than the national party—might lose votes if they highlighted the policy positions of their European-level parties.

Scholars also face the simple problem of measurement. Europarties are ubiquitous, but how to capture their impact? While there are studies on individual Europarties and their role in various IGCs, this line of research typically employs cautious language when assessing the 'success' or influence of Europarties. A broadly shared view is that the impact of

Europarties depends particularly on the numerical weight of Europarty politicians—as prime ministers or heads of state in the European Council, as Commissioners, or in the Parliament—and the internal cohesion of the Europarty. Furthermore, their influence is always relative and should be examined against the background of national preferences. Here we come to the circular nature of preference formation as the positions of national parties and governments are in turn shaped by the positions of EU institutions and the Europarties.

This book does not claim to solve the problem of how much power exactly Europarties have in Treaty reforms or in the broader process of European integration. In fact, we fully understand the cautiousness of our colleagues, and in many ways are own approach reflects such measurement problems—and also explains why we theoretically focus on the concepts of advocacy and agenda-setting. These concepts are interconnected and emphasize how Europarties are continuously and through a variety of channels engaged in debates about the 'future of Europe'. The book therefore deliberately focuses on broader patterns and avenues of influence related to advocacy and agenda-setting rather than on specific issues or policy processes. For every issue where Europarties have directly shaped outcomes, there are other processes where such partisan influence is weak or indirect. However, the starting point of this book is that European integration cannot be understood without accounting for the impact of the Europarties. It identifies Europarties as transnational partisan actors that operate both at intergovernmental and supranational levels of EU decision-making. Europarties have consolidated their own organizational structures, and more importantly, have over the decades built their own networks and coalitions that enable them to wield influence in ways not captured by previous studies.

The next section of this chapter briefly summarizes existing knowledge and literature on Europarties.[1] Third section introduces our research questions, theoretical and conceptual choices, and explains how we contribute to both studies of EU governance and party politics. The final section outlines the structure of the volume.

[1] The literature review intentionally focuses on select publications since the 1980s. Later chapters refer to more detailed findings from a broader set of studies.

Europarties: Organization and Influence

Europarties remain something of a black box in studies of both EU governance and political parties. There is an impressive amount of research on both the political groups in the European Parliament and on the EU policies of national parties, but the networks and influence of the Europarties deserve more serious scrutiny. While much of the previous research has explored the organization and even influence of the Europarties, our book is the first one to specifically focus on their role in the broader construction of European integration.

Research clearly shows that Europarties have become more important in the EU political system. Article 138a of the Maastricht Treaty (entered into force in 1993) assigned political parties a specific role to play in the political system of the EU: 'Political parties at the European level are important as a factor for integration within the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union'. This 'Party Article' was subsequently included in the Lisbon Treaty (2009): 'Political parties at European level contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union'. This Treaty base provided the legal and political foundation for the decision to introduce since 2004 public funding of the Europarties from the annual EU budget (Johansson & Raunio, 2005; Wolfs, 2022)—which in turn has triggered the establishment of several new Europarties (some of which are now defunct). Table 1.1 lists the current ten registered Europarties and their corresponding EP political groups.

We concentrate in this book on the three largest and traditionally most influential European party families: the centre-right European People's Party (EPP), the centre-left Party of the European Socialists (PES), and the centrist-liberal Alliance for Liberals and Democrats in Europe (ALDE). EPP was already established in 1976, while the pre-existing confederations of liberal and socialist parties, also founded in the mid-1970s, were turned into actual Europarties in the early 1990s in the context of the inclusion of the above-mentioned 'party article' in the Maastricht Treaty.

The EPP is a mix of Christian Democrats and conservatives, joining together parties from all EU member states (e.g., Hanley, 2008: 85–116; Jansen & Van Hecke, 2011). The largest national party has traditionally been the combined German Christian Democratic Union/Christian

Table 1.1 Europarties, their EP political groups, and political families

Europarty	*Political group in the European Parliament*	*Political family*
European People's Party (EPP)	Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) (EPP Group)	Christian Democrat/ (Liberal) Conservative
Party of European Socialists (PES)	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D)	Socialist/Social Democrat
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE)	Renew Europe Group (Renew Europe)	Centrist/Liberal
European Democratic Party (EDP)	Renew Europe Group	Centrist
European Green Party (EGP)	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)	Green
European Free Alliance (EFA)	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance	Regionalist
Identity and Democracy Party (ID)	Identity and Democracy Group (ID)	Nationalist/ Eurosceptic
European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR)	European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR)	(National) Conservative
Party of the European Left (PEL)	The Left in the European Parliament Group (GUE/ NGL)	Left/Democratic Socialist
European Christian Political Movement (ECPM)	ECR, EPP	Christian–Social

Source Adapted from Van Hecke et al. (2018: 16); website of the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations (APPF): www.appf.europa.eu/appf/en/home/the-authority

Social Union (CDU/CSU). The conservative wing of the party family has strengthened over the years, not least through the addition of more conservative member parties from the Central and Eastern European member states. More recently, the position of Fidesz, the Hungarian nationalist party led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, caused heated debates inside the EPP. Referring to Orbán's government introducing measures that violate EU's values and human rights, the EPP group changed its internal rules in March 2021 so that national parties, and not just individual members of the EP (MEP), can be expelled from the group. Fidesz responded by quitting the group immediately. Even in early

2019, the Europarty EPP had suspended Fidesz's voting rights. Despite the numerical growth of conservative forces in the party family, the EPP has traditionally and consistently been in favour of closer European integration.

The Confederation of Socialist Parties of the European Community (CSP), founded in 1974, was transformed into PES in November 1992. PES brings together social democratic and socialist parties from across the Union. It supports further integration, primarily because, with monetary union and deeper economic integration, the defence of traditional goals of the left—such as social and environmental legislation and employment policies—requires European-level action to complement national measures. In the Parliament, the centre-left social democratic group was the biggest group from 1975 to 1999 elections (Hanley, 2008: 62–84; Külahci & Lightfoot, 2014; Ladrech, 2000; Lightfoot, 2005). The Federation of European Liberal, Democrat, and Reform Parties, founded in 1976, became the ELDR in December 1993, changing its name to ALDE in 2012. ALDE consists of various liberal and centrist parties, and in the Parliament has come to occupy a pivotal role between the groups of EPP and PES. ALDE is a firm advocate of deeper integration but includes a variety of centrist, social liberal, and more market liberal parties (Hanley, 2008: 117–137; Smith, 2014).

Existing research emphasizes the interaction between Europarties' development, both in terms of organizational consolidation and policy influence, and the broader deepening of European integration. To put it simply: the more supranational the EU regime both in terms of competencies and its decision-making structure, the more incentives national parties have for investing resources into Europarties and their capacity to influence decisions taken in 'Brussels'. In one of the first empirical contributions to the debate, Niedermayer (1983) concluded that the Europarties were organizationally quite weak and that their influence vis-à-vis the Commission was limited. Since then, successive Treaty reforms have transferred significant policymaking authority to the European level, and particularly the empowerment of the Parliament and the Commission has facilitated the increasing weight of party politics in EU governance.

Organizationally, the Europarties are quite similar. Their highest decision-making body is the congress. Other organs include the bureau (or council) and the presidency. Majority voting can be used, but Europarties essentially aim at unanimous decisions. The introduction of public funding of Europarties from the EU budget has reduced their

financial dependence on national member parties. However, as 'parties of parties', Europarties primarily serve as arenas for their member parties and remain constrained in their efforts to be actors in their own right. As a result, it is still more realistic to describe Europarties as federations of national parties or as party networks, at least when comparing them with the often centralized and hierarchical parties found at the national level. At the same time, it is evident that Europarties are, in the early twenty-first century, much more institutionalized and mature organizations, both in terms of their identity and structures, than the looser transnational parties or confederations that emerged in Europe in the 1970s (e.g., Gagatek, 2008).

Importantly from our perspective, Europarties fulfil a coordinating function: they promote the sharing and exchange of information, knowledge, and experience, and they play an important role in facilitating and institutionalizing networks (Johansson & Raunio, 2019; Ladrech, 2000). The major Europarties are strongly present in EU institutions, notably the Parliament and the Commission, and have active links to interest groups. Europarties also negotiate, both internally and with each other, key EU appointments, such as the presidents of the Commission, the Parliament, and the European Council. Furthermore, they work out political or action programmes for their corresponding EP political groups and manifestos for European elections. They adopt common policies in a broad range of topics, often through regular or ad hoc working parties, that cover major policy areas as well as party-related activities like campaign management. Moreover, Europarties prepare the ground for future enlargements by integrating interests from the prospective member states (e.g., Ibenskas, 2020; Öhlén, 2023; Pridham, 2014). Through their membership in the Europarties, parties from the applicant countries engage in partisan cooperation that is important in nurturing wider, pan-European political allegiances. In this connection, Europarties serve as vehicles for the diffusion of democratic values.

However, existing research grapples with the question of impact. Do Europarties matter? What influence do Europarties really have? Most of the existing research has focused on IGCs negotiating Treaty reforms. Here the evidence is somewhat mixed, but points in the direction of Europarties and their EP groups wielding, under the right circumstances, even decisive influence in the IGCs and the European Council summits. Their influence is conditional, with the effectiveness of the Europarties largely depending on the capacity to mobilize 'their' heads of national

governments for the party cause (Johansson, 2016, 2017; see also Van Hecke, 2010). Pre-European Council summit meetings among government/party leaders are a central aspect of this mobilization process, but, as shown in Chapter 4 of this volume, their significance appears to vary over time and across party families. Europarties have no formal powers to take decisions binding their heads of government, implying thus that successful *ex ante* policy coordination between national member parties is essential for Europarties to achieve their goals in the European Council. Obviously, the relative bargaining weight of individual Europarties is stronger when they are more strongly represented in the European Council (Drachenberg, 2022; Hix & Lord, 1997; Johansson, 1999, 2002a, 2002b, 2016, 2017; Lightfoot, 2005; Tallberg & Johansson, 2008; Van Hecke, 2004).

Interestingly, earlier research suggests that the format or institutional framework of the constitutional process matters, with the 'convention' model more likely to facilitate Europarty influence. Chapter 4 of this volume covers in more detail the 2002–2003 Convention on the Future of Europe, which resulted in the Draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe—that subsequently became the Lisbon Treaty. The partisan dimension arguably played an important role throughout the Convention, not least during the final stages, with the Europarty networks building bridges between MEPs and national parliamentarians (see Chapter 4). This applied particularly to the largest Europarty, the EPP, which managed to exert significant influence in the Convention through its members and delegation leaders (Johansson, 2020: 115–122; see also Van Hecke, 2012). Here an obvious parallel is the Conference on the Future of Europe—analysed in Chapter 5 of this volume—which was delayed by one year because of COVID-19 but took place in 2021–2022. Also organized in the 'convention' or 'conference' format, there is clear evidence that the Europarties and particularly their EP political groups managed to shape considerably both the proceedings and outcome of the Conference (Johansson & Raunio, 2022b).

Another theme to be explored in the empirical chapters is the difficulties involved in drawing a line between Europarties and their corresponding EP political groups and the balance of power between them (Ahrens & Miller, 2023). For instance, while the EPP Group has played an important role in successive rounds of Treaty reform since the 1980s and has benefited from the resources of the European Parliament, it is the Europarty that has brought national government leaders together to act

effectively (Johansson, 2020). Those national leaders still dominate the playing field when it comes to issues decided in the European Council, the EU's highest decision-making organ. Those leaders are expected to care for domestic constituencies. A lot is at stake, politically as well as personally. Nonetheless, Europarties and their EP political groups have proven to be significant players at this level, too. Decision outcomes may also reflect asymmetries of information and power. All these actors are not equal. Some national parties are more influential than others and power asymmetries inside the Europarties and political groups cannot be avoided, with some individual MEPs and national delegations carrying more political weight than others (Johansson & Raunio, 2022a).

Europarties have actually emerged from their EP groups. As stated in the introductory section, Europarties and their parliamentary groups are officially independent of each other, but, in reality, they should be viewed as operating within the same Europarty organization. This applies particularly to the three main Europarties analysed in this volume. There is substantial overlap in terms of national parties. Measuring the percentage of MEPs belonging to the EP groups that were also members of a national party belonging to the corresponding Europarty, in the 2009–2014, 2014–2019, and 2019–2024 legislative terms, the overlap was almost complete, above 95%, in EPP, while it was lower in PES and particularly in ALDE after the 2019 elections. EP political groups are also strongly present in the various decision-making bodies of the Europarties. While the central offices of the Europarties have grown in size over the decades, the EP groups have substantially stronger resources than the respective Europarties, both in terms of funding and staff (for details, see Ahrens & Miller, 2023; Calossi, 2014; Calossi & Cicchi, 2019).

The EP party system has throughout the history of the Parliament been in practice dominated by the 'grand coalition' of EPP and PES (the official group name has been Socialists & Democrats, S&D, after the 2009 elections), with the liberal group (called Renew Europe after the 2019 elections when it formed a pact with the *La République En Marche!*, the party established by French President Emmanuel Macron) also present in the chamber since the 1950s (Ahrens et al., 2022; Bressanelli, 2014; Hix et al., 2007). EPP has been the largest party group since the 1999 elections. In January 2024, EPP controlled 178 seats, the S&D 141, and Renew Europe 100 (out of a total of 705 seats). In fact, since the 2019 elections the two largest groups, for the first time, control less than half of

the seats in the chamber—a situation that should increase the bargaining weight of the liberals and the smaller party groups.

While the primary decision rule in the Parliament is a simple majority, for certain issues (mainly budget amendments and second-reading legislative amendments adopted under the co-decision procedure), the Parliament needs absolute majorities (50% plus one MEP). This absolute majority requirement has facilitated cooperation between the EPP and S&D, which between them controlled around two-thirds of the seats until the 2014 elections. Cooperation between EPP and S&D is also influenced by inter-institutional considerations because the Parliament has needed to moderate its resolutions in order to get its amendments accepted by the Council and the Commission (Kreppel, 2002). When the two large groups have failed to agree, the numerically smaller liberal group, situated ideologically between the EPP and S&D, has often been in a pivotal position in forming winning coalitions in the chamber. Pragmatic cooperation between the centrist groups means that most issues are essentially precooked at the committee stage—thus paving the way for plenary votes adopted by 'supermajorities', or what Bowler and McElroy (2015) have called 'hurrah votes'.

The main EP political groups are thus definitely institutionalized, mature organizations. They have decades of experience in building unitary group positions, bargaining with each other in order to form winning coalitions, and interacting with the Commission and other European-level actors. Equally important in terms of our study is the 'underdog' position of the Parliament itself. Initially, a purely consultative body with members seconded from national parliaments, the EP is today vested with significant legislative, control, and budgetary powers. In addition, MEPs have proven remarkably inventive in pushing for more powers between IGCs, adopting practices that have over time become the established course of action (Héritier et al., 2019). In these inter-institutional battles, the leading figures in the Parliament—notably political group chairs—have been strongly present, thereby signalling that the issue is important for the Parliament and that there is broad support in the chamber for the reform. This stands in contrast to normal legislative processes, where rapporteurs and MEPs with relevant policy expertise are influential within the political groups and in the Parliament as a whole.

The same party-political situation extends to the Commission, where EPP, PES, and ALDE have controlled most and occasionally even all portfolios since the 1950s. In the Commission appointed in late 2019 and

led by Ursula von der Leyen (EPP), EPP has 10, PES 9, and ALDE 5 Commissioners (having thus 24 out of 27 positions). There is evidence of the pledges made by the Europarties ahead of the EP elections finding their way into the pre-legislative proposals of the Commission, with EPP particularly influential in this respect (Kostadinova & Giurcanu, 2020). Europarties' programmatic priorities therefore influence the agenda of the Commission. Informal ties are also important, with for example both the EPP's political group and its Europarty having regular dinners and other modes of contact with the Commission (Bardi, 2020). Moreover, Europarties can seek to influence agenda-setting more indirectly via interest groups, think tanks, and other actors close to them—and indeed, these same actors can in turn lobby the Europarties. Of specific interest are political foundations, organizations funded from the EU budget and affiliated with a Europarty that should contribute to debates about both public policy issues and the broader process of European integration. The political foundations mainly do this through organizing various events, such as seminars and conferences, their publications, and through maintaining active networks with their national member foundations, with each other, and of course with the Europarties and their EP groups. The respective foundations have very close links with their Europarties, helping them in drafting manifestos, resolutions, as well as more long-term strategies and programmes (Bardi et al., 2014; Dakowska, 2009; Gagatek & Van Hecke, 2014). As of January 2024, EPP has the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (WMCES), PES the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), and ALDE the European Liberal Forum (ELF). Given the quite limited resources of Europarties, even if their offices have grown considerably in recent decades, the political foundations should improve the policymaking capacity of Europarties, not least in terms of offering new ideas and perspectives.

Overall, Europarties are easily perceived as being part of the 'Brussels bubble' that should do more to reach out to civil society and citizens (Norman & Wolfs, 2022; Van Hecke et al., 2018). Europarties have introduced membership for individuals, but in her pioneering study, Hertner (2019) showed that the Europarties had only very small numbers of individual members, with national member parties often against giving individual members stronger participation rights. Hertner thus argued that Europarties should empower their grassroots activists by granting them real participatory opportunities. According to her study, ALDE and PES had granted individual members at least some say in decision-making

and/or drafting of policies, whereas in EPP individual members enjoyed essentially no rights at all.

It becomes evident from the preceding discussion that the Europarties and their EP political groups can draw on decades of experience from constitutional reform and inter-institutional bargaining. They are used to building networks and coalitions and have a long-standing interest towards the future development of EU democracy and institutional questions, advocating a stronger role for the supranational institutions while arguing in favour of reforms that directly deal with Europarties themselves. Indeed, champions of the role of Europarties consistently emphasize the contribution Europarties make to the further democratization of the Union. Perhaps the best example is the introduction of the *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism (see also Chapter 4).

In the 2014 EP elections, the Europarties and their EP political groups took a bold and controversial step in this direction by putting forward 'lead candidates' for the Commission president. Jean-Claude Juncker, the lead candidate of the largest political group, EPP, was eventually appointed as the new head of the Commission. The other lead candidates were Ska Keller and José Bové (EGP), Martin Schulz (PES), Alexis Tsipras (EL), and Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE). This *Spitzenkandidaten* initiative was criticized heavily by Eurosceptics, with the Parliament (again) accused of over-stepping its formal competences. For example, British Prime Minister David Cameron talked of 'a power grab through the back door' that was never agreed upon by member states and would both shift power from the European Council to the Parliament and politicize the Commission.[2] Cameron was certainly right in claiming that the *Spitzenkandidaten* process strengthens the role of party politics in the Commission, but again the change should not be exaggerated, as party politics had already before that influenced strongly the composition of the Commission. Because both the Commission and its president must be approved by the Parliament before they can take office, the EP had explicitly demanded that the voice of the voters must not be ignored in the make up of the Commission. Hence, the wording of the Treaty of Lisbon, according to which the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall propose to the Parliament a candidate for Commission president 'taking into account'

[2] David Cameron, 'No One Voted for Mr Juncker', *European Voice*, 13 June 2014, http://www.politico.eu/article/no-one-voted-for-mr-juncker/ (accessed 19 January 2023).

the election results merely gave treaty status to a practice dating back to mid-1990s.

In the 2019 elections, the Europarties again put forward their own lead candidates: Manfred Weber (EPP), Frans Timmermans (PES), Jan Zahradil (ECR), Ska Keller and Bas Eickhout (EGP), Violeta Tomič and Nico Cué (EL), and Oriol Junqueras (EFA), while ALDE put forward seven candidates. Many of these candidates ran very active campaigns, touring across the EU and taking part in various public debates. Much to the disappointment of the Parliament and the Europarties, the European Council effectively ignored the *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism and nominated Ursula von der Leyen—who was not the lead candidate of any Europarty—as the new Commission president. Here disagreements among the Europarties also contributed to the outcome, as Weber's candidacy was not sufficiently supported by PES or ALDE (Crum, 2023; De Wilde, 2020; Heidbreder & Schade, 2020). While studies suggest that Europeans have remained largely unaware of the lead candidates, the *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure has, nonetheless, the potential to both increase the visibility of the EP elections and to develop a stronger link between voters and EU decision-making (e.g., Braun & Popa, 2018; Costa, 2022; Gattermann & de Vreese, 2020; Kotanidis, 2023).

From the perspective of our central argument, what matters more is the process leading up to the 2014 elections. Europarties and their EP groups had since the 1990s campaigned consistently for a stronger electoral link between the Parliament and the Commission, and the *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure started to take more concrete shape after the 2009 elections. It had initially been the PES that had put forward the idea during the run-up to the Amsterdam Treaty, but EPP was subsequently more active and nominated its own candidate for the Commission president ahead of the 2009 elections after which PES again turned more supportive. ALDE, in turn, was less positive throughout the process. Commission President José Manuel Barroso (EPP) called in 2012 for the Europarties to propose their candidates for the Commission presidency prior to the 2014 elections, with the Parliament adopting a similar resolution that was supported by the EPP, S&D, ALDE, and Greens/EFA (Ahrens & Miller, 2023; Hamřík & Kaniok, 2019; Héritier et al., 2019: 61–79). Furthermore, while both politicians and academics had previously put forward

various proposals for injecting more democracy into EU governance,[3] since the 2014 EP elections the political and scholarly debate has very much focused on the *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism.

Research Design: Transnational Partisan Networks and the Future of Europe

The process leading to the *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism displayed features that are key elements of our argument—continuous advocacy, agenda-setting, and transnational partisan networks.

Theoretically we lean on the concepts of advocacy and agenda-setting, which in our approach are closely related (see Chapter 2). The *Spitzenkandidaten* initiative and the broader empowerment of the Parliament show the continuous nature of partisan advocacy, with various party-political actors from MEPs to Europarty leaders and national parties engaged in persistent campaign in support of their goals. Our approach therefore does not emphasize so much specific moments, 'windows of opportunity' (Kingdon, 1984). Obviously, they do matter, but such occasions should be seen in the context of advocacy spanning several years or even decades. Advocacy coalitions are people from various organizations, groups of like-minded actors, who share beliefs and engage in a degree of coordinated activity to decisively impact policy outputs and change (e.g., Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018; Sabatier, 1988).

For us, agenda-setting is therefore about continual advocacy and networking. In line with so-called 'multiple streams framework' (MSF) model (Ackrill et al., 2013; Béland & Howlett, 2016; Kingdon, 1984), policymaking processes consist of three streams: the problem stream consists of problem perceptions among policymakers; the solution stream consists of proposals for political decisions; and the politics stream consists of political activities and developments like lobby campaigns, or the political context in which decision-making occurs. The links between the three streams are made by issue entrepreneurs, individuals, or organizations that 'are willing to invest their time and energy in promoting a particular issue' (Elder & Cobb, 1984: 121). For us, the entrepreneurs are primarily the

[3] For example, Hix (2008: 166–178) envisioned a parliamentary model very close to the adopted *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism. An alternative approach would be that of having a direct election of the Commission president. In such a 'presidential' model, the candidates would also be put forward by Europarties (Decker & Sonnicksen, 2011).

key individuals within Europarties and the partisan networks that have gradually evolved and consolidated in the course of European integration.

We also pay attention to the discourse and terminology employed by the Europarties; the way in which they frame their priorities and 'talk'. In advocacy and agenda-setting issue framing can be of fundamental importance (Daviter, 2011). Advocacy can utilize broadly shared fundamental values and 'big words'—e.g., democracy, legitimacy, or participation—or use an alternative strategy of 'small steps', whereby support is gradually built up through more low-key strategies, including behind-the-scenes processes and even depoliticization of issues (Princen, 2011). For example, MEPs continuously, and successfully, referred to concepts such as legitimacy and democracy in seeking more powers for the Parliament (Rittberger, 2005). The incremental, 'small steps' approach is highly relevant, and our empirical analysis also underlines the relevance of 'talking to the right people' in Brussels instead of building broader societal support or even reaching out to the grassroots party activists. Such choices have normative consequences that we explore in the concluding chapter of the volume.

The justification for the term *transnational* comes from the 'across' and 'in-between' nature of European-level parties. 'Transnational' or 'transnationalism' broadly refers to various ties and interactions linking citizens, actors, or institutions across the borders of individual countries (e.g., Kaiser & Starie, 2005). We conceive Europarties as transnational partisan actors that operate both at intergovernmental and supranational levels of EU decision-making. They are found in the supranational institutions, the Parliament, and the Commission, yet they also operate in more intergovernmental arenas such as the European Council.[4] We also believe that the concept of transnational is an accurate description of empirical reality: in line with earlier literature, Europarties are more like

[4] In terms of two central integration theories, intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism, Europarties are relevant for both approaches. The former emphasizes the centrality of governments and domestically driven preferences, but their successful advancement requires coalition-building between the member states, and the partisan networks are highly useful for that purpose. The latter in turn underlines the European level interaction between national politicians, civil servants, or interest groups. Through such contacts, national actors gradually learn to trust one another and develop friendships and loyalties transcending member state boundaries. Neofunctionalism also recognizes the importance of supranational institutions, and both the Commission and the Parliament consist of Europarty politicians.

alliances, networks, or umbrella organizations of like-minded parties than the kinds of more centralized and hierarchical political parties found in national politics (e.g., Bell & Lord, 1998; Day, 2014; Dunphy & March, 2020; Hanley, 2008; Johansson, 1997; Ladrech, 2000; Van Hecke, 2010, 2012).

Yet, as we argue, this transnational nature of Europarties at the same time enables them to wield influence in multiple ways and through multiple channels—also together as coalitions of Europarties. Our approach focuses on the European level but argues and shows that often senior national politicians and member parties are the key actors in Europarty networks. Here is also an empirical challenge for students of Europarties: prime ministers and chairs of national parties are simultaneously holding important domestic offices while advancing the objectives of the Europarties. We do not claim that the Europarty 'hat' would override national obligations, but, as our analysis in the empirical chapters illustrates, under the right circumstances this dual role facilitates the policy success of Europarties. We readily acknowledge that our research design is biased in favour of the transnational partisan dimension. We deliberately prioritize the theoretical and empirical mapping of the mechanisms through which this partisan politics takes place, paying less attention to alternative, more intergovernmental explanations.

Therefore, our approach veers close to the multilevel governance model (Hooghe & Marks, 2001) and its applications to interest groups (Eising et al., 2018) or interparliamentary cooperation, where Crum and Fossum (2009) coined the concept of a multilevel parliamentary field to characterize various links between national parliaments and the EP (see also for example Lupo & Fasone, 2016; Meissner & Crum, 2023). In fact, such horizontal and vertical interparliamentary cooperation is also relevant in terms of Europarties, as it provides another meeting ground for like-minded national and European-level politicians. There is also a closely related, emerging strand of research on the vertical links inside the same parties or party families between national and European levels of decision-making (Groen, 2020; Kaiser & Revesz, 2022; Meissner & Rosén, 2023; Pittoors, 2023).[5]

[5] Initially such research focused exclusively on the links between national parties and their MEPs, and particularly on the question whether the former monitored the behaviour of the latter (e.g., Blomgren, 2003; Raunio, 2000).

The decision to focus on the three largest and most institutionalized Europarties—EPP, PES, ALDE—is based on their longevity and centrality in EU governance. As discussed in the previous section, these party families are strongly present in EU institutions and national governments. Smaller Europarties simply do not have sufficient resources or presence in Brussels, and hence their organizations and networks are much less developed. This applies not only to the Greens but also to Eurosceptics or the radical left. The few existing studies of these party families provide evidence of how their weak presence at the European level limits their chances of influencing EU decisions vis-à-vis the more established Europarties analysed in this volume (e.g., Dunphy & March, 2020; Gómez-Reino, 2018; Hanley, 2008: 138–200).

Turning to our research questions, this book is by no means the first to discuss the nature, organization, or even influence of the Europarties. The literature referred to in this chapter has tackled these issues from different perspectives (e.g., Hanley, 2008; Hix & Lord, 1997; Ladrech, 2000; Lightfoot, 2005; Timus & Lightfoot, 2014; Wolfs, 2022), but no doubt because of the empirical challenges involved in measuring their impact, the existing studies have largely focused on IGCs, select policy domains, or have described the development of individual Europarties. Our study is therefore the first attempt at uncovering the broader influence of the Europarties on the construction or the 'future' of Europe. Focusing on the EPP, PES, and ALDE, the book is structured around three main research questions:

1. What strategies Europarties utilize for advancing their visions of Europe?
2. What is the relative influence of the actors in the networks of the Europarties?
3. How successful have the Europarties been in shaping the future of Europe?

These questions are intentionally broad in line with the main focus of our book. They are also questions that are practically impossible to answer precisely. Yet, they are important questions that deal with the very essence and fundamental characteristics of Europarties—their operation, organizational structure, and eventual policy influence. Empirically, the book analyses the networks and positions of the Europarties, constitutional

reform processes, and the role of the Europarties and their EP political groups in the broader debates on the future of Europe. Our primary interest is in questions of institutional reform, although they cannot really be studied in isolation from policies. For example, the creation of the European Central Bank (ECB) and subsequent institutional development of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) are often defended with their positive impact on monetary and financial policies. The data consists of interviews, documents, observational data, and plenary records of the EP, with the analysis covering mainly developments from the early 1990s onwards. In addition to addressing the research questions, the analysis explores the positions of the three Europarties—how they have evolved over time and the extent to which EPP, PES, and ALDE agree or differ regarding the 'future of Europe'.

Structure of the Volume

This introductory chapter has motivated and presented the research questions and argued that Europarties still remain the neglected dimension of European integration. This applies particularly to their networks and role in the debates on the future of Europe.

The second chapter contains the theoretical framework of the book. It is based on two interconnected approaches: advocacy and agenda-setting. The chapter discusses the main elements of both agenda-setting and advocacy coalition framework (ACF) literature, showing how the latter has not been applied to political parties. It argues that Europarties should be viewed primarily as transnational partisan actors that operate both at the intergovernmental (Treaty reforms) and supranational (European Parliament, EU policymaking) levels of EU politics, and discusses how the multilevel nature of the EU polity provides several channels for advancing policy objectives. The chapter further argues that the transnational character of the Europarties, often seen as their weakness, has enabled them to influence European politics in ways that are hidden from public view. Europarties are engaged in continual advocacy and agenda-setting about the future of Europe.

Europarties are fairly unknown even among EU scholars. Therefore, the third chapter focuses on the organizational structure of the Europarties: rules regarding decision-making, funding, the relationship between Europarties and EP political groups as well as national parties, and the links with political foundations attached to the Europarties. It traces the

organizational development of the EPP, PES, and ALDE, showing that the integrationist logic of the EU system helps explain the development of Europarties and their growth of capacity.

The fourth chapter focuses primarily on the intergovernmental level of EU politics. It examines the role of the Europarties in successive rounds of Treaty reforms and in European Council decision-making. The analysed IGCs are those leading to the Single European Act (1987), the Maastricht Treaty (1993), the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999), the Treaty of Nice (2003), and the Lisbon Treaty (2009). It shows that under the right circumstances, Europarties have wielded even decisive influence, but their success depends on their numerical strength in the European Council and on their internal cohesion and capacity for mobilization. Particularly EPP and PES have left their mark on the Treaties. The chapter also shows how the networks of the Europarties and personal relations at the top-level facilitate influence. It further argues that the 'conference format' used in the European Convention of 2002–2003 benefits the Europarties, as in IGCs the national governments are the central actors. The data consists primarily of interviews and various documents as well as secondary literature.

Chapter 5 examines in detail the input of the Europarties before and during the Conference on the Future of Europe that was held in 2021–2022. Drawing on interviews, observational data, and position papers, it shows how the Europarties, both individually and together, utilized their networks for mobilizing support for their positions. We find significant convergence between the main Europarties and substantial cooperation between them, particularly inside the European Parliament. Organizationally, the 'convention format' again benefited the partisan actors and especially the EP political groups. The chapter shows also how the Europarties are in the early 2020s substantially more in favour of deeper integration, including Treaty change, than most national governments.

The concluding chapter reflects on the findings and returns to the research questions, arguing that the influence of Europarties is difficult to measure but observable and significant. European integration cannot be understood without paying sufficient attention to the continual advocacy and agenda-setting of these transnational partisan actors. It shows that over time most of the objectives of the Europarties have been met, both in terms of institutional reform and policy competence, and that there is substantial and increasing convergence between the main Europarties. The chapter also argues that without further changes to the EU's

system of government, Europarties are likely to remain unknown among European voters and even among activists inside national parties. It also identifies a dilemma or trade-off: insofar as Europarties become more relevant and influential, they are likely to be placed under stricter supervision by their member parties. In general, national parties are careful to maintain the greatest possible autonomy, and they are unwilling to subordinate themselves to their supranational counterparts. It is therefore difficult to achieve a full-fledged integration of political parties on a European scale, while vertical links with citizens and party activists are bound to remain weak. The book concludes by putting forward various proposals that could increase the visibility of Europarties in EU politics.

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CHAPTER 2

Reconciling Theories of Agenda Setting, Advocacy Coalitions, and Transnational Political Partisanship

Introduction

This chapter outlines our theoretical framework, which is based on reconciling insights from three interconnected analytical and conceptual approaches. The first section presents the key dimensions of agenda setting, one of the most established analytical constructs in social sciences and political science in particular. The second section elaborates at greater length on advocacy coalition theory, which remains one of the most celebrated approaches in policy studies. We relate these analytical approaches to each other, reconcile them to see their combined power, and discuss their applicability in studies of European integration. Not least their lessons for modern policymakers explain why both approaches still resonate today.

We see these analytical approaches as closely intertwined and particularly well-suited to examining the strategies of the Europarties in relation to Treaty reform and the broader question of the future of Europe. Europarties are engaged in continual advocacy and agenda-setting about key European matters. In addition, the third part of the theoretical framework discusses the transnational partisan dimension of European integration, which we conceive of as a central mechanism through which the European Union (EU) evolves. These are the three analytical approaches that underpin the empirical analyses in Chapters 4 and 5,

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while the concluding chapter weaves together these strands of research to reflect on how Europarties shape EU politics.

Combining these approaches helps to achieve a deeper understanding of Europarties, their actions, and how they have shaped European integration—in the context of Treaty reforms, they are also helpful in uncovering the underlying reasons for their success (or lack of it). It means capturing the essence of what drives Europarties and why they matter, as well as highlighting the challenges they face both in mobilizing their networks and in maintaining momentum in the ever-changing process of integration. However, the approach in this chapter is deliberately conceptual while subsequent chapters develop the argument about networks and coalitions.

Agenda-Setting in EU Politics

Agenda-setting is a fundamentally important stage of politics. Starting with Cobb and Elder (1971), academic research has produced different typologies and approaches to studying agenda-setting. That literature often identifies three types of agendas: the public agenda includes issues that citizens find salient; the media agenda consists of issues that are covered by the media; and the political agenda includes issues that policymakers deal with. According to the so-called multiple streams framework (MSF) model (Ackrill et al., 2013; Béland & Howlett, 2016; Kingdon, 1984), policymaking processes consist of three streams: the problem stream consists of problem perceptions among policymakers; the solution stream consists of proposals for political decisions; and the politics stream consists of political activities and developments like lobby campaigns, or the political context in which decision-making occurs. The links between the three streams are made by issue entrepreneurs, individuals, or organizations that 'are willing to invest their time and energy in promoting a particular issue' (Elder & Cobb, 1984: 121). When these three streams meet, a 'policy window' opens and the issue moves to the agenda of decision-makers. Within MSF, 'the analytical task is to specify the dynamic and complex interactions that generate specific policy outcomes' (Ackrill et al., 2013: 872–873), but particularly in complex settings such as the EU, this can be inherently difficult.

As for the origins of issues on the agenda, they can come from the external environment or from the political actors themselves (Mansbach & Vasquez, 1981). The former approach sees political issues arising

from the international environment. The latter category in turn includes issues that arise from the interests of the actual stakeholders, the political institutions, and actors within them. As argued by Princen (2007, 2009), in EU governance, the latter approach is normally more appropriate for understanding the sources of items on the agenda of the EU institutions, although major external developments such as terrorist attacks, military conflicts, refugee crisis, or climate change obviously feature high on the EU agenda. National governments or interest groups try to move issues to the Brussels agenda, and the European-level actors—Europarties and their EP political groups included—have their own strong reasons for having matters debated in EU institutions.

Agenda-setting success is often influenced by how problems are framed (Daviter, 2007, 2011). Issue entrepreneurs can refer to broadly shared fundamental values (for example, human rights, sustainable development, or democracy), or use an alternative strategy of 'small steps' whereby support is gradually built up through more low-key strategies, including behind-the-scenes processes and depoliticization of issues (Princen, 2011). A related tactic is issue bundling or what in MSF terminology is called coupling: 'Apart from skills and resources, entrepreneurs pursue strategies to join together problems and policies into attractive packages, which are then "sold" to receptive policy-makers' (Ackrill et al., 2013: 873). Considering the 'distance' between Brussels and average citizens, 'agenda-setting strategies in the EU will be focused more exclusively on dynamics that take place within policy communities than on reaching out to larger audiences outside of those communities' (Princen, 2011: 940). And, as Princen also points out, broadening the scope of participation entails the risk of creating controversy and opposition. For example, proposals such as transnational lists for EP elections are sure not to please the more Eurosceptical politicians.

Another key dimension concerns the 'venue' (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), that is, where and by whom the issue is debated. Princen (2011) distinguishes between venue shopping and venue modification. 'Venue shopping occurs when agenda-setters seek out a venue (among those available to them) that is most receptive to their cause. Within the EU, venue shopping may occur between EU institutions (horizontal venue shopping) and between the different "levels" in the multilevel system that the EU forms part of (vertical venue shopping)' (Princen, 2011: 931). Venue shopping occurs among already existing venues, whereas venue modification means that 'if a suitable venue is not available, actors may

sometimes also be able to modify the range of available venues in order to create one that is better suited to their purposes' (Princen, 2011: 933). For example, in EU governance environmental activists may prefer that environmental policies are on the agenda of actors that are likely to have more pro-environment positions. For Europarties, a particularly relevant question is the balance between supranational (Parliament, Commission) and more intergovernmental (Council, European Council) institutions.

Modern Europe is a multilevel polity that offers political actors various access points for influencing decision-making. The Commission enjoys the monopoly of legislative initiative, and more broadly as the 'engine of integration' it is commonly perceived as having a central role in setting the agenda in Brussels (e.g., Hartlapp et al., 2014; Koop et al., 2022; Pollack, 1997). Sometimes external shocks or unexpected events can have a strong impact on agendas, as has happened recently with the euro crisis, the refugee crisis, Brexit, COVID-19, and Putin's war in Ukraine. Pollack (1997) distinguished between formal and informal agenda-setters in EU governance. The former includes the 'big' institutions like the Commission and the European Parliament (EP), whereas the latter are issue entrepreneurs. Europarties in a sense belong to both categories: they are independent civil society organizations, but strongly present in EU institutions. Key individuals inside Europarties and EP political groups are thus both policymakers and issue entrepreneurs. Overall, there is a broad range of actors from national and EU institutions to lobbyists and interest groups to public opinion that influence which issues receive the attention of EU decision-makers (e.g., Ackrill et al., 2013; Daviter, 2007, 2011; Princen, 2007, 2009, 2011; Tallberg, 2003). As national governments and EU institutions consist of party politicians, it is obvious that, essentially, all major integration milestones as well as normal EU laws and policies have been shaped by political ideologies and the programmes and positions of political parties.

The agenda-setting approach is thus helpful in understanding the emergence and framing of issues on the agenda of decision-makers. However, it usually emphasizes positive power and neglects negative power, that is the power to prevent other actors from devoting attention to specific issues. While we in this book focus on goals and priorities of the Europarties, it is equally relevant to acknowledge issues and solutions not promoted by these supranational partisan actors. But regardless of whether Europarties promote their favoured solutions or try to keep

certain proposals off the agenda, they engage in advocacy, either alone or as coalitions of like-minded actors.

Advocacy Coalition Framework

Following the discussion of agenda setting, this section presents the key aspects of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF).[1] It introduces its concepts and assumptions, trying to nail down a definition, and it also gleans some of the framework's strengths and limitations. It discusses applications and describes how the framework can be further developed based on lessons from a broad set of empirical applications more generally and specifically in the EU context. Our ultimate consideration is the applicability of this framework to Europarties—outside or inside the European Parliament within the political groups and even across them—and how we can usefully build on the ACF to investigate partisan transnational advocacy networks or coalitions in the EU.

Key Concepts and Assumptions

In everyday use, advocacy, of course, means any action in support for or recommendation of a particular cause. How, then, do scholars define advocacy coalitions? In broad strokes, advocacy coalitions are groups of like-minded actors who share beliefs and engage in a 'non-trivial' degree of coordination to decisively impact policy outputs and change. Sabatier (1988: 139; see also Sabatier, 1987; Sabatier & Pelkey, 1987), who pioneered the ACF, suggests the following definition of advocacy coalitions: 'These are people from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers) who share a particular belief system—i.e., a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perceptions—and who show a non-trivial degree of coordinated activity over time'. To Sabatier (1988: 133) advocacy coalitions are composed of 'people from various organizations who share a set of normative and

[1] For a thorough overview of the ACF research programme—its intellectual foundations, theoretical emphases, and future trajectory—and numerous publications therein, see Jenkins-Smith et al. (2018, 2014). For more detailed descriptions of the ACF than provided in this section see also Sabatier (1988, 1998), Sabatier and Weible (2007), Nohrstedt et al. (2020), Weible (2017), Weible et al. (2009, 2011, 2020), Pierce et al. (2017, 2020), Cisneros (2021), and Henry et al. (2022), among others.

causal beliefs and who often act in concert'. The underlying assumption is that actors can be aggregated into several advocacy coalitions and that actors can be drawn from various governmental and private organizations.[2]

Coalition dynamics, in other words, are crucial as the ACF assumes that the final policy output reflects the winning coalition's beliefs (e.g., Pierce et al., 2020). Three meta-theoretical concepts underlie the ACF: coalitions, learning, and policy change (Henry et al., 2022; see also Nohrstedt et al., 2020; Weible, 2017). Furthermore, there are three cross-cutting or basic concepts within the ACF that serve as the backbone for analysing those three key components (coalitions, learning, and policy change): subsystem, actors, and beliefs (Henry et al., 2022).

The ACF is one of several theoretical approaches available for studying policymaking. It sought to provide an alternative to the understanding of the policy process as a policy cycle. In the words of Weible (2017):

> The ACF aimed at gaining a better understanding of some of the most perplexing puzzles in public policy, including the formation and maintenance of coalitions, the propensity for learning and the role of science and technology in policy processes, and the factors associated with policy change over time.

As an approach to public policy as a field of study, and with hundreds of applications across the world, the ACF is one of the most established and most frequently applied approaches for studying policy processes.

The ACF can be understood as a policy process framework that has been developed to simplify the complexity of public policy (Weible et al., 2009). It is designed to deal with complex subsystems involving large numbers of actors and to understand policy changes over a period of a decade or more within a particular substantive domain/subsystem. As distinct from other theories of the policy process, the ACF provides a more cooperation-oriented approach and one that centres on policy change. It does so by emphasizing notions of learning and effects therefrom for policy outcomes. The ACF is best applied at the subsystem level and less within specific action situations (Weible et al., 2011: 357).

[2] Some scholars suggest that state actors are the principal agents of learning, while Sabatier and others argue that advocacy coalitions, made up of both state and non-state actors, are the prime 'learners' (see Bennett & Howlett, 1992).

Indeed, policy subsystem is the primary unit of analysis and the principal empirical and theoretical domain. Advocacy coalitions operate within policy subsystems and the ACF highlights the role of both formal and informal actors in such subsystems and their strategies and resources for furthering their policy objectives by shaping policy outputs and impacts (e.g., Cisneros, 2021; Jenkins-Smith et al., 2018; Sabatier, 1988; Weible, 2017; Weible et al., 2009, 2011, 2020).

ACF is based on seven foundational assumptions[3]:

1. Policy subsystems, characterized by a geographical area, an issue, and policy actors.
2. The subsystem actors include participants who attempt to influence policy. These may include government officials, private or non-private organizations, experts, scholars, consulting firms, think tanks, and media, among others.
3. The ACF assumes that policy actors are boundedly rational.[4]
4. Subsystems aggregate actors into one or more coalitions. The ACF provides a lens to see the policy actors as members of coalitions. These coalitions are formed based on similarities and differences in core policy beliefs.
5. Policies often reflect and translate the beliefs of one or more coalitions.
6. Scientific and technical information is important for understanding subsystem affairs. Such information, besides the day-to-day experience of the policy actors, informs the causal patterns adopted by the belief systems.
7. To understand the policy process or policy change, the researchers must adopt a long-term perspective (e.g., ten years or more). Often, the debates among the coalitions last more than decades, and to understand the coalitions, learning, and policy change, one must understand all the past events.

[3] We draw here on Weible (2017). See also Weible et al. (2009, 2011), Weible and Jenkins-Smith (2016).

[4] That is to say, the ACF specifies a model of the individual who is boundedly rational with limited abilities to process stimuli.

The ACF attempts to understand and explain mainly three puzzles. These are, again, advocacy coalitions, learning, and policy change. They are considered puzzles because existing empirical research has produced mixed results.

Regarding the first puzzle, *advocacy coalition*, Weible (2017) points out that even when there is evidence showing the existence of coalitions and shared beliefs within those coalitions, there is no clarity if it is necessary to have shared core beliefs when forming coalitions or whether secondary beliefs are sufficient. He further notes that these diverse findings reflect different approaches when studying advocacy coalitions. And, additionally, some scholars bear in mind that other factors, such as shared interests, trust, and resources are important too in coalition formation, not only shared beliefs. The policy actors who are part of the advocacy coalition are those who are essential to the 'coalition members', and those who play a certain role within the coalition. They include brokers, who work to reach agreements among opponents; and entrepreneurs, who play a role in leading coalitions, facilitating learning, and producing policy change.[5]

The second puzzle, *learning*, refers to the way in which individuals decide 'to change their actions and way of thinking after having certain experiences and which are concerned with the accomplishment or revision of the guidelines of the belief system of each individual' (Weible, 2017; see also Weible & Jenkins-Smith, 2016; Weible et al., 2011). Research has shown that learning does indeed occur within and between different coalitions, but it is not clear whether this learning process includes changing the core and secondary policy beliefs within the coalition, or whether the change in secondary beliefs can begin to generate this learning.[6] In addition, many researchers have emphasized that other factors, such as

[5] Policy entrepreneurs are advocates for proposals or for the prominence of an idea; willing to invest resources of time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money in the hope of a future return (Kingdon, 1984). Such individuals can play a significant entrepreneurial role in the process of policy change (Dudley & Richardson, 1999: 227). They are not necessarily found in any one location in the policy community (or policy subsystem in Sabatier's terminology), but could be in or out of government, in elected or appointed positions, in interest groups or research organizations.

[6] While a traditional strength of the ACF has been its focus on policy-oriented learning, Weible et al. (2011: 356) also note: 'If there were an area within ACF deserving of innovations in theory and methods, it would be policy-oriented learning.'

networks and science, have been shown to facilitate policy learning within and between the various coalitions.

Thirdly, *policy change*, refers to the changes that occur in policy, what generates these changes, and, subsequently, what these changes are (Weible, 2017; see also Weible et al., 2011). There are some changes in the core beliefs of the coalitions, named 'major' policy changes, and there are 'minor' changes, which occur in the secondary aspects of the policy subsystem. Research has shown that there are indeed changes in policy and that there are certain factors that lead to a change in policy. However, the process of understanding is complex because policy change is not the result of one event alone, but rather a combination of diverse dynamics that occur in one process over time.

Taken together, these three puzzles or themes—advocacy coalitions, (policy-oriented) learning, and policy change—capture the core areas of theoretical emphasis in ACF and structure empirical explorations within the framework. The ACF assumes that policy actors are primarily motivated by their belief system, which is partitioned into fundamental normative orientations called deep core beliefs, normative and empirical policy-related beliefs called policy core beliefs, and narrow and instrumental secondary beliefs (Weible et al., 2020). Among the assumptions, ACF thus explicitly identifies beliefs as the causal driver for political behaviour. But how to establish the cause–effect relationship? This question can be difficult to answer not least because of the complexity of advocacy coalitions and the potential impact of other factors. It may be that the ACF understates the complexity of the problem and overestimates the explanatory power of advocacy coalitions.

Empirical Applications and Questions About Generalizability

Since its emergence in the 1980s, the ACF has developed into a rich and varied research programme with a growing community of scholars applying the framework, testing and developing its hypotheses, and exploring new methods of data collection and analysis in political contexts that span the globe (Weible, 2017; Weible et al., 2020). At its core, the ACF is about understanding policy change and stability, and the role of policy-oriented learning within processes of policy change and within policy subsystems. This has been the subject of considerable empirical investigation in a variety of settings. Over time, ACF has been applied to cases involving airline deregulation, telecommunications regulation, drug

policy, energy policy, environmental policy, forest policy, health policy, water policy, ocean policy, pollution control, climate change, and intelligence, to mention only a few. Thus, it has mainly found its way into empirical applications to policy processes. With the focus on policy applications, ACF has paid attention to those actors usually involved in such policy processes, mainly interest groups, while other sets of actors may go unnoticed. For example, ACF has hardly at all been applied to party-political actors. This is surprising, given that political parties work to influence public policy and are sources of advocacy.

Much of the first wave of scholarship received criticism for putting forward wide claims unsubstantiated by anything like convincing evidence. The ACF was criticized for a bias towards pluralistic political systems, such as the United States. But with a growing number of applications, across a wide range of policies, the later waves of scholarship have done a lot in terms of addressing claims about the policy impact of advocacy coalitions. In the 1990s, the framework was developed through revisions to some of its assumptions (Weible et al., 2009). There was an acknowledgement that more needs to be understood about the actual conditions under which change takes place, that external perturbations are a necessary but not sufficient cause of change in the core policy attributes, and that one potentially important factor in this change is the role of the policy entrepreneur. One of the major revisions to the ACF was summarized in Sabatier and Weible (2007), where the framework was reformulated to ease applications outside of the pluralist system in the United States to corporatist systems that generally are less open, more centralized, and restrict participation. The revision identified two additional paths to policy change; internal subsystem events and dispute resolution through negotiated agreements involving two or more coalitions (Sabatier & Weible, 2007: 204–207). Subsystems, of course, can vary in their development, some being more well-developed than others; and they can overlap, which is more likely to occur when they are well-developed.

Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) assessed the ACF based on six applications (see also Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1994). Later, Weible et al. (2009) examined 80 applications of the ACF spanning nearly twenty years (1987–2006). By taking stock of the existing applications, they identified and discussed some of the strengths and weaknesses of the ACF and offered directions for future research. The reviews showed that the ACF is applicable to various substantive topics, across various geographical areas,

and in combination with other policy process theories and frameworks. The most tested hypotheses involved policy change, learning, and coalition stability. Hypotheses tended to be confirmed, yet questions remained about the membership, stability, and defection of coalition members; about the causal mechanisms linking external events and policy change; and about the conditions that facilitate cross-coalition learning. Continuing or emerging areas of research deserving theoretical and empirical attention included the role of institutions and resource dependence in the framework, policy subsystem interdependencies, and coordination within and between coalitions. In addition, the reviews found that coalition membership was relatively stable over time and that policy core beliefs glued coalition members together, but defection was also common. Hence, what was needed was original theorizing and deliberate research designs that investigated both the stability and defection of coalition members over time.

Another review of research discussed applications of the ACF in the Philippines, China, India, and Kenya, and concluded with an argument for the continued application of the framework outside of Western Europe and North America (Henry et al., 2014). Pierce et al. (2017) catalogued and analysed 161 applications of ACF from 2007 to 2014, a plurality of which in terms of depth examined environment and energy, subsystems at the national level, and utilized qualitative methods. More recently, Pierce et al. (2020) explored how the ACF's theory of policy change was applied to 148 policy processes in 67 journal articles from 2007 to 2014. One of their main findings was the large number of applications in the environment and energy policy domain.

Regarding coalitions, the ACF argues that the line-up of allies and opponents tends to be rather stable and that actors within an advocacy coalition will show substantial consensus on issues pertaining to the policy core (Weible & Jenkins-Smith, 2016). Typically, such advocacy coalitions do not only operate in a single forum but also at different levels of policy-making (e.g., Shanahan et al., 2011). What we see is the coming together of a variety of actors, institutions, policies, and practices developed in diverse communities to tackle (cross-level) problems. This reminds of the key themes addressed in research on global or European governance, including how to assess the effectiveness of institutional arrangements. We must also remember that ACF research tends to concern deeply political processes. Therefore, it is not just a theory about policy processes but also about politics and decision-making. It uncovers agreements based on

important relationships (coalitions) that can be even decisive in ultimately shaping policy or legislation. That policy success and the sometimes hidden nature of these coalitions in turn raise crucial questions about transparency and accountability.

Despite this increasing range of research, crucial questions remain about ACF and its generalizability. The ACF suffers from limitations at least some of which are recognized within the research community itself. There has been justified criticism about the lack of terminological precision. What precisely is an advocacy coalition and how can we identify them? How do advocacy coalitions differ from traditional actor constellations involved in policymaking? How are advocacy coalitions formed and maintained? How do people act in advocacy coalitions? To what extent is there policy learning inside the coalition and between them? Key ACF components, not least learning, are not easily measured. Preferences can develop endogenously within the coalition or exogenously. Coalitions may be measured in different ways. According to Satoh et al. (2023), previous research has been inconsistent in defining and measuring coalitions, which has hampered comparative research and theory building.[7]

The ACF has been criticized for not taking collective action problems, such as shirking, seriously (e.g., Schlager, 1995). This means, to realize its potential more fully, admitting the explanations of collective action from frameworks based on instrumental rationality. And to incorporate more in-depth accounts of how coalitions form and maintain themselves over times, and of the types of strategies the coalitions are likely to adopt to pursue their policy goals. Drawing on general coalition research, not least coalition formation in parliaments and governments may help to consolidate the ACF further. According to Weible et al. (2011: 355), however, progress has been made in response to 'criticism about collective action in coalitions, in part, through the specialized empirical efforts by multiple scholars on developing theory about coalition stability and

[7] Satoh et al. (2023) present a method called the Advocacy Coalition Index. It measures belief similarity and the coordination of action in a manner that makes it possible to assess the extent to which advocacy coalitions are found in policy subsystems, whether subgroups resemble coalitions, and how individual actors contribute to coalition formation. The index is applied to a comparative analysis of two climate change policy subsystems, namely Finland and Sweden, and Satoh et al. (2023) demonstrate that the index performs well in identifying the different types of subsystems, coalitions, and actors that contribute the most to coalition formation, as well as those involved in cross-coalition brokerage.

structure as the outcome variables. Similar efforts are needed for learning and policy change'. But important issues related to coalition stability remain. ACF emphasizes competition among stable coalitions, which may hold opposing normative policy beliefs, but these are generally expected to result over time in convergence and policy stability. There is thus a tendency towards consensus and stability which might exaggerate the level of consensus within these coalitions or networks. Outcomes may reflect dominant coalitions and power imbalances. Within political families—Europarties and political groups—there is a tendency to claim consensus, that decisions have been reached unanimously, even when there is a lack of cohesion and controversies behind the decisions have not been completely solved. Building and claiming consensus reflect distribution of power. Policymakers generally want to display unity.

In this vein, a final consideration is that ACF, both theoretically and empirically, tends to underestimate the existence of hierarchies and asymmetries in resources and power (here defined as the way people can influence others or make decisions).[8] However, within the ACF research programme, we also find categorizations of coalition resources and applications of these categories.[9] In brief, changes in the institutional framework conditions can (re-)shape the availability of power resources. Variation between actors also matter with, for example, elected officials holding policymaking authority and bureaucrats holding expertise

[8] But see, e.g., Weible et al. (2020) for a discussion of power imbalances of resources between coalitions, and Weible et al. (2011: 356 and references therein) about studies exploring how changes in the distribution of coalition resources contribute to policy change. Henry (2011) investigates the role of power and ideology in the endogenous formation of policy networks in the case of policy networks in five regional planning subsystems in California. While shared ideology—conceptualized as a system of policy-relevant beliefs and values—according to the ACF is the primary driver of collaboration within policy subsystems, Resource Dependency Theory suggests that power-seeking is an important rationale behind network structure, and that collaborative ties are formed primarily on the basis of perceived influence. Henry's results also suggest that ideology is an important force behind network cohesion or collaborative ties.

[9] Sabatier and Weible (2007: 201–202; see also Weible et al., 2011) identify six categories of coalition resources: formal legal authority to make policy decisions, public opinion, information, mobilizable troops, financial resources, and skilful leadership. Building on this categorization, contributions by Albright (2011), Nohrstedt (2011), and Ingold (2011) continued to advance the literature in this area by exploring how changes in the distribution of coalition resources contribute to policy change. More recently, contributions by Smith et al. (2015) and Sotirov et al. (2021) further develop the role of coalition resources.

bringing different types of resources for the coalitions (Nowlin et al., 2022). And some players look set to benefit the most. In this context, it is interesting to note that, like the agenda-setting approach discussed in the previous section, ACF usually deals only with positive power and neglects negative power; the power to prevent other actors from devoting attention to specific issues. Of immediate relevance for our research purposes is a question raised by Weible et al. (2011: 356): 'How and to what extent do coalitions capitalize on new resources to achieve greater influence in policy subsystems?'

ACF in the EU Context

The discussion above shows the gradual development of the ACF both theoretically and empirically. It has been refined in response to criticism, and the ACF provides a useful set of analytical tools by which to study highly significant processes of policymaking. ACF scholars have created a core community that regularly synthetizes findings from applications of the framework, giving the ACF the form of a true research programme (Cisneros, 2021). Scholars have also noted its relevance in understanding EU policymaking. In line with insights from agenda-setting literature, a consideration in the ACF is that actors and coalitions seek to maximize their advantage by strategic venue shopping—which in the EU context could mean coalition activities and coordination at different levels (subnational, regional, and national, European) and related to different EU institutions (Ingold, 2022; Sabatier, 1998). As Sabatier (1998: 121) noted, the multilevel governance system of the EU offers plenty of venues to influence policy development and therefore 'the ACF should apply well to the increasingly complex set of relationships evolving within the European Union'. Rozbicka (2013), focusing on interest groups in her overview of ACF studies in the EU context, considered the ACF one of the most promising theoretical approaches in the continuously growing field of EU policy studies.

The role of the ACF in EU (policy) studies was addressed comprehensively by Ingold (2022), according to whom by 2018 as many as around 150 applications existed in Europe (see Pierce et al., 2017; Nohrstedt et al., 2020). However, most of those concentrated on national and regional policymaking, with only around 15% of European ACF studies dedicated to the supranational level, meaning EU politics. Highlighting the possibilities, challenges, and opportunities for studying policy change,

coalitions, and actors at the supranational level, Ingold (2022: 567) offered a welcome addition to previous overviews of the existing literature in the field. Ingold further observed that like the global situation, the empirical applications most often covered energy, environment, and health policies—policy fields most studied by the ACF (cf. Pierce et al., 2017). Prominent examples of empirical applications include policy areas such as steel industry (e.g., Dudley & Richardson, 1999), employment policy (Johansson, 1999), taxation policy (Radaelli, 1999), agricultural policy (Nedergaard, 2008), wind power (Szarka, 2010), ecological risk assessment of pesticides (Hunka et al., 2015), smoke-free policy and health advocacy (Weishaar et al., 2015, 2016), tobacco regulation (Smith et al., 2015), the European Union Force (EUFOR) Althea operation (Palm, 2017), genetically modified organisms (Tosun & Schaub, 2017), pharmaceutical/public health policy (Brooks, 2018), biofuels (Rietig, 2018), and forest policy (Sotirov et al., 2021).[10]

But, overall, what is the specific advantage of the ACF in the EU context? There is no simple answer as the research is continuously evolving, but the relevance of the ACF is seen in the growing number of studies employing the framework. Three patterns emerge from this literature. First, research has proven that the ACF is applicable within and across various policy issues. Echoing Sabatier (1998), Ingold (2022) noted that the ACF provides a suitable framework for studying EU policymaking, as it can be utilized for understanding how different public and private actors belonging to different countries and acting at diverse levels coordinate their efforts in pursuit of a shared objective. Importantly for our argument, ACF guides scholars towards looking beyond mere intergovernmental relationships and formal EU institutions. The gradual consolidation of both the jurisdiction of the EU and its political system obviously provides the basic operating environment for advocacy coalitions, but coalitions and policy entrepreneurs inside them utilize multiple informal channels for advancing their objectives.

The second pattern is continuing differences among researchers regarding the stability (or not) of advocacy coalitions and their internal power dynamics. Studies applying the ACF to investigating 'formal' coalitions formed by interest groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) during consultation procedures conclude that they are ad hoc

[10] For a focus on NGOs in EU forest policymaking, see Weber and Christophersen (2002).

and short-term (Pijnenburg, 1998; Rozbicka, 2013; Warleigh, 2000), and thus differ from advocacy coalitions that are based on stable and long-term core beliefs. Warleigh (2000: 239–240) found that policy coalitions are not stable but issue-specific and concluded that 'EU policy-making probably yields evidence of both advocacy and policy coalitions'. In his view, like Pijnenburg (1998), this finding justifies the claim that the pragmatic search for advantage is the primary shaper of coalitions in EU policymaking. Dudley and Richardson (1999) observed how coalition dynamics and the balance of power between competing advocacy coalitions may shift because key members choose to defect from one coalition to another. Key actors within these coalitions might be pivotal in the policy process. This brings us back to agenda-setting and those individuals who are policy entrepreneurs—advocates for proposals or for the prominence of an idea who can play a significant entrepreneurial role in the process of policy change. That boils down to the generic question of who has the final say in policymaking. With reference to the study by Newell (2018), Ingold (2022: 572–573) points out:

> And this is true: not all coalition members have the same level of (decisive or formal) power, and it is crucial to know 'who has an opinion, preference, or belief', and who are the ones who have a more or less direct impact on the decision and thus on policy outputs and change.

Third pattern concerns ideas and discourse. Nedergaard (2008) found that discursive coordination was the most frequently used form of coordination during the 2003 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Radaelli (1999) drew attention to the political power of policy narratives—and the fact that a policy narrative developed—in the context of the advocacy coalition framework. Through studying tobacco regulation, Smith et al. (2015) showed how the ACF can be applied to one specific issue or one actor—the regulated tobacco industry. They highlighted the role of advocacy coalitions and how policy entrepreneurs with sufficient resources such as large corporations shaped the membership and direction of advocacy coalitions. In their case, the ability to shape regulatory reform involved the deliberate construction of a vaguely defined idea that could be strategically adapted to appeal to diverse constituencies. The question of how ideas interact with interests is, of course, long-standing in social science research. Shared terminology and discourse are indeed particularly relevant also in the case of Europarties.

To conclude this section, ACF has become more widely used in EU studies, but almost exclusively in relation to policies and policy change. The complexity of modern European political architecture, with a large number of actors and ideas involved in the processes, makes it difficult to isolate the independent effect of coalitions. The empirical studies also show how challenging it can be to identify and follow actors and their activities across EU levels, institutions, and venues, especially as policy change is often incremental and occurs over a longer time period. These methodological considerations are relevant also when assessing the influence of transnational partisan coalitions. Clearly, there is potential and the need to extend ACF to networks and coalitions of politicians and their parties. That means more attention to politicians' transnational networks, not least the more informal ones. To our best knowledge, ACF approach has not been applied to transnational settings encompassing partisan actors, particularly regarding how Europarties shape 'history-making' decisions such as Treaty reforms. In the next section, we combine the agenda-setting and advocacy approaches with the concept of transnational partisanship, particularly in relation to main constitutional and institutional developments in European integration.

Unpacking Transnational Partisan Advocacy Coalitions

We utilize the ACF and agenda-setting approaches for exploring the role of partisanship and Europarties in EU governance, especially in relation to Treaty negotiation and revision. In fact, the basic characteristics of the Europarties and their external environment suggest that advocacy and agenda-setting are fundamental for their influence. Existing research on ACF has analysed primarily policy change and has paid hardly any attention to political parties, whereas our main focus is on the actors themselves—the Europarties and their networks. We identify them as stable and institutionalized advocacy coalitions, but also recognize that their membership and internal power dynamics may vary over time and depend on the specific context of the bargaining process.

While the ACF has generally been applied to national policy processes, recent decades have witnessed a burgeoning literature on transnational advocacy networks (TANs), usually building on Keck and Sikkink (1998). Parts of this literature draw on ACF research to develop integrated frameworks for empirical applications. A few examples are Litfin (2000) dealing

with advocacy coalitions in the case of globalization and Canadian climate change policy; Farquharson (2003) examining global tobacco advocacy networks; Pralle (2003)[11] on the internationalization of Canadian forest, supporting the theory of 'venue shopping', too; Zippel (2004)[12] on a TAN involving advocates and policy expertise regarding sexual harassment in the EU; Carpenter (2007) studying advocates in the human rights sector, asking why some issues but not others galvanize TANs; Novak (2020) applying the lens of transnational advocacy networks to human rights litigation; and Holzscheiter et al. (2021) who examine advocacy coalition constellations and norm collisions in international drug control, human trafficking, and child labour. Hence, the last three decades have seen a growth in transnational advocacy coalition or network studies. It reflects the real-world growth in transnational political mobilization by 'non-state' actors, as well as the existence and role of advocacy coalitions across countries. This implies that a wide range of advocacy coalitions is being globalized, which also has implications for our understanding of international and regional politics. The extent to which they make their impact felt will depend on their resources, mobilization, and political strategy for reaching policy goals.

However, most of this literature emanates from research on interest groups and social movements or public participation. Political parties, whether national or transnational, do not feature prominently, if at all, in these research programmes. Yet in our increasingly interdependent world parties too have incentives for transnational activism, for engagement in spheres of cross-border governance in its broadest terms. More specifically, we suggest that the growth in the jurisdiction of the EU has presented national parties with functional pressures for transnational engagement, not least through the changing 'political opportunity

[11] According to Pralle (2003), however, venue shopping can be more experimental, and less deliberate or calculated, than is commonly perceived; advocacy groups choose venues not only to advance substantive policy goals but also to serve organizational needs and identities; and venue choice is shaped by policy learning. Moreover, policy venues may be not only traditional governmental institutions but also include non-state governance arenas.

[12] According to Zippel (2004), 'newer' international organizations and institutions, like the EU, offer activists a more open terrain to advance their goals; further noting that the EU's multilevel policy-making structure provides both challenges and opportunities for advocates.

structure' related to European-level institutional development and policymaking. This is a general theme that will surface throughout the remaining chapters in this book. In other words, we suggest a return to traditional scholarship on political engagement emphasizing political parties, alongside interest groups and social movements, as ways to influence public policy. But some political movements are likelier than others to go transnational.

A counterintuitive example of transnational action is when nationalist (often regional) movements or parties work together across borders, that is, in transnational nationalist advocacy (Gupta, 2008). In a similar vein, the transnational, cross-national coalition-building of political parties classified as 'radical right' or 'populist', which tend to share anti-immigration positions, has something contradictory about it (e.g., McDonnell & Werner, 2019; Steven, 2020). Obviously, the incentives for such transnational activity are strong enough, not least in the EP with its various resources available to parties and individual members. At the same time, most of these nationalist parties are (so far) not involved in EU policymaking through the other main institutions: the Commission, the Council, and the European Council. (Ethno-)nationalist parties, whether populist or under any other label, provide a critical case: if these parties engage transnationally, we can expect parties belonging to all other party/ideological families to do so.

More broadly, transnationalism denotes all types of cross-national contacts if one relaxes the assumption that states are the only units or actors interacting across national boundaries. As argued by Keohane and Nye (1977: 24–25), multiple channels connect societies, including transnational relations, where *transnational* 'applies when we relax the assumption that states are the only units'. We are dealing here with interactions across national boundaries: face-to-face and through various communication channels. To classify a relationship as 'transnational', researchers typically look for how non-state actors of different kinds interact across national boundaries. They include a wide range of actors which need to be differentiated into subcategories or subtypes. For example, political parties are fundamentally different from business firms. And the degree of institutionalization of transnational coalitions varies from loosely structured networks to joint transnational organizations which are actors and not just arenas.

In the EU context, a new scholarship on transnational relations emerged in the 1990s which paid attention to policy effects more broadly. In the words of Risse-Kappen (1996: 58):

> As for the EU, one would assume that the increasingly dense network of transnational coalitions and organizations—from transnational interest groups […] to European party organizations—not only affects EU policies directly, but also the processes of national preference formation as mediated by the domestic structures of the Member States.

At that point, the evolving Europarty organizations or their forerunners had already existed for two decades. And since the 1990s the political and institutional environment in which the Europarties exist—and which they have purposefully shaped—has altered fundamentally.

In our opinion, the contribution of advocacy coalitions to policy-making goes further and much deeper than existing research on EU governance has accounted for. It extends also to long-term constitutional and institutional changes advocated through transnational relations between political parties. Such relationships and presence therein allow individuals to cooperate for the shared objective of promoting European unity or particular policies. This demonstrates how the European Union functions not only through the interplay between member states or the EU institutions, with their respective mandates, but also through continuous transnational partisan interaction.

Coalitions are of course a central feature of politics. For individual actors and collective of actors alike, coalition-building serves to pool resources and power and facilitates influence over outcomes. Coalitions help to simplify the process of decision-making. This basic demand for cooperation prompts actors to form coalitions. However, there are alternative theoretical expectations for coalition formation. The partisan hypothesis suggests that actors form coalitions primarily based on ideological affinity, as defined by party affiliation (see Chapter 4). By contrast, other theories point to power, interest, and culture as driving concerns.

When transferred to the politics of coalition formation at the transnational/supranational (EU) level, our starting point from the ACF is that actor alignments will reflect ideological proximities and divides, as defined by party affiliation. Transnational partisan coalitions are expected to be stable, and we also expect their networks and memberships to expand over time—both in response to their internal consolidation and to the

gradual empowerment and enlargement of the EU. Coalition patterns are also likely to be stable across issue areas due to both ideological proximity within coalitions and the fact that actors within the coalition grow accustomed to formulating common positions. At the same time, coalitions may well cut across ideological divides. In the context of the EU, initiatives and outcomes are often the result of coalition-building across political families. These coalitions both compete against one another but also join forces in pursuit of common objectives. That said, ideological divisions are a constant in party politics whether nationally or transnationally.

In the study of EU politics, the notion of partisan coalitions has received extensive support in the empirical work on the European Parliament (e.g., Ahrens et al., 2022; Bressanelli, 2014; Hix et al., 2007). Less has been written about the other EU institutions in this respect, but there are some assessments of ideological or party affinity in the Council and particularly the European Council (e.g., Hix & Lord, 1997; Tallberg & Johansson, 2008; and the literature cited in chapters one, three, and four of this book). Translated to the context of European Council decision-making, the partisan hypothesis generates the expectation of a party-political divide, with participants (at the highest level the prime ministers or presidents of the member states) coordinating positions within the dominant transnational Europarties—particularly the three party families we examine in this book, the European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), and Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). European Council summits are preceded by transnational party caucuses, and there are gatherings of government ministers represented in the Council. It is also an empirical question to what extent such Europarty caucuses play an independent political role or are primarily used by national governments for advancing their own agendas. While the status of heads of government as representatives also of national political parties—and involved in Europarties one way or the other—generates expectations of partisan alignments also in the European Council, these same political leaders are first and foremost responsible to domestic constituencies. Not least therefore, there are important limits to the trend of party politicization in the EU and to the influence of Europarties.

The influence of transnational Europarties is also conditioned by their capacity to operate effectively. What matters is their mobilization capacity to shape outcomes and, even when enjoying numerical superiority, the

ambition and capacity to coordinate positions. In the process, there may be a convergence of preferences and positions, both within coalitions and between them. Hence, the simple existence of transnational coalitions is no guarantee of their effectiveness. In our empirical analysis in Chapters 4 and 5, we highlight the mobilizing role of both organizations—Europarty headquarters, EP political groups, political foundations etc.—and individuals (entrepreneurs) that belong to the coalitions Europarties have built and enlarged over several decades. Important in our approach is the temporal dimension: while transnational partisan coalitions may not always achieve their goals, their advocacy is continuous and ever-present. It is therefore crucial to extend the empirical lens beyond the European Council summitry and specific Intergovernmental Conferences (IGC).

A rare insight into life inside a transnational partisan advocacy coalition, and one of the first studies in the EU context drawing on the ACF, was provided by Johansson (1999). It unpacked transnational advocacy coalitions related to the European employment initiative (EEI). The coalition included trade unions and political parties as well as governments and EU institutions, and individuals within them. Those constituting the advocacy coalition favoured an employment title in the revised Treaty, and stronger coordination between member states regarding employment policies. While national governments were involved and pivotal for the outcome, it was to a large extent driven by transnational advocacy (see also Ladrech, 2000; Lightfoot, 2005). PES, both as an actor and arena, championed the employment chapter or title in the Amsterdam Treaty that came into effect in 1999 (see also Johansson, 2017; Tallberg & Johansson, 2008). There were transnational exchanges throughout the process, notably within transnational party caucuses preceding European Council summits. There was a clear party-political pattern behind the support given by individual governments, and that case study also highlighted continual advocacy, emerging convergence, and the role of individuals as policy entrepreneurs—themes that we shall analyse in our empirical chapters. Johansson (1999: 97) was also careful in assessing the independent effect of the partisan coalition: 'the transnational dimension of EU policy-making and treaty reform must be seen as a complement to rather than a substitute for what was happening at the intergovernmental level'. In similar vein, Johansson and Raunio (2005) in their analysis of Europarty funding explored cross-party coalitions capitalizing on 'incomplete contracts' ever since the opening created by the Party Article in the

Maastricht Treaty and how they successfully and continuously argued for a stronger position for the Europarties.

Our approach carries implications for theoretical approaches in agenda-setting and advocacy coalitions, as well as for research on transnational relations and the ever-growing literature on European integration in its broadest terms. We suggest that this literature, with some exceptions, has overlooked the important form of interaction through transnational party networks. In contrast to accounts that continue to emphasize intergovernmental interaction, we specify and map an additional and central mechanism through which processes of EU decision-making are taking place and European integration evolves. We call this mechanism the *transnational partisan dimension* of European integration.

We argue that Europarties should be viewed primarily as transnational partisan actors that operate both at the intergovernmental (Treaty reforms, European Council) and supranational (European Parliament, Commission, legislative, and day-to-day policymaking) levels of EU politics. This is evident in the gradual development of the Europarties and in their organization and identity. We discuss how the multilevel nature of the EU polity provides several channels for advancing policy objectives, and how the Europarties have throughout the decades established their own networks and coalitions for shaping the future of Europe. Coalitions work on many levels and their impact is cumulative. We further argue that the transnational character of the Europarties, often seen as their weakness, has enabled them to influence European politics in ways that are hidden from public view. We will develop this argument in subsequent chapters. Moreover, we pay attention to the discourse and terminology employed by the Europarty entrepreneurs. Successful advocacy often depends on or is at least facilitated by framing of issues (Daviter, 2011). 'Democracy', 'legitimacy', 'representation of citizens', and 'participation' are examples of 'big words' traditionally employed by Europarties in their documents. Europarties may differ in their concrete objectives and programmatic priorities, but terminology is essentially similar.

We now proceed to the empirical analysis of Europarties and examine the core hypothesis that they have contributed to fundamental institutional change in the EU, by shaping the agenda of Treaty reforms and bringing together advocacy coalitions that continuously engage in agenda-setting about the broad theme of the 'future of Europe'. We begin with a chapter on Europarties themselves and their networks and then

turn to an analysis of observable patterns of Europarty attempts at influence in Treaty reforms in the past as well as in the 2021–2022 Conference on the Future of Europe and beyond.

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CHAPTER 3

Europarties: Elucidating Their Organizational Evolution and Capacity

Introduction

Every political party can be considered a network, a movement, an ideology as well as an organization.[1] Political parties are first and foremost organizations. Gradually, a certain organization crystallizes. When it comes to the transnational parties at the European level, the Europarties, their development will reflect the circumstances in which they find themselves.[2] But as we show in this book, the Europarties themselves have strongly influenced these circumstances. They both structure and are structured or restructured.

This chapter elucidates the evolution of Europarties in their organizational aspects and offers insights into pivotal moments in their development. We look at how Europarties organize and how identity ties them together. We grapple with the question of how profoundly they have evolved into proper 'political parties at the European level'. However, our main purpose is not so much a detailed description of the Europarties as an explanation for why they have developed as they have over the decades. We are also exploring broader trends: how the ambitions

[1] Initially, the study of political parties essentially focused on them as organizations. That involved questions about their internal structures and distribution of power.

[2] In this chapter, too, the terms 'transnational party' and 'Europarty' are interchangeable. Europarties are recognized by EU regulations.

K. M. Johansson and T. Raunio, *Transnational Parties and Advocacy in European Integration*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-62285-4_3

to build Europarties and efforts to forge transnational links within them interact with institutional factors. We argue that this development represents an evolutionary logic reflecting incremental growth and adjustment best explained in terms of collective action and identity. Political scientists tend to analyse organizations, including parties, as a way of organizing collective entities for collective purposes rather than how they may form collective identities. We try to do both.

A distinction can and should be made between 'organization' and 'institution'. In brief, organizations can be understood as material entities whereas institutions, by contrast, are values, rules, or conventions governing relations. According to this distinction, a political party is an organization, while a practice or a principle is an institution. Institutionalization, then, means that practices or principles become embedded within an organization. They become standardized ways of doing things. This process of institutionalization is another aspect explored in this chapter.

Three major questions are addressed in this chapter: (1) What are Europarties for? (2) What is the organizational evolution of the Europarties? And (3) What is the organizational structure of the Europarties? This chapter explores these questions in the context of evolving practices and regulations, with the goal of trying to understand the multi-layered organizational complexity characterizing and inherent in transnational parties and in political organizations more generally. At the centre of our interest are the actual dynamics and consequences of these developments. Arguably, Europarties were created as an organizational response to changing systemic and societal conditions at the national and European levels (Bardi & Calossi, 2009).

Overall, this chapter aims at a better understanding of the evolving nature of the Europarties in the European Union (EU) polity, through an analysis of how they organize and why they organize the way they do. In line with the delimitation in this book, we keep the empirical focus on the three largest and most significant Europarties: the centre-right European People's Party (EPP), the centre-left Party of European Socialists (PES), and the centrist Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). They share one thing in common: over time, they have grown into much more complex organizations. We have sorted through older and more recent academic studies as well as primary data to grasp the complexities of evolving practices and regulations. We both introduce and challenge the literature, which has only rarely placed organization as the primary

unit of analysis.[3] While organizational aspects are of course noticed, the existing literature in the field has provided only limited insights into the organizational process within the Europarties separately or comparatively. Europarties constitute instances of transnational organizing.

The remainder of the chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, we offer answers to the question of what Europarties are for. In the second section, we outline the organizational evolution of Europarties more generally, with particular attention to their regulation. In the third section, we turn to the Europarties' organizational structure. Finally, in the fourth section, we conclude this chapter with a summary of central findings and with reflections on what lessons these findings hold for scholarly understanding and the future of the Europarties.

The Rationale Behind Europarties

This brief section seeks to answer a fundamental question about Europarties: what are they for? To find answers, it may help to look at the literature on political parties in general. One major reason why political parties have been formed is that they are institutional solutions to handle internal collective action problems within or outside the legislature—to reduce transaction costs of collective decision-making and coalition-building (Aldrich, 2011). Building a coalition requires effort and time and therefore involves transaction costs. In this vein, we use the idea of 'collective action' to explain why national parties get together and involve themselves in transnational coalitions (cf. Bartolini, 2005: 340). It is one reason why political parties freely choose to organize, and to coordinate, themselves collectively in transnational parties, gravitating them towards acting collectively at the transnational level. It emphasizes interests and politics as rational action. Leaving less room for ideology and the role of ideas, the short, and rationalist, answer is that they are formed to increase prospects for winning desired outcomes.

A second potential explanation is that political parties reflect shared identities and ideologies. This emphasis on ideas may explain the commitment to common principles and transnational engagement within political families. Accounts that fail to take account of ideology and history do not capture how principles and norms—that are central to constructivist

[3] For rare contributions, see Gagatek (2008, 2009).

theories—may evolve over time and what drives transnational engagement and exchange, other than interests. Participation in transnational parties might give a sense of community and belonging. Identity may tie member parties together and is a contributing reason for why they coalesce. In a historical-institutionalist perspective, patterns of institutional development constitute the accumulated product of practices evolving and consolidating over time. We conceive these two broad explanations as complementary; both help to understand the rationale of Europarties, their evolution, and their structure. We explore the extent to which initial moves to organize Europarties were subsequently supported by positive feedback mechanisms. These developments are reflected in how organizations have evolved, including the functional specialization within them.

Europarties are both an indication and facilitator of the integration in Europe. We find a strong normative commitment to European integration in the main Europarties, advocating substantive Treaty reforms and further institutional development of the EU. Over time, this is particularly true of the EPP, whose identity is strongly associated with the Christian Democrats who in the 1950s were the early primary advocates of integration and since then have succeeded in mobilizing a transnational coalition supportive of deeper integration (see Chapter 4). Under the EPP's ideological 'pillars' the willingness to form the United States of Europe was explicit in its statutes. While that exact wording was gone by the early twenty-first century, the EPP remains committed to a federal European Union, an ever-closer Union. EPP and the other Europarty elites have clearly played a significant role in shaping the institutional environment of the EU. Their motivation may be ideational, in the sense of being rooted in their principles, or it may be interest-based, insofar as it entails a desire to alter the institutional setting for their own ends. Or some combination thereof. In any case, Europarty activists have contributed to the political and institutional environment in which the Europarties exist.

Organization is everywhere a powerful tool for activists to achieve their ambitions. Regardless of the context or level of governance, political parties are policy-motivated actors seeking to influence outcomes. Like parties at the national and subnational levels, Europarties, in the EU context, seek to have direct input into policymaking and are therefore driven by the goal of shaping outcomes (e.g., Külahci, 2002; Lightfoot, 2005; Van Hecke, 2010). But to explain political action we need to also consider incentives structures and opportunities. There certainly are

incentives involved in transnational organization and action. But incentives are not only material. They can be social. And incentives can be created. Political actors such as Europarties have incentives and objectives and operate within governance structures. Over time, opportunities arise for reaching their goals, and this is where the concepts of agenda-setting and advocacy are crucial. Political parties are ultimately expressions of both organization and power (Panebianco, 1988), with ideological similarity facilitating collective action and achieving desired outcomes.

Working through Europarties has significant advantages for national parties and their elites, not least the vast partisan networks that connect them vertically and horizontally in Europe. These networks offer a way of reducing transaction costs for individual national political parties and elites when acting at the European level, as our colleague Robert Ladrech (2000, 2006) has acutely observed. For these national parties regular coordination with sister parties from other member states, not to mention interaction with EU-level entities, would be nearly impossible on a unilateral basis. Europarties fulfil therefore an important network and coordination function, as we discussed in Chapter 1. In the process, Europarties may establish additional independent authority and growing policymaking capacity.

Organizational Evolution and Regulatory Framework

Over the past five decades, since they were founded, the Europarties have evolved in tandem with their institutional environment. It can be described as a gradual institutionalization and an embedding of the Europarties in a common regulatory framework.[4] We will pay particular attention to this changing institutional environment of the Europarties. The most significant observation concerns the interplay between the institutional changes in the EU and the evolution of the Europarties themselves. They have actively contributed to those changes. Beyond

[4] Regulation of European political parties and particularly the public funding regime, including rules and rule changes, are examined in detail by Wolfs (2022). See also, e.g., Bardi (2002, 2006), Day and Shaw (2003), Gagatek (2008), Lightfoot (2006), Poguntke et al. (2013), Timus and Lightfoot (2014), Van Hecke (2010), and Van Hecke et al. (2018).

the regulations, the most important change pertains to the gradual strengthening of the European Parliament (EP).

To begin with, the Maastricht Treaty, which finally entered into force in November 1993, contained an article (Article 138a) on 'parties at the European level'.[5] The initiative originated in cross-party support among EPP, PES, and European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR, forerunner to ALDE); on a mission to recognize the role of Europarties in the Treaty. However, the president of the EPP, at the time also prime minister of Belgium, Wilfried Martens, was instrumental in convincing other participants at the December 1991 European Council in Maastricht to endorse the party article (Martens, 2008: 181; see also Jansen & Van Hecke, 2011: 194). Seeking legitimacy for the initiative, a reference by Martens and others in the Europarty circles was made to the article (Article 21) on political parties in the German Basic Law. As a result, the party article in the EU Treaty resembles the one in the German Constitution. Before the Maastricht Treaty was formally signed in February 1992, the precise wording was decided. According to Hix and Lord (1997: 190), the commitment to include an article on parties at the European level 'was the first clear indication of the party federations attempting to alter the institutional environment for their own ends'. For the first time, the concept of 'political parties at the European level' was formally introduced in an EU Treaty and constitutionally recognized. It was symbolic of the role of political parties in a supranational polity. But for the time being the 'party article' was declaratory without a concrete legal basis. Nonetheless, this was an important first step, generating a momentum for further steps towards a regulatory framework for Europarties. Hence, the significance of the decision first made in Maastricht was greater than perhaps recognized at the time.

As Raunio (2006: 250) observed, their constitutional recognition in the form of the party article in the Maastricht Treaty 'is directly linked to the subsequent development of Europarties'. In the interval between the Maastricht Treaty and the Treaty of Nice a decade later, there were renewed efforts at party regulation, and efforts aiming at restructuring the existing transnational party federations. Apart from the EPP, which

[5] Roa Bastos (2012) studied the codification of the party article in the Maastricht Treaty from historical and sociological approaches, looking at political mobilizations and 'discursive formation', also in scholarly discourses. He showed the influence of German scholars and politicians in these processes.

had already been founded as a 'party' in 1976, the (con)federations of national parties were quickly turned into Europarties. The Confederation of Socialist Parties of the European Community (CSP), founded in 1974, was transformed into the Party of European Socialists (PES) in November 1992. Founded in 1976 as the Federation of European Liberal and Democrat Parties, it was reconstituted as ELDR in December 1993. It appears that the EPP, 'party' by name since its inception in 1976, provided a model for the other families not least in its organizational aspects.[6] By the mid-1990s all three main Europarties seemed to have an identity of themselves as 'parties'. Building on their long-standing transnational cooperation—political groups in the EP had existed since the early 1950s—it seemed a natural move towards stronger organization.

In the 1990s the introduction of the 'party article' in the Treaty of Maastricht, a more powerful EP, and new waves of EU enlargement created 'a new opportunity structure of internal and external stimuli' (Van Hecke, 2006: 159). It led to what Van Hecke (2006: 159) calls the 'rebirth' of transnational party federations, particularly the EPP which emerged as the largest Europarty. Back in the 1970s, similar 'stimuli' were created by the enlargement of the then European Community (EC) and the introduction of direct elections to the EP which is the institutional arena most friendly to the idea of 'political parties at European level'. Ahead of the first direct elections held in 1979, each of the three main party families established a transnational party organization as explained above. It looked like the formation of the EU party system in which a trio of nascent Europarties—EPP, PES, ELDR—first formed.

However, while recognizing Europarties, the Treaty of Maastricht—or the Treaty of Amsterdam—did not provide a legal basis for financing the Europarties. That materialized with the Treaty of Nice (Article 191), which came into force in February 2003. This led to an agreement later that year over regulations governing them and rules regarding their funding. These regulations were then implemented in 2004, in view of the EP elections that year. Again, there was considerable activity within and around the Europarties with the aim of a proper EU regulation of political

[6] Originally, the EPP's full name was the European People's Party—Federation of Christian Democratic Parties in the European Community, later changed into European People's Party—Christian Democrats. Today, it is just the European People's Party, a reflection of its wider membership, not only Christian Democrats. EPP, including organizational aspects, is analysed in Jansen and Van Hecke (2011) and Van Hecke (2006).

parties. Elsewhere we have explored the process resulting in the incorporation of the party article in the Treaty of Maastricht, the subsequent clause in the Treaty of Nice, and the regulation on the introduction of public funding of political parties at the European level adopted in 2003 (Johansson & Raunio, 2005). Applying insights from rational choice and historical institutionalism, we showed how the Europarties consistently and determinedly exploited the 'incomplete contract', the party article in the Maastricht Treaty. Together they formed an influential cross-party advocacy coalition. The concepts of agenda-setting and advocacy coalition frameworks help to understand cross-party actions like those relating to party regulation in the EU. The Europarties are well-placed to establish such a common frame of debate. The regulation of Europarties is also a good example of positive spillovers, as predicted by the neofunctionalist explanation of European integration—vertical and horizontal integration.

While this regulation about funding was another significant achievement for the Europarties, they aimed for a proper 'statute' for political parties at the European level and this was not yet achieved. Eventually, the regulation was amended in 2007. The revision allowed all European-level political parties to campaign in EP elections and to establish European political foundations (Bardi et al., 2014; Gagatek & Van Hecke, 2014; Wolfs, 2022). Europarties thereby gained additional resources. European political foundations could be used for a range of activities such as organizing events, forging links, and producing and distributing information. There have been subsequent rule changes—amendments—in 2014, 2018, and 2019. And in 2020 the Commission presented an initiative for a new Europarty regulation. It failed to reach an agreement, and at the time of writing, there were still ongoing negotiations over such new regulations intended to be in place in view of the 2024 EP elections. Reforms to the rules governing political parties in the EU might clarify their role in relation to election campaigns, among other things.

Since 2004 all recognized Europarties have a legal personality (in the country where they are registered) and receive public funding from the EP/EU—subject to certain conditions.[7] As of early 2024, there are ten

[7] Their funding is subject to the Regulation No 1141/2014 (further amended by Regulations 2018/673 and 2019/493) and oversight of their activities by the Authority for European Political Parties and Associated Foundations (APPF). See The Authority | About us | Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations (www.appf.europa.eu/appf/en/home/the-authority). It provides an overview of

registered Europarties (see Chapter 1). The regulations have served the interests of the existing Europarties well also by structuring the EU political party system, by limiting the available choices. And most importantly, the regulations have advanced the development of the Europarties themselves. In the words of Van Hecke (2018: 12): 'Their development, especially in relation to the affiliated EP political groups and alongside European political foundations, has been impressive, both legally and politically'. Through the regulations the Europarties have moved on to further stages of development. The legal framework has contributed to additional authority, resources, and discretion of the Europarties. They have achieved a greater independence from EP political groups as well as from national member parties. As Ladrech (2006: 497) noted: 'In the longer term, the new circumstances in which the party federations find themselves promote a more independent position than they have experienced to date'.

Overall, the constitutional (Treaty) recognition and subsequent legislation are a development towards more regulated and institutionalized Europarties. Why so? It clearly is a development which is driven by the dynamics of European integration. But we also argue that it has a lot to do with ideas and policy objectives and with key activists within the party families and the Europarties. Since the first formal introduction of the party article in the Maastricht Treaty there was tireless and coordinated work to achieve rule changes through a proper legal basis. These episodes illustrate how much change has been brought about by the actions of people like Martens. The development perfectly demonstrates how such activists can play an important role as both agenda-setters and norm or policy entrepreneurs. There is no escaping that dedicated and persistent 'entrepreneurs'—in line with our theoretical discussion and conceptualization in Chapter 2—are behind the various initiatives for the recognition and regulation of Europarties. Unsurprisingly, these actors are found within the circles of the Europarties and within the related EP political groups, with further support obtained from within the Commission. The concepts of agenda-setting and advocacy coalitions help explain why the Europarties have succeeded in their pursuits of the regulatory framework, which in part reflects their ambitions to build an ever-closer union.

registered parties and their foundations, subsidies, and donations and contributions. The 'Authority' oversees the registration of European political parties and foundations and their compliance with the regulation.

Characteristically, the key champions of the Europarties have highlighted and consistently referred to the argument that Europarties are crucial to democratizing the Union. The democracy argument is then used to further legitimize the Europarties. They saw the regulatory framework of Europarties, including the funding regime which they benefit from, as an opportunity to expand their role in the EU political system, and as a development they could take advantage of for their own ends. In sum, as we noted at the beginning of this chapter, Europarties both reflect and create the circumstances that affect their existential conditions. And the regulations also have consequences for the Europarties also in terms of organization. How they are organizationally structured is the subject of the next section.

Organizational Structure

This section addresses the organizational trajectories of the three main Europarties: EPP, PES, and ELDR/ALDE. The paths they have followed—from the 1970s to the 2020s—are broadly similar. We find substantial similarities between the Europarties.[8] By the mid-1990s, they had broadly the same organizational structure (Hix & Lord, 1997: Ch. 3). And they reminded of traditional party structures with the presidency, bureau or council, congress, working groups, and so on. In other words, they had a common structure of activities.

Things have changed since the 1990s, when the party article was introduced in the Treaty of Maastricht. Today's Europarties are fundamentally different from the looser transnational party federations or confederations that emerged in Europe in the 1970s. The Europarties are more regulated and institutionalized. The party regulation decided in 2003 prompted organizational consolidation inside the main Europarties and the creation of new Europarties, thereby making it another important step in the development of Europarties (Lightfoot, 2006). The regulation helped to clarify the role of the Europarties within the EU political system. It allowed for a clear—or clearer—differentiation of roles between the EP political groups as well as the national parties and the Europarties.

[8] The organizations of the main Europarties, until the early 2000s, are introduced in Delwit et al. (2004a), Hix and Lord (1997), and Johansson and Zervakis (2002). For the liberals, less studied, see also Smith (2014).

The new regulatory framework was expected to give a strong impetus to the further development of the organizational structures of the Europarties (e.g., Bardi, 2002, 2006). As Bartolini (2005: 339) wrote in relation to the new regulation:

> As a result of the need to formalize the conditions of financing and of operational survival, the organization of political parties may experience a further institutionalization moving from the current network form to a more hierarchical and authoritative organization at the EU level. Europarties may become more organized because this is the only way to legally obtain the money they need to survive.

The party regulation therefore suggested a potentially major impact on the organizational development of Europarties; on their institutionalization and increasing 'systemic integration' (Bardi, 2004: 319; Lightfoot, 2006: 311). The new circumstances in which the Europarties found themselves could promote a more independent position.

But while they became better equipped for organizing, the Europarties remain constrained by parties at the national level and face obstacles to developing their actorness. As a result, they do not automatically assume a more significant role and develop into more hierarchical organizations. In addition to regulations and resources in general, authoritative leadership is required. Over five decades, the Europarties have evolved into larger and more complex organizations. This organizational growth increases the need for internal coordination, which in turn consolidates the structures of the Europarties. However, national member parties have their own identities and interests to protect, and when combined with the further moves towards deeper European integration, they have an incentive to both advance their objectives through the Europarties and also to safeguard their own positions in decision-making.

Turning to comparison of the organizational components, there is clear adaptive pressure, and this is a key reason for why the Europarties very closely resemble each other, in the same way as national parties within one country often have almost identical organizational structures. Functional requirements and other institutional factors explain why the Europarties' organizational structures resemble each other. In the early 2000s, three close observers (Delwit et al., 2004b: 10b) wrote: 'A kind of mimicry, in actual fact strongly encouraged by the European institutional context, has had an effect in the structuring of European federations. They all have

nearly the same internal organs'. These organs included the congress, the council, the general secretariat, and, in the cases of the EPP and PES but also in the then ELDR, a meeting of party and government leaders (see also, e.g., Hix & Lord, 1997: 183–195; Jansen & Van Hecke, 2011: Ch. 8; Van Hecke & Johansson, 2013a, 2013b). At the same time, while the organizational components among the various European party federations were virtually identical, their 'methods of functioning' were nonetheless different (Delwit et al., 2004b: 11). The membership and internal ideological cohesion impacted on the organizational crystallization. As noted above, internal divisions, primarily between national member parties, can create obstacles to building consensus and reaching agreements.

While Europarty organizations are often depicted as similar, they are not identical. In a rare study of Europarty organizations, Gagatek (2008) demonstrated the existence of important organizational differences between the EPP and the PES relating, among other elements, to their structure, the design of their decision-making process, membership policy, and how party goals were specified. In line with Gagatek, we concur that there are organizational differences between the Europarties. Yet, on the structural level, we simultaneously find significant similarities. And institutional factors suggest that the similarities are unlikely to decrease, but rather increase. In this vein, as Smith (2014) argued in the case of the liberals, while the origins of transnational party-political cooperation were mainly ideological, repeated institutional reforms, whether within the EP or through revisions of the Treaties more widely, created pragmatic reasons for Europarties to consolidate and to expand, and ultimately to seek power.

In the 2020s, the Europarties are more institutionally embedded in the EU political system and procedurally better equipped for acting independently from EP political groups and national parties—an important step in their institutionalization. The structuration of the organization is a central indicator of institutionalization and reveals a lot about the networks of these Europarties. Over time, they have built stronger organizational structures and their staff have increased considerably, although as reported in Chapter 1 the EP political groups nonetheless have much stronger resources. The key organs inside the Europarties are the congress, presidency, executive committee (or similar), secretariat, and leaders' meeting (and ministerial meetings where relevant). Their highest decision-making body is the congress, formally at least. Other organs include the council or political assembly and the presidency. The EP

political groups are integrated into the Europarties and there are also close connections between the Europarties and the affiliated European political foundations.[9] Their collaboration encompasses everything from organizing events and preparing publications to more direct contributions to policymaking. Viewed together, this means that Europarties have generated resources, capacity, and networks.

In addition, there are associate members such as those for youth and women. And it is worth noting that these Europarties, in somewhat different forms, allow for individual membership through which grassroots party members can engage within the organization of the Europarties. Even so, although to varying extent, individual members have until now had little if any influence over drafting manifestos and selecting leaders and candidates in EP elections and, arguably, should be granted real participatory powers (Hertner, 2019). Engaging with grassroots members makes sense given that Europarties are expected to—as stated in the 'party article' in the Treaty of Maastricht—'contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of the citizens of the Union'. However, the natural habitat of Europarties is rather the Brussels-based institutions than the more national societal spaces in the respective countries.

The Europarties have also introduced internal organizational reforms, which to some extent reduce their dependence on their individual member parties. Although the constitutional provisions of the Europarties allow for majority voting, they tend towards consensus to avoid internal conflict—a recognition of the 'transnational' character of the Europarties and the strong position of national member parties. Tackling larger collective problems requires consensus or then some issues are postponed or not brought up as a matter for discussion. However, what 'consensus' means in practice may vary both across cases and time. Within Europarties, there is a tendency to claim that decisions have been reached by consensus, unanimously, when in fact the controversies behind the decisions have not necessarily been completely solved. That may also reflect asymmetric power within the Europarties. In principle, however, these Europarties can take decisions and adopt policies, programmes, and manifestos based

[9] As noted in Chapter 1, the European political foundations close to the EPP, PES, and ALDE, respectively, are: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (WMCES); Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS); and European Liberal Forum (ELF).

on some kind of majority vote. It is in these contexts that they exercise their essential coordinating function, with continuous exchanges of views and sharing of information to facilitate collective agreements.

What also emerges from this overview is the leaders' meeting as one of the most significant activities of the Europarties and a key element of their organizational identity. Such meetings have become increasingly common. Since the 1980s, the EPP since 1983, Europarties regularly organize summit meetings of party and government leaders prior to, but also independently of, the European Council. Involving politicians at the highest level brings legitimacy and purpose to the Europarties. The question about real impact of the summit meetings will be discussed in the next chapter. Another question, outside the scope of this book, is how Europarty activities and specifically meetings of leaders influence the policies or identities of national political parties. More generally and amidst the backdrop of the evolution of the Europarties, the literature on the 'Europeanization' of political parties should not dismiss such potential Europeanizing effects.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have sought not only to describe but also to explain why Europarties are organized the way they are. Despite their complex operating environment and their characterization as transnational rather supranational actors, the institutional development of the EU and added impetus through their regulatory recognition and funding have helped Europarties to evolve further, not least in their organizational capacity. It also illustrates the vital role of advocacy coalitions in the processes.

We have discussed the organizational evolution and structure of the Europarties, using the examples of the EPP, PES, and ELDR/ALDE. We find organizational continuity in these Europarties and similarities across them. They have broadly the same internal structure, and we have uncovered a pattern of increasingly institutionalized Europarty organizations. The Europarties have manifested a significant organizational development through considerable organizational growth and strengthening. Europarties—as seen over the past five decades—both in terms of identity and structure are very different from the much looser transnational parties or confederations that emerged in Europe in the 1970s. Their evolution reflects incremental growth and adjustment and can be explained by a combination of collective action and collective identity. Their very close

resemblance in terms of organizational structure can be illustrated by the party and government leaders' meetings organized by each Europarty. The EPP stands out because it has been most effective in organizing such meetings alongside other internal bodies. It has set an example for the other Europarties, which became evident in the context of the transformations in the 1990s. The PES and ELDR both turned their party federations into actual 'parties', and the change was not just symbolic but carried implications for how they structured themselves internally.

We distinguish two underpinning elements of Europarty organization. The first is the way organization is used to structure activity and mobilization, through different bodies and layers, in the pursuit of a common cause. Europarties must organize support (at different levels)—with coordination from party headquarters in Brussels. It is here that Europarties are vehicles for mobilizing their networks and providing pathways to having an impact. The ability to mobilize is crucial; willingness to work together, acting collectively. So is serious political will, especially when considering the strong role of national member parties inside the Europarties. The second is the importance of collective identity, the EPP's connection to Christian Democratic founders of European integration being an excellent example of such legacies.

The Europarties have displayed the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. But a more pertinent conclusion, and one that is central to the argument advanced in this book, is that they have shaped the circumstances of their own existence. They interact with the environment—and alter it to their own benefit. Evidence shows how closely linked the organizational evolution of the Europarties is to major institutional reforms such as the introduction of direct elections to the EP, successive Treaty reforms, and not least the empowerment of the Parliament, as well as EU enlargement. And with the introduction of public funding of Europarties from the EU budget, they became less financially dependent both on EP political groups and national member parties. EP political groups may want a strengthening of Europarties as a counterweight to national parties (and governments), however.

Not least because of the regulations the Europarties find themselves in a better position to perform their functions than t in the late twentieth century. They carry more authority and have more discretion over their actions, even if there still are considerable limits to the powers of the Europarties. They have increasingly moved away from reliance on national

member parties yet remain heavily reliant on the latter. The Europarties' power still depends on close coordination with national capitals and on national member parties supporting various initiatives. These vertical relationships are continuously negotiated and evolving.

Our analysis of Europarty organizations also improves scholarly understanding of transnational organizing and reveals some interesting patterns. Cooperative habits across the Europarties have shifted decisively. One possible reason is that the Europarties offer incentives, related both to policy-seeking and identity, for continuing interaction. Another is regulatory frameworks. But the underlying challenge is that national parties, whether in government or opposition, constrain Europarties' options by making non-binding commitments to reconcile views and positions. National member parties may have varying ambitions for 'political parties at the European level'. For the future, there remain questions about the Europarties' role as campaign organizations in EP elections and about their overall independent authority and discretion. The Europarties continue to be dependent on the support and commitment of national member parties, which generally want to run their own election campaigns and determine their own policies. If Europarties become more autonomous and influential, therefore, the likelier it is that they will be closely scrutinized from the headquarters of national parties—a theme that we shall return to in Chapter 6. A similar situation applies to the EP political groups and their members. Nonetheless, the organizational evolution of Europarties suggests they have become better placed to shape their own futures and that the Europarties are so entrenched in the EU political system that they will probably move forward along their existing trajectories.

This chapter has shown how the Europarties have acted as agenda-setters and advocacy coalitions regarding their own legal status and organizational development. The integrationist logic of the EU system, again shaped by Europarties themselves, helps explain the development of Europarties and their incremental growth as organizations. In the next two chapters we will approach Europarties less as a dependent variable and more as an independent variable—studying them as agents of integration and highlighting their impact on Treaty reform processes and beyond.

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CHAPTER 4

Europarties and the Politics of Treaty Reform: Ascendance, Capacity, Locus

Introduction

The main political parties of the European Union (EU)—Europarties—are among its main agenda setters and have systematically been advocating Treaty reform. Through engagement with national member parties and political groups in the European Parliament (EP) as well as representatives in the other EU institutions, the Europarties can significantly shape bargaining and outcomes by fostering cooperation within their respective political families. To wield effective influence requires such ability to bring together the partisan networks, among other things.

To fully account for the continued activity and potential influence of Europarties it is vital to consider behavioural tendencies manifested in structural changes in the institutional environment. And here many of the goals of the Europarties that can be traced back to the 1980s, favouring stronger supranational institutions and especially the empowerment of the EP, have been met. Arguably, as seen over several decades there has been a gradual yet consistent shift away from intergovernmental cooperation towards supranational integration with ensuing incentives for parties to form transnational alliances.

In this chapter we once again analyze the role of Europarties and take stock of the academic literature on this topic. Doing so, we shed light on the under-addressed impact of the Europarties in studies of Treaty reforms in the EU, from the Single European Act (SEA) in the 1980s to

K. M. Johansson and T. Raunio, *Transnational Parties and Advocacy in European Integration*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-62285-4_4

the current Lisbon Treaty in the 2000s, including the Treaties of Maastricht (Treaty on European Union, TEU), Amsterdam, and Nice. The chapter also discusses the Draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, which was adopted by the Convention on the Future of Europe, also known as the European Convention, in 2003, primarily because the 'convention' format provides a different type of a forum, arguably more conducive to partisan influence, than standard Intergovernmental Conferences (IGC). Revisiting these Treaty reform processes helps deepen our understanding of a foundational element of European integration and the EU itself, of the forces behind EU Treaty reforms in the past and probably also in the future. During these decades, a period that spans a large part of the history of European integration, Europarties have advocated for the integration of Europe and have sought to further their cause including their own constitutional recognition.

We address two main questions: What impact do the Europarties have on the Treaty reforms? Under what conditions can they be effective, that is, when are they most likely to achieve their goals? To answer these questions, we centre on how Europarties have sought to shape the successive Treaty reforms. Our task is examining attempts at Europarty influence in the politics of Treaty reform, assessing whether Europarties and their networks have shaped the EU's constitutional foundations. In doing so, we raise additional but related questions. Who are involved? And how do the various actors within the Europarty networks seek to make an impact?

Simplifying slightly, explanations of European integration fall into intergovernmental and supranational approaches. Here, we also build on transnational approaches to uncover forces and dynamics involving non-state or nongovernmental actors. They feature prominently in the EU political system and policy processes, not least through agenda-setting. The presence in the EU arena of advocacy coalitions and transnational networks, among others, suggests that to understand the nature of the EU one must go beyond intergovernmental relations. Scholars have identified the pressures on parties to adapt to the EU political system. Treaty changes in the 1980s and 1990s reduced national vetoes in favour of majority decisions in the Council and empowered the EP, which increased the pressure on parties to invest resources in European level coordination and cooperation (cf. Johansson, 1997). Not for nothing do purposeful actors align with one another in EP political groups and transnational party federations—and find common cause with broadly likeminded parties. IGCs and European Council meetings incentivized

the federations to convene regular summits of national leaders from the time of the TEU negotiations onwards (Hix & Lord, 1997; Lord, 2002; more below).

Previous studies have found evidence that Europarties play a role in facilitating collective agreements in the EU. They offer venues for political leaders to discuss in anticipation of a zone of agreement in the European Council itself. An important part of that involves party summitry, largely composed of party and government leaders. The pre-summit meetings are influential in preparing various initiatives and in working out common positions. The party networks as advocacy coalitions are particularly relevant in terms of agenda-setting in EU governance; they influence the policymaking agenda of European institutions where transnational parties advance their own goals and coordinate their joint positions (Ladrech, 1997, 2000, 2006). Johansson (1999, 2002a) has documented this type of activity for both the Party of European Socialists (PES) and the European People's Party (EPP) and demonstrated their capacity to organize intra-party family relations (more below). The Europarties have extensive networks, which constitute a vital resource increasing their capacity needed to impact Treaty reforms.

But their influence goes further than agenda-setting and coordination. Through organizational capacity and transnational collective action, Europarties both shape and are shaped by the institutional structure of the EU and in many ways affect the policymaking environment in 'Brussels'. They do so through activities which involve dimensions of agenda-setting and advocacy, performed by transnational partisan actors. But finding these transnational impacts is not straightforward. They may be hidden in various channels of communication. It may also be difficult to distinguish transnational impacts from other sources of influence. Specifically, political actors in these networks may represent both national parties and governments as well as Europarties. The test of whether Europarties matter is then mainly to see whether heads of government associated with a particular political family are mobilized along Europarty lines. Proving who participates is one thing. Proving effects is quite another.

This chapter thus explores the influence Europarties have had in past Treaty reform processes. It shows that the causes and effects of Treaty reforms are linked in more complex ways than the conventional intergovernmental prediction suggests. By contrast, guided by the over-arching question of how, and under what conditions Europarties affect Treaty decision outcomes, this chapter offers a different analysis of this relationship. We argue that Europarties are not alone able to shape bargaining

outcomes but perform an important role in these processes. There is evidence in academic research to that effect. But the Europarties face obstacles. We can expect them to impact, but not without conditions. How much they manage to shape Treaties and EU governance overall, depends on factors such as domestic politics and peer pressure. More broadly, we argue in this chapter that three central factors shape the extent to which Europarties influence Treaty outcomes: the partisan composition of the European Council, the cohesion and capacity for mobilization of Europarties, and the choice of venue for deliberations and negotiations of Treaty changes.

We explore the influence of these factors empirically over a longer time based primarily on previous studies which rely on complementary forms of primary material such as extensive interviews and documentation. We centre on general tendencies in the material, based on multiple interviews, and only draw on individual interviews to exemplify common opinions among the interviewees. Speaking from experience, over time it became harder to gain access to data such as interviews that enable scholars to trace government leaders' positions. This also reflects the development and status of the Europarties themselves in terms of political relevance at the highest level of decision-making in the EU.

While having a particular focus on Treaty negotiations and reform, we thus also explore the conditions under which Europarties can be expected to 'make a difference' or 'matter' with a view to other instances of Europarty attempts at influence. Existing research shows that Europarties really do have influence, but also that their influence is conditional (e.g., Johansson, 2016, 2017; Johansson & Raunio, 2019; Van Hecke et al., 2018). Under the right circumstances Europarties have wielded decisive influence, including circumstances in which they have found themselves in numerical supremacy in the European Council and have displayed evidence of internal cohesion. Depending on ascendancy or cohesion, particularly the two largest and most powerful Europarties, the EPP, comprising Christian Democratic and conservative parties, and PES, have left their mark on the Treaties. We compare their performances and track records as influencers. The third largest political family, the liberals, has also been represented in the European Council and other EU institutions. With fewer prime ministers, however, the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR)/Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) has been less successful in influencing the Treaties. Yet it has also organized leaders' meetings, well-attended by government leaders

overall. The chapter shows how the Europarties' capacity to mobilize the networks and personal relations at the top level facilitates influence. In this way, they have been capitalizing on their vast party networks.

Exploring our argument that Europarties play an important role in EU politics and Treaty reform but not without conditions, two implications stand out. One is for the analysis of European integration. In contrast to accounts that emphasize intergovernmental relations and national bargaining positions, we stress preference formation through transnational mechanisms, such as party networks. The other implication is for studies on Europarties. This chapter contributes to the literature on political parties and groups at the EU level by mapping how participation in decision-making at this highest level of EU politics feeds back into the organization of Europarties. Europarties have gradually seized a bigger political role and are involved in policymaking across a wide range of issues.

The chapter is divided into four sections. Beyond this introduction, the following two sections briefly introduce the fundamentals of EU Treaty reform and coalition formation, respectively. After that a more substantive section divided into three subsections elaborates on the three factors assumed to be shaping the influence of Europarty politics in the European Council, specifying why and how Europarty influence is conditional. It analyzes the quantity and quality of Europarty presence in the European Council and impact in Treaty reforms through illustrative evidence. Through exploring the results of Europarty influence on the Treaties, it addresses the question of how much collective influence the Europarties have wielded over the content of these Treaties. We conclude by bringing together the theoretical arguments and central findings, as well as by discussing the broader implications of our findings for existing and future research and for future reforms of the EU itself.

Understanding EU Treaty Reform: Context and Complexity

Treaty reforms in the EU play out in a particular context and dynamic. They involve a complex set of actors, and this complexity also reflects the complexity of the broader EU system, general EU bargaining, and decision-making. But the existing literature on EU Treaty-making and particularly on IGCs often treats these processes as unique and as mainly involving national politicians representing governments. However, there

has been a 'partial eclipse' of the IGCs, as governments no longer dominate this domain the way they used to do (Hodson & Maher, 2018). There is a much wider range of actors involved and the significance of their role in the Treaty reform process is a matter of empirical research. While the growing impact of the Parliament, and its strategies for self-empowerment, in overall Treaty reform has already been addressed by the literature (e.g., Christiansen & Reh, 2009; Corbett et al., 2016; Héritier et al., 2019; Rittberger, 2005;), the role of EP political groups has generally not been taken into consideration (for a rare contribution see Johansson, 2020; see also Fontaine, 2009).

An IGC is necessary to negotiate a new Treaty, which provides the EU's constitutional basis. Treaty negotiations in IGCs have resulted in wide-ranging constitutional and institutional changes since the 1980s (Laursen, 2012a, 2016a, 2016b and references therein; Segers & Van Hecke, 2023 including chapters on Treaties and Treaty changes). IGCs constitute milestones in the history, process, and long-term patterns of European integration, and they have resulted in changes considered to be 'history-making' decisions (Moravcsik, 1998). Some of the most important decisions affecting the EU have been taken by IGCs, and that has set a pattern. The EU is based on Treaties negotiated and ratified by member states and these Treaties form a kind of 'constitution' for the Union. The member states are often described as the 'masters of the Treaties'. But to describe them like that is to underplay the other forces at work, including Europarties that lie at the centre of this book.

The 'history-making' nature of IGCs and their explicit aim of producing Treaty reforms means that the relevant actors—at the highest level the prime ministers and presidents representing the member states—are keen to seek alliances along ideological or partisan lines, at least as a complement to their pursuit of national interests in the negotiation process itself. Working through Europarties brings significant advantages. While governments are at the centre of the negotiations leading to the adoption of the Treaties, to describe IGCs simply as an intergovernmental or interstate exercise is therefore one-dimensional and obscures the transnational and ideational forces at work. These partisan effects can be felt through the coordinated responses within the broader political families for which Europarties are the organizational platforms. It also bears noting that governments to varying extents have been keen to develop close relations with supranational institutions, including the Parliament. In the past, more federalist-minded member states, including

the Belgian and Italian governments, have made their support for Treaty revisions conditional on the support of the EP. This has strengthened the EP political groups and the wider support needed behind comprehensive Treaty reforms.

Coalition Formation: The Partisan Hypothesis and Its Competitors

Theories of coalition formation address the question why actors form some coalitions rather than others; what the motives driving the choice of coalition partners are. The partisan hypothesis suggests that political actors form coalitions primarily based on ideological affinity, as defined by party affiliation. By contrast, competing theories point to power, interest, and culture as driving concerns. Ideological proximity thus constitutes one of several bases for coalition-building. In the context of EU negotiations, the Franco-German alliance is frequently considered a power-based coalition, formed for the purpose of producing pre-agreements that set the parameters for the broader negotiations (e.g., Krotz & Schild, 2015). The notion of interest-based coalitions receives extensive support in research on negotiations in the Council (e.g., Thomson, 2011). Cultural-based coalitions include, notably, the distinct North/South or North/South/East divides identified in European level bargaining (e.g., Naurin & Lindahl, 2008).

Political alliances may emerge for different reasons. Voting patterns in the Council may reflect strong common interests across ideological divides in addition to national interests. And EU decision-making, especially in the Parliament, has been built on a 'grand coalition' between the leading political families and their Europarties, EPP and PES. As was seen in the previous chapter, the Europarties combined into a broad coalition driving the regulation of 'political parties at the European level' including their funding (Johansson & Raunio, 2005; see also, e.g., Wolfs, 2022). That process showed cross-party consensus on a matter of both principles and interests. In this vein, Europarties and their EP political groups have often acted on powerful incentives to seek alliances or work out common positions across themselves.

In the study of EU politics, the partisan hypothesis receives extensive support in empirical research on the EP and its dimensions of contestation (e.g., Hix et al., 2007). This is present in the voting patterns

of MEPs and in the organization of political groups. Since the formation of the first political groups in the then Common Assembly—the forerunner to the EP—in 1953 political families have organized themselves into such political groups.[1] Overall, research has shown that the EU political space is defined by two dimensions: the traditional left–right dimension, constituting the central dimension of contestation, and the independence–integration dimension particular to the EU, capturing attitudes towards European integration. The two dimensions are present in the positions that national parties take on European issues, and in the programmes and manifestos of the Europarties. However, these two dimensions have been supplemented by a third ideological dimension: the Green–Alternative–Libertarian/Traditional–Authoritarian–Nationalist (GAL–TAN), which is based on cultural and social values. The old conflict and divide between left and right has been challenged by structural shifts over the decades, reflecting new circumstances, and one of the main developments of such shifts is the rise of nationalist (populist) parties (e.g., Hix et al., 2024; Hooghe & Marks, 2018).

Even some assessments of coalition formation in the Council find support for the partisan hypothesis and for an ideological left–right dimension, observed, for instance, by shifts in member state positions as a product of changes in government (Hagemann, 2008; Hagemann & Hoyland, 2008; Manow et al., 2008; Mattila, 2004). These results, identifying party-political patterning, generate the expectation of coalitions based on party politics rather than nationally defined preferences. According to Manow et al. (2008: 24) 'party affiliation constantly turns out to be a significant predictor for the observable voting patterns in the Council and in the EP, often a better predictor than nationality or regional economic interests. This even seems to hold for Intergovernmental Conferences…'[2] Their party-political 'centre of gravity' approach

[1] The three original political groups, comprised by Christian Democrats, socialists, and liberals, were broadly similar, as most members were in favour of promoting European construction and strengthening the role of the Assembly.

[2] With references to Johansson (1999, 2002a, 2002b), and Aspinwall (2002). Aspinwall (2002) examined ideology and national preferences on European integration and took issue with conventional explanations of state preference formation on European integration. He tested the hypothesis that left-right ideology is a better predictor than nationality of party views on integration, and then analyzed the relationship between government ideology and government position on several dozen proposals considered during the IGC leading up to the signing of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997. He found no significant

strongly suggests that fluctuations in the relative strength of political parties have been a major determinant in the history of European integration (Manow et al., 2008; also, e.g., Chryssogelos, 2022). For example, Europe's shift to the left in the second half of the 1990s was important in facilitating the inclusion of the employment title in the Amsterdam Treaty or in the reinterpretation of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) (Manow et al., 2008: 20).

Given the findings outlined above, coalitions among member states, and particularly in the Council, are predicted by the partisan composition of national governments. But the evidence remains mixed. Recent research, drawing on survey data, finds that member states with similar politico-economic systems have a greater tendency to cooperate with each other, and that governments' ideological similarity has become more important over time, particularly as structured by the GAL–TAN and European integration dimensions (Johansson et al., 2023). If the countries are close to each other on these dimensions they are likely to cooperate to a greater degree. Their analysis concludes that this might be a consequence of an increasing politicization of European integration and of a greater prominence for conflict on issues structured by these dimensions rather than the traditional left–right dimension (Johansson et al., 2023: 12; see also, e.g., Hooghe & Marks, 2009). But according to that study, the cooperation between the countries does not change significantly when, for example, there is a change of government between the right and the left. There are somewhat different dynamics that can affect cooperative relations between governments, but it can be difficult to really determine exactly which dynamic is decisive. And their conclusions come with the important caveat that the strength of cooperative relations is likely determined by different factors, 'some related to micro level factors of individual relations and some to member state characteristics or idiosyncrasies' (Johansson et al., 2023: 13). The latter can be normative factors such as commitment to shared norms and values, among other things. Finally, they note that there is also variation in the strength of relations depending on policy areas.

relationship between nationality and preferences on integration, posing a challenge for liberal, functional, and historical theories of state preference formation. Aspinwall's study pointed to 'a significant and robust relationship' between party ideology (and the resulting ideology of governments) and their preferences regarding integration generally, and the Amsterdam Treaty negotiations specifically.

Research results in this field are at best predictive but not deterministic. Notably, there are continual shifts in the partisan composition of governments. This is another field to pursue further. Nonetheless, a range of studies indicate that party politics matters for EU politics and has gained significance. In the words of Chryssogelos (2022: 452): 'Focusing on EU institutions in particular, the growing role of party politics is also evident'. Translated to the context of European Council negotiations, the partisan hypothesis generates the expectation of a party-political divide, with heads of government coordinating their positions within the dominant transnational parties—the EPP, the PES, and the ALDE. The European Council, a traditional stronghold of interstate negotiations, may be described as a least-likely setting for party politics or partisan coalitions. Yet, one must remember the 'high stakes' involved in European Council summitry and the continuous interaction between leaders. For the heads of state or governments and of EU institutions participating at this level of politics, the top of the EU's hierarchy, there are direct benefits from having like-minded 'friends' around the negotiation table. They build up useful contacts that can evolve into a substantial network of actors. Such networks facilitate policy influence and are one of the reasons for getting involved in the Europarties, which structure those powerful networking opportunities.

The Quantity and Quality of Europarty Presence in the European Council

In this section we will further outline our central theoretical argument. We then present empirical evidence to support the case for Europarty influence but also for the limits thereof—in the context of EU Treaty negotiations and reform. In Chapter 1 we raised the question of the impact of Europarties; whether they matter or not, whether they have influence, meaning successful attempts to shape an outcome from what it otherwise would have been in the absence of the action. But influence can be general or specific; it can be manifest or latent. The precise influence of Europarties is, of course, difficult to isolate in practice. One way to assess whether Europarties matter or 'make a difference' is to gauge the extent to which they attempt to mobilize and influence. In other words, to explore how Europarties, through their party networks, make efforts to impact political developments. We can track their attempts at influence through their actions and institutional presence, and we can seek to identify the 'prime movers'.

There is certainly evidence of party-political mobilization through Europarties having been decisive for decision-making on EU Treaties. In particular, the EPP was significant in the processes preceding the adoption of the Single European Act (Budden, 1994, 2002; Johansson, 2002b), and the Maastricht Treaty (Johansson, 2002a). These reforms were significant in pushing European integration towards more supranationalism. This illustrates that a Europarty like the EPP can be conceived of as both an agenda-setter and an advocacy coalition, a transnational one, bringing together policymakers at different levels. It facilitated collective agreements at the level of the European Council. Let us next explore these developments in more detail.

In the 1980s, the call for a major Treaty reform came against the backdrop of a growing concern about the bloc's competitiveness, as well as the challenges that enlargement and external relations posed. Eventually, the Milan European Council in June 1985 took a decision to open an IGC to revise the Treaties. It was welcomed as an opportunity to reinforce institutions and decision-making as well as to extend policy-making to new areas of activity. During the IGC, the Christian Democrats continued their coordination with a view to shaping the detailed agenda and the EPP contributed to advancing progress in the IGC. Issues on the agenda included the completion of the internal market and environment policy, as well as research and technology. The agreement included new decision-making procedures, with more majority voting (including on single market proposals). What was to become the SEA, which came into force in 1987, was largely the result of impact from Christian Democrat leaders in the EPP, and their determination to push through reforms to shift European integration in a more supranational direction. In 1985, the heads of the German, Irish, and the three Benelux governments were Christian Democrats, while the deputy prime minister (Arnaldo Forlani) and the foreign minister in the Italian government were Christian Democrats (Giulio Andreotti, the former and would-be prime minister). Of the original six member states, Christian Democrats were still in leading positions in five and out of altogether ten governments EPP member parties were represented in six. The Christian Democrat leaders knew each other well. At the time, the EPP Conference brought together some 30 high-level politicians, including leaders of national governments, political parties, and parliamentary groups as well as the presidencies of the EPP and of the EPP Group, along with Commissioners and leading MEPs from the Parliament.

However, despite significant results the Single European Act failed to satisfy the most federalist minded. Therefore, as an advocacy group or coalition, the EPP continued to keep up the pressure for a new and more fundamental Treaty review, one transforming the European Community (EC) to a genuine Union. In the making of the Maastricht Treaty or the TEU, the meetings of Christian Democrat leaders shaped both the agenda and the outcome of the negotiations. Previous studies display a clear link between the Maastricht Treaty outcome and the demands and positions of the EPP (Hanley, 2004: 250; Hix & Lord, 1997: 189; Jansen, 2006: 112; Johansson, 2002a: 887). Many of the EPP's requirements made their way into the new Treaty. A comparative analysis shows that most of the EPP's demands were satisfactorily met and that there was no progress at all on only one point, namely on the *avis conforme*—assent of the EP for new actions (Article 235) and revisions of the Treaties (Article 236). It is also worth noting that Wilfried Martens, EPP president and prime minister of Belgium, had drawn up most of the important demands in agreement with Ruud Lubbers, the Dutch prime minister who would chair the Maastricht European Council. In an interview, Lubbers said that at the time of Maastricht the EPP 'did a lot as Christian Democrats together', were 'a strong family', and 'still a team in Maastricht'.[3] Also in an interview, Martens noted that positions were 'strongly inspired by the EPP programme', although as some of the EPP prime ministers were in coalition governments there were no 'purely EPP attitudes' (see also Martens, 2008: 104–108).[4] In sum, the six EPP heads of government formed a core of the advocacy coalition. It would be inaccurate to describe their political actions as just intergovernmental.

The EPP mobilized the network and was a cohesive family of mainly Christian Democrats. They shared a federalist thinking, although to varying degrees. They were inspired by the legacy of their ideological movement and its place in the history of European integration and were also seeking to alter its institutional architecture. Yet, there is also evidence that internal fissure and limits in the ambition and capacity to coordinate positions may reduce Europarty influence in processes of Treaty reform as well (Johansson, 2016, 2017). Indeed, as we already have

[3] Interview conducted by Karl Magnus Johansson, Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, 15 June 2000.

[4] Interview conducted by Karl Magnus Johansson, Brussels, 30 March 2000.

discussed in Chapters 1 and 3 of this book, the Europarties have no formal powers to take decisions binding their government leaders and therefore successful ex ante policy coordination between national member parties is essential for Europarties to achieve their goals in the European Council. And individual Europarties carry more bargaining weight the stronger representation they have in the European Council (Hix & Lord, 1997; Johansson, 1999, 2002a, 2002b, 2016, 2017; Lightfoot, 2005; Tallberg & Johansson, 2008; Van Hecke, 2004).

The presence of such transnational partisan influence is not exactly surprising given that the Europarties gather and connect influential decision-makers. At the same time, government leaders are expected to act in the so-called national interest. In the European Council, where all decisions on constitutional change are made, partisan coalitions constitute one of several alternative forms of alliance. Under what conditions can we expect partisan coalitions to be the dominant pattern? What factors can be hypothesized to condition Europarty influence? In the remainder of this section, we explore the three factors hypothesized to shape the scope and influence of (Euro)party politics in EU politics, in particular Treaty negotiation outcomes: the relative numerical strength of Europarties, the cohesion and mobilization of Europarties, and venue choice.[5]

Relative Numerical Strength of Europarties in the European Council

The heads of government in the European Council represent national parties in office. Depending on the pattern of electoral success in the member states, the European Council has traditionally been dominated by, or divided between, socialists/social democrats, liberals, and Christian Democrats/conservatives. We hypothesize that the relative number

[5] Discussion partly drawn from Tallberg and Johansson (2008). See also Johansson (2015a, 2016, 2017), Johansson and Raunio (2019), Van Hecke (2010), and Van Hecke et al. (2018). Tallberg and Johansson (2008) suggest a third factor shaping the influence of party politics in the European Council: the salience of an issue on the left–right dimension. However, we have decided against incorporating this factor because, besides its bias generally against issues relating to other ideological dimensions or agenda items, it is less relevant in the context of Treaty negotiations where the issues on the agenda of the European Council and decision-making reflect the left–right dimension less than otherwise in EU policymaking. Instead, we have added venue choice (format) as a factor hypothesized to shape influence in Treaty reform, specifically. It also bears noting that the other two factors, the relative numerical strength of Europarties and the cohesion and mobilization of Europarties, both include ideology to a certain extent.

of heads of government that each respective Europarty can gather will affect European Council decisions on a range of issues. Hence, the Europarties can be expected to matter (more) when they are in numerical ascendance, wielding stronger influence in the European Council when leaders from one party family outnumber those from others (Hanley, 2004; Johansson, 1999, 2002a, 2002b, 2016, 2017; Lightfoot, 2005; Tallberg & Johansson, 2008; Van Hecke, 2004).

Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the relative numerical strength of the Christian Democrat/conservative (EPP), socialist/social democrat (PES), liberal (ELDR/ALDE), as well as the national conservatives (European Conservatives and Reformists, ECR) and the left (Party of the European Left, PEL, and Left in the European Parliament, GUE/NGL) parties in the European Council over almost four decades (1985–2023) and at the time of the IGCs. During this period the EC/EU enlarged from 10 to 27 members (28 before Brexit).

The chart shows the political affiliation of European Council members and the shifting balance over these years, based on the various political families represented in the EP. It effectively illustrates how the three main political families have been continually involved in the European Council. It points to three distinct periods: Christian Democrat/conservative predominance in the second half of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, socialist/social democrat predominance in the second half of the 1990s, and Christian Democrat/conservative and liberal predominance in the 2000s.

These swings in the partisan composition of the European Council were an effect of general ideological shifts in national electorates, which translated into the empowerment of socialists/social democrats or Christian Democrats/conservatives/liberals in several member states within a limited period. Whereas the EPP had been in ascendancy at the time of the SEA and the Maastricht Treaty negotiations when the Christian Democrat heads of government met and agreed on fundamental points, the second half of the 1990s was a period of socialist/social democratic numerical ascendance in the European Council. At its peak, in the second half of the 1990s, and at the Amsterdam European Council in June 1997, preceded by the recent victories of the British Labour Party and the French Socialist Party, socialists/social democrats formed all or part of 13 out of 15 national governments. Numerically dominating the European Council in the second part of the 1990s, the PES was bolstered. It

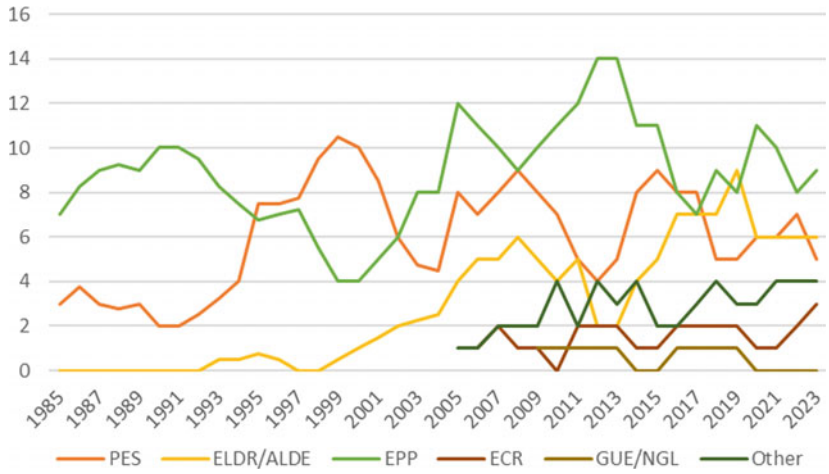

Fig. 4.1 Relative numerical strength of transnational parties in the European Council, 1985–2023 (*Note* The chart shows the situation on 1 January of the year concerned. Up to 2004 yearly scores are split in half when shifts in government occur. When prime ministers or presidents are not part of any Europarty, their ideological profiles have been approximated. Hence, Jacques Chirac (Rally for the Republic, RPR), Charles Haughey (Fianna Fáil), and Albert Reynolds (Fianna Fáil) as well as British conservative prime ministers—Margaret Thatcher and John Major—are classified as EPP, and Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (non-political), Lamberto Dini (non-political), Mario Monti (non-political), and Mario Draghi are classified as liberal (ELDR/ALDE). There are also instances of independent or non-affiliated members of the European Council. *Source* Adapted and extended from Tallberg and Johansson [2008: 1227] and drawing also on Drachenberg [2018: 3], with data about the political composition of the European Council from 1 January 2005 to mid-2018, and Drachenberg [2022a: 15–16], covering the 2009–2022 period. See also Drachenberg [2022b: 15–16])

was during this period that the European Council concluded the negotiations on the employment chapter of the Amsterdam Treaty, explored separately in a case study (Johansson, 1999; see below and in Chapter 2). While respecting the competences of the member states, employment policy was henceforth to be 'a matter of common concern'.[6] To have

[6] Even so, while the employment chapter is applicable to all member states and makes employment a matter of common European level concern, it is about coordinating

most of the heads of government in the European Council was crucial for the centre-left socialists. The PES also exerted an influence through successive EU Presidencies. The relative numerical weakness in the European Council, along with internal divisions not least over the employment chapter, weakened the EPP's capacity to play the same crucial role as it did during the SEA and the Maastricht Treaty negotiations (Johansson, 2016; Van Hecke, 2004: 50).

A new balance of power emerged in the European Council. EPP government leaders were still an important part of it, but numerically weakened. And policy started to shift, but the shift was not playing out as some anticipated. The fact that Tony Blair (PES, sort of) and the Spanish conservative prime minister José Maria Aznar (EPP) were close allies in the work to reorient the EU agenda away from social regulation in a direction of structural reform and liberalization had a negative impact on the cohesion of both the PES and the EPP. And their cooperation combined with the new policy direction reinforced the suspicion that they were not really to be trusted within their respective party families. Since 1997, the British and Spanish governments frequently coordinated to push a deregulation agenda—yet the leading parties in these governments were members of the PES and of the EPP, respectively.

In the following decade, the period of socialist/social democrat supremacy gradually gave way to centre-right dominance from the early 2000s onwards. This partisan swing in the composition of the European Council coincided with the revival of Treaty reform within the EU, up to the point when the Lisbon Treaty was adopted in 2007. In March 2007 the EPP met at the highest level in Berlin to mark the 50th anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome. The event brought together leaders of governments and parties as well as the presidents of the three major EU institutions: Angela Merkel for the Council of the European Union (and European Council); José Manuel Barroso for the Commission; and Hans-Gert Pöttering for the Parliament. This event, during the German EU Presidency, was part of the preparations for a new constitutional reform initiative (more below).

The presidential and legislative elections in France further increased the influence of the EPP, at least in numerical terms. The election of Nicolas Sarkozy as president and his appointment of François Fillon as

rather than legislating as the main responsibility for employment policy remains in the competence of the member states.

the prime minister meant that an EPP member party, Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), came to power in France and promised a way out of the constitutional crisis that followed the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by the French and Dutch voters in the late spring of 2005. At its meeting in June 2007 the European Council decided to open an IGC, with the Portuguese Presidency of the EU taking on this task. The new Treaty was drafted during only a few months, but it contained essentially the same institutional reforms as proposed by the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (more below). Hence, the EPP brought together a wide range of government leaders, and its numerical supremacy allowed the EPP to play a central role in the EU generally, and in Treaty reform specifically. An essential condition—the relative numerical strength of Europarties—was met. Yet, there are other essential conditions, and it is hard to assess which matters most.

Changes in the balance of party affiliation in the European Council do not automatically translate into policy shifts. Yet political affiliation can be expected to matter one way or another. The partisan composition of the European Council fluctuates over time. Drachenberg (2022b: 16) shows that, since 2002, on an annual average the EPP has included 39% of EU heads of state or government, 27% belonged to the PES and 20% came from ALDE-affiliated national parties. The high point for the EPP was in 2012–2013, when 52% belonged to this party family. The PES had its highpoint in 2002, with 47%, and the high point for ALDE was in 2018–2019, with 29%. The liberal family was, for decades, in third place in respect of affiliated European Council members, but between 2017 and 2020 it had the second highest number of affiliated heads of state or government in the European Council, which also partly explained its growing coordination activities. Drachenberg (2022b: 16) notes:

> While in numerical terms all the three main political parties have had high and low points since the 2000s, it would neither be possible nor accurate to determine periods where one or the other main party 'dominated' the European Council. The post-2004 period should rather be considered as the end of single-party dominance in the European Council and an era of increased party diversity.

Drachenberg (2022b: 47) concludes that the numerical strength of the three main Europarties has fluctuated over time, and that since the 2000s none of them has 'dominated' the European Council. And that European political families can also influence European Council

proceedings through other channels, as their national member parties are often in national coalition governments, albeit without providing the prime ministers. Which increases the importance of the coordination within and between Europarties, and across member states.

While members of the European Council almost all belonged to the three main political families until the early 2000s, the diversity of political affiliation has broadened in recent years. At the end of 2023 the European Council included ten members from the EPP (plus the Commission President), six from ALDE/Renew Europe (plus the European Council President), five from the PES/S&D, two from the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), and four independent or non-affiliated members (Drachenberg, 2023).

Capturing the influence of Europarties through numbers is a tricky task. Numbers can be misleading. This has been especially true in those instances where the PES has been unable to convert numerical ascendancy in the European Council into power because it has been overall more internally divided than EPP, as discussed below. Although numbers can give a sense of how the balance of power is changing and may indicate where power lies at a certain point in time, much depends on other explanatory factors, not least the cohesion of the Europarties. In any case, Europarty influence is contingent on a certain presence in the European Council. It is a necessary precondition for a long-term impact. But a large quantity does not always translate into quality. We caution that simple maths and number-crunching might be misleading, however: to some extent divisions within Europarties reduce their potential influence. Heads of government do not necessarily adopt the same ideological position just because they belong to the same Europarty. The ideological profiles of national parties of the same political colour vary, and the Europarties, therefore, exhibit a level of heterogeneity. For instance, there is notable variation among the Christian Democratic and conservative parties of the EPP, and the socialist and social democratic parties of the PES, on issues such as liberalization, regulation, and strengthening social rights. There are issues that have not divided the European Council along clear ideological lines of left and right and which perhaps have not been party politicized. These issues have produced some strange bedfellows—and split natural ones, when leaders from the same political family have been on opposing sides. Hence, we identify the degree of ideological cohesion among the heads of government of a particular Europarty as a factor that shapes the capacity to translate numerical advantage into party-political influence.

Cohesion and Mobilization of Europarties

As we noted in Chapter 3, the Europarties rely more on voluntary consent and cooperation of national member parties, lacking the enforcement mechanisms that national parties (usually) enjoy. However, through their networks and activities the Europarties can disseminate the norms, principles, and standards that define the Europarty and guide the member parties in their conduct with each other. Such intangible factors, like commitment and skill, are part of the answer to the question of how Europarties impact and how we assess their effectiveness, independent of their quantity. But such factors are difficult to measure. The Europarties' potential impact clearly depends on the ability to initiate and to carry out determined actions, which do not happen by themselves. They require certain underlying standards, principles, and values—in other words, what it means to be part of such transnational community and to act through it.

When it comes to impact, the evidence suggests that the number of representation matters, but that is not what matters most—it is the quality which is crucial. The underlying activity of Europarties and how they can adapt to changing circumstances matter. To properly understand these features and trends, analysts must consider the collective action capacity of each of the Europarties. Numerical superiority is therefore alone not a sufficient condition for influencing political outcomes in the European Council along party-political lines. In addition, the heads of government of a particular Europarty must be mobilized behind the common cause. Hence, we hypothesize that Europarties are more likely to influence the process and outcome of negotiations, the greater their cohesion and capacity for mobilization. As Hix (2005: 187; see also Hix & Lord, 1997: Ch. 7) noted, for parties to exercise influence in the EU, 'translation from party strengths to policy outputs requires party actors in the same party family to cooperate, and winning coalitions to be constructed between different party families'. To this end, the Europarties organize meetings of party and government leaders just before the European Council summits, but also hold party summits and conclaves independent of the European Council (Van Hecke & Johansson, 2013a, 2013b). The purpose of such institutionalized networking is to discuss items on the agenda, develop strategies, and—whenever possible—hammer out a common line. Moreover, summits like these generate media exposure.

In addition to the leaders of the Europarty and of member parties, whether in government or in opposition, the attendees at these pre-summit meetings include individuals from the corresponding political group in the EP and from the Commission. For the heads of government, the Europarties offer a layer of coalition-building in the European Council, through which they may seek to improve the bargaining position of the member state they represent. However, the effectiveness and influence of the Europarties as vehicles for coalition-building in the European Council and more generally depends largely on their relative cohesion and capacity to mobilize 'their' heads of government for the party cause (Johansson, 2016, 2017; see also Van Hecke, 2004, 2010). The pre-European Council summit meetings among government and party leaders are a central aspect of this mobilization process, but their significance varies over time and across party families. The continued importance of Europarties—visible across them—is thus linked to the summitry phenomenon. At the top party and government level, Europarties are meeting regularly in advance of EU summits. By comparison, the EPP has utilized these pre-summit gatherings more effectively than the PES, with greater participation of heads of government and, arguably, more direct inputs to the agenda items of the European Council.

A case study of the nomination of the EU's new institutional leadership in 2019 illustrates the importance of the Europarties' role in coordinating between national and EU leaders in the European Council (Drachenberg, 2022b; see also Chapter 1). Most notably, it shows how the Europarties perform an important coordination role within the EU political system.

> The growing politicisation of the EU, and notably of the European Council, and the increased coordination role of the European political parties in the context of the European Council, need to be seen as two complementary trends which reinforce one another. The politicisation of the European Council leads to increased attention being paid to this body by European political parties, which in turn further reinforces the politicisation of the European Council. Moreover, the fact that European political parties are strengthening their coordination activities, based on growing demand by their affiliates who are members of the European Council, supports this claim. (Drachenberg, 2022b: 49)

That study clearly indicates that Europarties contribute significantly to the functioning of the EU, not least through facilitating coordination across institutional barriers. And here the findings also attest to the Europarties'

role in the appointment of institutional leaders, including the Commission president (see also, e.g., Bardi, 2020). However, in the past such appointments have revealed tensions within political families. Notably, in 1994 the German chancellor Helmut Kohl blocked Dutch prime minister Ruud Lubbers from becoming the Commission president. This meant growing tensions in the family of Christian Democrats. As expected, however, a Christian Democrat became Commission president: Luxembourg's prime minister Jacques Santer. In 2004 the EPP's influence was apparent when one of its own, the prime minister of Portugal José Manuel Barroso, was appointed, then endorsed again by the EPP in 2009. To add a European element to the campaigns, and to link EP elections to the choice of the Commission president, 2014 saw the main political families choose lead or top candidates (*Spitzenkandidaten* in German) (e.g., Ahrens & Miller, 2023; Christiansen, 2016; Van Hecke et al., 2023). Jean-Claude Juncker, who was the candidate of the EPP/EPP Group, was then nominated by the European Council to be the next Commission president.

The Europarties again chose lead candidates ahead of the 2019 elections. However, the European Council could not agree on nominating the EPP lead candidate Manfred Weber as Commission president, reportedly because of opposition from French president Emmanuel Macron in particular. Disagreements among the Europarties were also behind the outcome, as Weber's candidacy was not sufficiently supported by PES or ALDE (Crum, 2023; De Wilde, 2020; Heidbreder & Schade, 2020). Instead, in a quite typical compromise deal, they agreed on a different German EPP politician: Ursula von der Leyen, with the PES and ALDE lead candidates (Frans Timmermans and Margrethe Vestager) as vice-presidents of the new Commission. The entire package of candidates for the high-level EU positions finally agreed by the European Council's heads of state or government 'showed a clear division of the posts between the European political parties, confirming the politicisation of the European Council and the important role of European political parties' (Drachenberg, 2022b: 46).[7]

Of course, participation of heads of government at pre-summit meetings is on a voluntary basis and their absence may decrease the influence of the Europarty. Nor can Europarties impose their views on decisions taken

[7] Within the Europarties, the selection procedures for lead candidates have aroused tensions. We return to this question in the concluding chapter of this book.

at European Council summits—at which the EU's main policy orientations and decisions are agreed. Holding more Europarty pre-summit meetings cannot guarantee influence if participation is limited or if those participating fail to agree over key issues. In other words, an increased volume of such Europarty summits may be a necessary condition for influencing EU or European Council decision-making, but it is not sufficient by itself. Indeed, there is evidence, particularly from the PES, that a lack of commitment to these meetings among the heads of government has reduced their significance (Van Hecke & Johansson, 2013a, 2013b). Specifically, Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder showed little inclination to attend. They apparently saw the PES pre-summit meetings as a waste of time. Their instinct was to see exclusively other prime ministers. Moreover, while Blair and Schröder, self-proclaimed Third Way leaders, backed a reform agenda as noted above, and Blair was continuously more supportive of structural reform including liberalization and renouncing dirigiste economics.

Hence, the PES faced limits in its mobilization capacity which negatively affected its ability to shape outcomes, even when enjoying numerical superiority. Yet, it was the PES which successfully advocated a chapter or title on employment in the Amsterdam Treaty. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this is generally considered an example of successful transnational party politics, of a truly transnational policy contribution (Johansson, 1999; Külahci, 2002, 2004, 2010; Ladrech, 1997, 2000; Lightfoot, 2005; see also see also Johansson, 2017; Tallberg & Johansson, 2008). It was visible evidence of the influence and output of the PES network (Ladrech, 2000: 107, 112 and Chapter 6). It involved work through the party networks, as well as intensive consultation at the highest levels of party and government. While including governmental actors, the contribution can be largely seen as transnational given the patterns of agenda-setting and advocacy.

But in assessing the independent effect of transnational partisan advocacy coalitions, it is important to consider the links between what was happening transnationally and at the intergovernmental level (see Chapter 2). One interpretation is that Swedish and other proposals for an employment chapter outlined alternative arrangements for formally institutionalizing a form of coordination in this policy area that to some extent already existed. The contacts through the party networks then served to capture a zone of agreement in the IGC itself, as a conscious effort to use or instrumentalize those party networks. Still, they were

crucial in gaining wider support for the employment chapter and subsequently for the new Treaty that came into effect in November 1999 and in shaping the coordination of employment policies put into practice through the new provisions. As noted above, it followed a shift in the European Council towards the social democrats/socialists, and it was an issue that divided the Christian Democrats, even though they were still pivotal despite the socialists' numerical superiority. Together with particularly the liberals in the ELDR, the Christian Democrats in the EPP could oppose the socialists (Hix & Lord, 1997: 193).

Compared with the PES, the EPP (and ELDR/ALDE) has confronted fewer problems in securing the participation of its heads of government at pre-summit meetings. A reason for this is the continuous commitment on the part of the German CDU and its leaders. But participation is not all, as limits in the ambition and capacity to coordinate positions may reduce the influence of the Europarties. Yet these top-level discussions have proven useful in preparing the ground for the subsequent European Council, also in the context of Treaty reform.

For Europarties to exercise influence, they must exhibit a certain degree of cohesion in the internal arena, mobilize effectively, and work within domestic constraints on national parties and leaders. This complex picture of Europarties and what conditions their influence, notably domestic political limitations, is amply illustrated by the 1996–1997 IGC and the Amsterdam Treaty outcome. Part of the overall compromise signed in Maastricht was an agreement written into the text to re-examine some issues in a further IGC due to start in 1996. Thus, the agenda of the IGC was largely predetermined. That another IGC should be convened was something the EPP actively pushed for. As the EPP leaders were concerned about the small number of Christian Democrats in the European Council, and in response to concerns of the Dutch and Italian parties, Kohl, Santer, and the Belgian prime minister Jean-Luc Dehaene promised that the positions taken by their governments in the IGC would be closely coordinated with the policies of the EPP party (Hix & Lord, 1997: 194). The relative numerical weakness in the European Council made it even more important for the EPP to mobilize its heads of government.

An in-depth case study of the role of the EPP in the negotiations leading to the adoption of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 documents its influence as well as the limits to such influence (Johansson, 2016; see also Johansson, 2015b). The case illustrates how factors pertaining

to domestic politics limited the scope for the EPP to shape the outcome of the Treaty negotiations more significantly. Notably, such factors came to the fore in Germany and limited the room for manoeuvre of the governing coalition under chancellor Kohl, confronting the limits for a compromise over the new Treaty. A condition of a deal was parliamentary approval from both legislative chambers, perhaps the single biggest constraint on the federal government's scope for negotiation. It was constrained from above and below.[8] Kohl's position was weakened by the social democratic majority in the Bundesrat, Federal Council, one of the two legislative chambers. Other national governments too had their concerns and faced domestic constraints, such as Ireland and Spain in justice and home affairs where considerable concern was also raised within Germany. Not least the sensitive immigration issue was bound up with asylum and refugee policy, with a more restrictive approach and tightening of German criteria for asylum.

Moreover, as we have explained, the EPP failed to influence the outcome more significantly first, and most importantly, because it lacked the relative majority from which it had profited before and, second, because the EPP suffered from internal ideological divisions among its leaders (Van Hecke, 2004: 50). The fissure and in some sense lowered ambitions gave rise to disappointment within the EPP among those who wanted to go further in terms of European integration (e.g., Martens, 2008: 137–138). But there were nonetheless significant achievements. To give one example, the extension of qualified majority voting (QMV) in the Council which also indirectly increased the powers of the Parliament. And it is worth noting that the Amsterdam European Council adopted a resolution on the SGP, establishing its political basis and providing policy guidelines for its implementation. A key element of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), SGP emphasized budgetary management and discipline in view of member states entering the third stage of EMU. EU member states thereby agreed to strengthen the monitoring and coordination of national fiscal and economic policies to enforce the deficit and debt limits established by the Maastricht Treaty. This was a key priority for German chancellor Kohl. The EPP had a common position on this, with the EPP leaders emphasizing that SGP had to be endorsed in Amsterdam

[8] Kohl faced further domestic constraints through the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe, yet another potential 'veto player'.

and amidst concerns that the new French socialist government under Lionel Jospin would not be able to finalize its position.

The Amsterdam Treaty may have been a modest reform in comparison with the SEA and TEU, but it kept the momentum alive for the hope among federalists of another breakthrough in the EU integration process. Specifically, a moment was building for yet another EU treaty reform, seeking solutions to the so-called Amsterdam leftovers. That brought about the 2000 IGC, which similarly resulted in both breakthroughs and frustrations. After the Treaty of Nice, which entered into force in 2003, the EPP among others called for a constitutional convention to prepare Treaty changes, to be further discussed in the next subsection.

Moving on to the Lisbon Treaty, which finally came into force on 1 December 2009, it is noteworthy that the process of Treaty reform was revived in June 2007 during the German EU presidency. One of its goals was to find common ground to get the EU constitution back on track. This was at a time of strong EPP representation in all the main EU institutions, including the Parliament where EPP was the largest political group since 1999. Despite the fact that the EPP had become less cohesive—struggling to cohere—it managed to mobilize its networks and to reach an agreement on a range of issues. As noted above, the EPP family gathered in Berlin in March 2007 on the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome. The EPP event brought together over 60 participants and was hosted by German chancellor Angela Merkel—president of the European Council and undoubtedly the most important European leader at that point—and chaired by EPP president Martens. According to Merkel (2010: xv), the celebrations 'were a significant driver' of the new Treaty, since the European heads of state or government, in signing the Berlin Declaration, committed themselves to a set of shared values, tasks, and structures within the EU as well as to placing the EU 'on a renewed common basis'. However, Merkel continued: 'Converting this commitment into a mandate for an Intergovernmental Conference was by no means easy'. While difficult to measure, the importance of this event was in the renewed commitment to the EU from its principal actors across institutions and member states, reaffirming continued support for European integration. The interlinked goals adopted by all EPP member parties were influential behind the new initiative and compromise that facilitated a way out of the constitutional deadlock.

Throughout this period (2005–2007), the EPP network continued to coordinate party positions and pushed for a renewed effort, aiming for

the EU to have a constitution in place by 2009. At the EPP Congress in Rome in March 2006, delegates voted overwhelmingly to continue ratifying the constitution and adopted a new document; new impetus should be given by the European Council in the first half of 2007 at the latest (Johansson, 2020: 126). The EPP Summit of heads of state and government also continued to meet in preparation for the next European Council. The EPP Summit continued to play an important role in coordinating the positions of EPP member governments, and the EPP continued to push for European integration and a constitution. In 2007, five EPP Summit meetings were held. Altogether, the EPP, as it seems more than the other Europarties, contributed to the agreement on the Lisbon Treaty later that year. The EPP, political group and the party, were thus influential in breaking the deadlock and moving on with the constitutional process. While concessions were made and the Treaty was not a proper constitution, there were important achievements for the federalist minded. Notably, the Parliament had been further empowered. Co-decision procedure, now officially called the 'ordinary legislative procedure', became the standard mode for the making of EU laws. QMV and co-decision were extended to 40 new policy areas. In line with recent IGCs, de Ruiter and Neuhold (2016: 115) note, 'the EP has come out of the negotiations on the Lisbon Treaty as a winner insofar as co-decision was extended into a vast array of policy fields'. Widely considered a less ambitious successor to a failed EU Constitution, the 2004 Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, or Constitutional Treaty, and the Lisbon Treaty are substantively similar (e.g., Christiansen & Reh, 2009; Laursen, 2016a; Piris, 2010; Ziller, 2012). Despite the differences, some of which are purely symbolic, the content is much the same.

In sum, the extent to which Europarties are cohesive and able to mobilize their networks do matter for their chances of influencing bargaining processes and outcomes of Treaty negotiations. In this subsection we draw attention to the ways in which Europarties use party networks within and around the European Council to influence Treaty reforms. The sheer activity of the Europarties—mobilizing their networks for the common cause—contributed significantly to the outcomes of each Treaty reform, partly because of the momentum it generated and sustained towards major reform. The relevance of the networks emerges clearly in the various instances of Treaty-making. Over time, we have seen a shift in the ways in which Treaty reforms have been prepared and even negotiated. Hence, we have identified the choice of venue for deliberating

or negotiating Treaty revision as an explanatory factor that conditions Europarty influence.

Venue Choice

We submit that a factor (positively) influencing the likelihood of Europarty impact is the choice of venue where Treaty revisions are prepared or negotiated. The locus, the place where something occurs or is situated, matters. Whereas Europarties gain from their links to national government and party leaders, their immediate connections with the EP political groups facilitate mobilization along Europarty lines in the context of Treaty revision. Arguably, the European Council is a 'relatively inhospitable environment for party politics' (Tallberg & Johansson, 2008: 1226). The scope for party politicization is less extensive there than in the other major EU institutions. Hence, shifting Treaty talks away from the European Council with its interstate character yields the expectation that mobilization along political family lines would occur more frequently.

As we discussed in Chapter 1, earlier research suggests that the format or institutional framework of the constitutional process matters, with the 'convention' model more likely to facilitate Europarty influence. And in Chapter 2 we highlighted the importance of venue in the theoretical frameworks of agenda-setting, advocacy coalitions, and transnational networks or coalitions. To reiterate, 'venue' is where and by whom the issue is debated and in the literature a distinction is made between 'venue shopping' and 'venue modification'. While 'venue shopping' occurs among already existing venues, 'venue modification' means that actors may sometimes (also) 'be able to modify the range of available venues to create one that is better suited to their purposes' (Princen, 2011: 933). Further, within the EU, venue shopping may occur between EU institutions (horizontal venue shopping) and between the different levels in the multilevel system that the EU forms part of (vertical venue shopping) (Princen, 2011: 931). Institutional structures can thus affect the responsiveness of political actors to issues. As venues are locations where policies are made, which issues are discussed and how they are discussed depends largely on the character of a venue and the way venues are organized is not neutral (Lelieveldt & Princen, 2023: 210).

Hence, shift in venues is related to political strategy (more in Chapter 2). The underlying assumption here is that political actors have considerable scope to make decisions about places for their actions,

whether by 'shopping' or 'modification' of institutional venue. Within the EU, as Sabatier (1998: 121) noted, the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) would expect coalitions to be seeking to maximize their advantage by 'venue shopping'—'as certainly seems to be happening, both among levels of government and among institutions at the European level'. For example, when Europarties seek out a venue that is preferable their choice is likely to reflect their own ambitions.

Perceptions of the EU itself—or EC before 1993—help explain why political parties have aligned with other broadly likeminded parties in available venues. Notably, the internal market project—'Europe 1992'—increased EC policymaking since the adoption of the Single European Act and explains an emerging European level presence by many social democratic parties (Ladrech, 1993). This prompted transnational party responses, with initial steps taken since 1989 towards the enhancement of social democratic transnational party cooperation, manifesting itself on both a programmatic and an organizational level. To explain this development, Ladrech (1993) builds on the neofunctionalist logic of political spill-over together with a theory of party change. The socialist transnational party federation came more into focus for many of these national parties. And, overall, the more policy competencies have been transferred to the European level, the higher the incentives for European level cooperation for essentially all political families, the Eurosceptics included (see Chapter 1).

The issues on the agenda of Treaty reforms were until the turn of the millennium negotiated in intergovernmental forums, with the Parliament winning support for the representation of two MEPs in the proceedings leading to the Treaties of Amsterdam and Nice. But while the Parliament thus became more closely associated with the preparatory work and then the IGC itself, and their representation would enable parliamentarians to debate proposals in the run-up to and during the IGC, the inclusion of the EP had been contested by some governments (notably the British and the French). In that context, progress or lack thereof seemed bound up with the ways in which IGCs were prepared. The mainly intergovernmental approach, and IGCs themselves, can easily reach stalemate, as revealed in the IGCs held in 1996–1997 and 2000, with progress held back by inter-member state quarrels.

Against this background, there were calls for a new way of preparing and negotiating Treaty change. That led to the 2002–2003 Convention on the Future of Europe, which came about owing to pressures from

Europarties and EP political groups. It marked a new phase in constitutional reform. Among the institutional actors, the Parliament—building on its increased powers and growing importance—was highly critical of the outcome of the IGC in 2000 as well as of its mode of negotiation that is of the intergovernmental method. It therefore demanded that the next IGC would be based on a more transparent process, through a convention. This requirement was primarily driven by the EPP, both the political group and party, but had widespread support across political families and not least in the EP. Eventually the Laeken European Council in December 2001 agreed to the establishment of the Convention.[9] The outcome was the draft of the Draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, adopted by the Convention in June and July 2003.

The initiative for the Convention to prepare the next IGC and the next Treaty, bringing together representatives of governments, parliaments, and the EP along with other institutions, implied a big difference from the narrower intergovernmental nature of the IGCs. The Convention commenced in February 2002 and lasted until June 2003. During this period, members of the Convention met as political families or groupings. Research confirms that party politics clearly mattered, not least in the networking among politicians within and around the political groupings at the Convention (e.g., Johansson, 2003, 2020; Norman, 2003; Van Hecke, 2012). These political groupings met before each meeting of the Convention to prepare for work at the plenary and they also put forward their own draft constitutions. Apart from these monthly meetings, the political families also convened for discussions outside Brussels.

The partisan dimension played therefore an important role throughout the Convention, not least when it reached its final stages. The bigger political families, and especially the well-organized EPP and centrist liberals, were crucial and built bridges between MEPs and national parliamentarians (Norman, 2003: 324–325; see also Johansson, 2003). The EPP, thanks to its numerical strength and commitment, managed to exert significant influence through its members and delegation leaders (Johansson, 2020: 115–122; see also Van Hecke, 2012). The partisan

[9] The body entrusted to draft the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights was called 'Convention', with MEPs and national parliamentarians among the members. It met during 2000. The Charter was important, also symbolically, in the constitutional development of the Union. The work of that Convention served as a template for a possible method for future treaty revisions.

dimension was evident, not just towards the end of the Convention, and was reinforced by the convention method itself and by the venue. The format encouraged the formation of transnational political groups and MEPs gained from it, not least because of the actual physical venue, which was the Parliament, their home turf. Hence, the EP 'was playing at home' (Priestley, 2008: 37; see also Beach, 2007, 2012; Christiansen & Reh, 2009: 168; Corbett et al., 2016). The EP delegation worked for the Convention to be a much more ambitious exercise than previous instances of Treaty reform preparations. The Convention format benefited MEPs' own cause to strengthen the EU and the Parliament. And in the process, they strengthened themselves. The convention format should also benefit the Europarties, as in IGCs the national governments are the central actors. But, as in the Convention itself, with its organizational hierarchies and different levels of status, at least in the EPP Convention Group there was a hierarchy and asymmetry of power, and therefore most likely also an asymmetry of information. Some obviously had more power than others. And there were signs of a vast gulf between national parliamentarians and MEPs. It seemed that national parliamentarians were outmanoeuvred. The choice of location was significant, not least through the institutional resources MEPs have in terms of personnel and overall infrastructure.

The Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe adopted by the European Council in 2004 was largely like the outcome of the Convention. But the negative outcomes in referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005 meant a halt in the Treaty reform process. As shown above, the process was revived in 2007 and resulted in the Lisbon Treaty. In the 2007 IGC, the EP participated with three representatives.[10] The heads of state and government were centrally involved, including through their key aides (sherpas) for EU and foreign affairs. The Lisbon Treaty was negotiated mainly using the traditional IGC method; that is, through negotiations between governmental representatives using unanimous decision-making. However, the convention method was now laid down in the Treaty for future major constitutional revisions. That was a major achievement for Europarties and an instance of cross-party consensus, too.

[10] They were drawn from the three largest EP political groups: Elmar Brok (EPP), Klaus Hänsch (PES), and Andrew Duff (ALDE).

To sum up, the concept of venue and insight into the choice of venue helps to improve understanding of political strategies and outcomes. By questioning mainstream venues, political actors create conditions for greater influence. And these venues have their public funding. The importance of venue is here illustrated by the shift towards the convention or conference format for preparing Treaty revisions in the EU. Compared with IGCs, the convention method offers diverse participants a more open terrain to advance their goals and is more conducive to the influence of transnational advocacy coalitions. The convention or conference format therefore favours partisan politics more than IGCs do. Importantly, the choice of venue has consequences.

While negotiations and decisions over Treaties primarily take place on the intergovernmental level of EU politics, we have emphasized the nature of the venue; the places where actors get together for talks and decisions. The 'conference format' used in the Convention on the Future of Europe of 2002–2003 benefited the Europarties, as in IGCs the national governments are the central actors. Unsurprisingly, this was also the format of the 2021–2022 Conference on the Future of Europe (see Chapter 5) and is the format preferred by Europarties for preparing future changes to the Treaty.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have taken a deeper look at Europarties' impact with a particular focus on constitutional processes and Treaty reforms and traced such impacts in decisions and negotiations leading to the adoption of Treaties from the 1980s to the 2000s. These multiple Treaty reforms hold broader lessons for our understanding of Europarties and their influence. At the outset of this chapter, we raised two main questions: What is the impact of the Europarties on Treaty reforms? Under what conditions can they be effective, that is, when are they most likely to achieve their goals? In addition, we raised two related questions: Who are involved? And how do the actors—within Europarty networks—seek to make an impact?

Europarties have undoubtedly had a strong impact, indeed a lasting impact, on decision-making in the EU and not only on constitutional or institutional matters but also across a wide range of policies. Europarties have shaped the Treaties, and therefore they have also shaped the future of the EU both regarding institutional questions and various policy sectors. Their actions have helped institutionalize and stabilize the Union.

They have proven to be among the main drivers of European integration. Each of these Europarties could be seen as an advocacy group. What they do in terms of agenda-setting and advocacy lays the groundwork for crucial agreement on reforms and thereby shapes the broader, long-term development of European integration.

The Europarties have continuously advocated for a more integrated Union, supporting Treaty reforms over the decades, and mobilizing their forces to advance European construction. Our agenda, advocacy, and transnational frameworks help to uncover patterns of interaction and networking in the long quest for a proper Union. In turn, these patterns reveal that over a longer period there has been Europarty mobilization and influence. Europarties have provided a forum for cooperation and integration on a range of issues, and particularly through the top-level 'summitry' the Europarties can have a direct input into policymaking. A more complete picture thereby emerges of the EU political system and of the constitutional processes underpinning Treaties. It is in sharp contrast with the story often told about EU Treaty reform with a narrow focus on national governments and largely overlooking the role of Europarties.

We find heavy Europarty input in Treaty reform preparations. This influence involves the interaction of national political parties within Europarties, which themselves have undergone significant development. They work on many levels. Of the Europarties the chapter has focused largely on the EPP, the most influential Europarty, and to a certain extent also on the PES. There was significant activity in the EPP as well as in the PES, as they mobilized their networks. Preferences have converged, both inside and between Europarties. The EPP stands out because of its extensive representation throughout EU institutions. Part of its strength owes to the commitment of heads of government to participate in the leaders' meetings; regularly convened before but sometimes independent of the European Council. By contrast, PES has experienced a lack of commitment to such meetings among 'its' heads of government which reduced its significance.

However, the PES championed the employment chapter in the Amsterdam Treaty. Several factors came together in the 1990s. First, a political initiative and a determined policy entrepreneur and growing support from the Nordics onto the wider EU context. Second, an underpinning advocacy coalition, not just partisan, consisting of most member states, MEPs and political groups, Commission officials, social partners, and political parties—national and transnational. Third, in framing their

issue the advocates for an employment chapter emphasized that the fight against unemployment required a common European effort. Finally, the balance in the Council and European Council had shifted towards the socialists/social democrats and the PES. All these factors facilitated the transference of policy learning and ideas from the national to the supranational level, and eventually the deal.

In a similar vein, the chapter also holds deeper lessons for understanding the limits to Europarty influence. There is ample evidence of such limits. While much of the Treaty reforms were driven by or through Europarties, their influence is conditional. This conclusion raises questions about the effectiveness of Europarties. The conditions for Europarty influence are demanding. The influence of Europarties depends on both the quantity *and* quality of their presence in the European Council. Unsurprisingly, the sheer number of government leaders belonging to a particular Europarty has significance for decision outcomes. But numbers are not enough. Europarties' effectiveness cannot be understood with numbers, relative numerical strength, alone. In addition to numerical supremacy, relative majorities, internal cohesion, and capacity for mobilizing the leaders and networks for the joint cause are also required. Moreover, it turns out that the venue or format for preparing and negotiating Treaty revisions matter. Notably, the convention format provides MEPs acting within political families a clearer status and potential impact relating to Treaty revisions. Over time, the Parliament has become increasingly involved in EU constitutional politics, thereby strengthening the (transnational) partisan dimension of Treaty reforms.

But the most significant factor is perhaps mobilization capacity. It helps to drive the networks of interaction and collaborative processes within the Europarties. It is particularly significant for the commitment of national parties and their leaders, in or out of government, to European integration in general and to Europarty activities in particular. Major decisions in the EU and in Treaty reform specifically depend on support from national parties and governments. They, in turn, can use the Europarty networks to push their arguments. But it also raises questions about the way forward for the EU itself. As we discuss in Chapter 6, the development of a more politicized EU may prompt a countervailing tendency towards weakening the influence of EU level parties.

This chapter and its results carry two broader implications for students of European integration. First, it shows that Europarties can significantly contribute to the cause of European integration overall. It also shows their

vital role in shaping the agendas and outcomes of EU Treaty revisions. The result has been a considerable strengthening of EU institutions, not least of the Parliament. Second, there are important limits to the trend of party politicization in the EU more generally. Even as Europarties have been transformed and become less dependent on national member parties, especially in terms of financial support, they still rely on the latter for more important positions regarding programmes and policies. Europarties are both enabled and constrained. Their impact varies across time and Europarties, because of conditions such as numerical strength and internal cohesion. Even so, more should be done in developing explanatory frameworks and indicators for examining in a comparative fashion when and how these Europarties matter. And even when they can be assessed to count for something, it can be tricky to determine if their role is one of being a facilitator, rather than a decisive intermediary. As our analysis of the Treaty reforms also highlights, conditions can be created. It underscores the importance of paying attention to the interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, including the intrinsic qualities of the Europarties themselves as well as outside influences.

Now that the EU is facing major challenges some are eying more Treaty changes, to put constitutional reform back on the agenda. While big constitutional and institutional reforms in the past have been partly driven by the Europarties, it remains an open question what might produce the next—potentially successful—Treaty reform. The last time there was a proper IGC was back in 2007, almost two decades ago. In previous rounds of Treaty reforms the motivation and drive were clear. It became less so after the Lisbon Treaty. The Europarties are internally divided on a range of issues, including the need for Treaty revisions. For instance, a pertinent question is whether EPP reform activism is exhausted since Lisbon, and, if so, why. Possible explanations include internal heterogeneity and pressure from right-wing populist groups with electoral impact, or other reasons. These days we do not hear much of any explicitly federalist ambitions.

Yet, the Europarties face a dilemma. Consider the EPP: for its own credibility as a leading force of European integration the EPP cannot allow its own member parties to fight against the further construction of Europe, otherwise it loses credibility. The same could be said of the other mainstream Europarties. Predictably, a movement to try to revise the Treaties has begun. While several governments continue to oppose Treaty revision, the main Europarties and EP political groups are preparing for a

Convention to happen anyway, as if that was just a matter of time. We will continue this discussion in the following chapter, where we turn to the Conference on the Future of Europe that was held in 2021–2022 and show that, organizationally, the 'conference format' again benefited the partisan actors, advocating Treaty change and thus constitutional reforms.

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CHAPTER 5

The Conference on the Future of Europe and Political Families: Pushing for Reform

Introduction

Theoretically, the policy influence of the Europarties should vary depending on the venue. As we argued in Chapter 2, political actors can seek to purposefully select venues that facilitate the advancement of their objectives (e.g., Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Princen, 2011). More supranational formats should benefit the Europarties and their European Parliament (EP) political groups, while intergovernmental forums should in turn be less conducive to transnational partisan politics. However, while European Council summitry and Intergovernmental Conferences (IGC) convened for the purpose of Treaty reform may be dominated by national governments, Chapter 4 nonetheless uncovered clear evidence of partisan influence also in such settings. Yet, venue choice should matter, and the empirical analysis in the previous chapter also showed that the Convention on the Future of Europe (2002–2003) was strongly impacted by the Europarties, not least their EP groups and members of the European Parliament (MEP).

The purpose of this chapter is to continue this line of inquiry through exploring the role of Europarties in the Conference on the Future of

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Europe (CoFE).[1] It offered yet another opportunity for the Europarties and their EP political groups to shape both the direction of integration and the institutional set-up of the Union. Designed as an innovative, bottom-up exercise in deliberative democracy, bringing together citizens across the European Union (EU), the start of the CoFE was delayed until May 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Chaired by the EU institutions and utilizing a combination of virtual platforms, national events, citizens' panels, and plenaries, in May 2022 the CoFE reached conclusions and recommended ways forward for the Union. However, the full impact of the CoFE is not clear since a range of member states remain hesitant or opposed to a constitutional convention and Treaty changes suggested by the CoFE in its final document adopted by a large majority of members.

We examine not just the positions of the Europarties but also what they did—individually and as a coalition of forces—to drive the process and advance their ambitions in the run-up to and during CoFE. We focus on the three largest Europarties, the centre-right European People's Party (EPP), the centre-left Party of European Socialists (PES), and the centrist Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), and their corresponding EP political groups. We address two main questions: What did the Europarties do to influence the Conference? Secondly, how effective were they in shaping the course and outcome of the Conference, that is, to what extent did they achieve their goals? In answering the questions, the chapter explores the various avenues and strategies through which the Europarties and their EP political groups sought to influence the Conference: coalition-building in the Parliament, and links with the Commission, national member parties, and European political foundations linked to the Europarties: for EPP the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (WMCES), for PES the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), and for ALDE the European Liberal Forum (ELF). It also analyzes the division of labour or balance of power between and within Europarties and their EP political groups regarding

[1] The chapter builds on our Sieps report and on a book chapter where we specifically focused on the EP political groups (Johansson & Raunio, 2022a, 2022b). We use the acronym CoFE, as that is also used by the Commission. See for example Conference on the Future of Europe—European Commission (https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/conference-future-europe_en).

the Conference as well as the substantive priorities of these transnational partisan actors in CoFE. In terms of temporal coverage, the analysis focuses on the build-up to CoFE and its proceedings but does not examine developments after the Conference concluded its work.

Theoretically, this chapter leans on the two analytical approaches, agenda-setting and the advocacy coalition framework, identified in Chapter 2 of this book. Methodologically, the chapter is based on novel data collection through an inventory of CoFE material, including plenary speeches, documents consisting of resolutions, press releases, and other material from EU institutions and political foundations, Europarties and political groups in the EP, especially position papers, and interview evidence, supplemented by other primary material such as news reports, and partly on participant observation through the FEPS. Document analysis enables us to understand the sequencing of the events and whether the position papers of the Europarties and EP political groups influenced the CoFE agenda, debates, and final outcome. The interviewees were from the offices of the Europarties and the EP political groups, as well as individuals from the Parliament and the political foundations. The interviews were semi-structured and carried out between 2020 and 2022. The interviews and observational evidence were particularly useful in uncovering how the Europarties and the EP political groups attempted to shape the CoFE.

To structure our analysis, we formulate a series of expectations. First, in terms of organizing CoFE, we expect that the transnational partisan actors specifically campaigned for the 'conference format' as opposed to more intergovernmental approaches. The 'conference format' is close to the 'convention' model utilized in the Convention on the Future of Europe two decades earlier and is by design more supranational, giving a strong role for the citizens and the plenary—with the latter a very familiar forum for parliamentarians. Regarding the division of labour between the Europarties and their EP political groups, the expectation is that the latter are more centrally involved in CoFE than their extra-parliamentary Europarties. MEPs are more 'present' in the EU policy process, have considerable experience of direct inter-institutional bargaining, and also have substantially stronger resources. Moreover, CoFE was not designed as a formal IGC resulting in Treaty changes, and thereby national heads of government were not directly involved. Regarding coalition-building, we expect to see active collaboration between the individual Europarties and/or their EP political groups, as they clearly had common objectives

regarding the 'future of Europe'. MEPs understand that parliamentary unity should help the EP in reaching its goals. In terms of the balance of power within the political groups, we expect the group chairs to be the dominant or at least the most visible actors. The rationale here is that to increase the chances of the EP's voice being heard, political group chairs should take an active role in guiding the issues through the Parliament and in expressing the positions of the EP and the political groups. As for the position papers, we expect to find strong convergence in the Conference between the objectives of the three Europarties and their EP groups regarding institutions and EU democracy.

The chapter contains three sections. The first part examines agenda-setting and advocacy coalitions of transnational partisan actors in the run-up and also during CoFE, while the second empirical part analyzes the correspondence between the position papers of the main Europarties and the final outcome of the Conference. The results provide strong evidence of how CoFE, like the EU in general, has a significant transnational partisan dimension. The concluding section summarizes the findings, discusses the question of impact, and expands on the broader implications of this chapter for existing and future research.

Shaping the Agenda and Format of CoFE

The Road to the Conference

The Conference on the Future of Europe needs to be understood in the context of the turbulence experienced by the EU since the early 2010s. Both the euro crisis and the refugee crisis revealed strong tensions between the member states and different political families, with particularly the populist and radical right parties benefiting from the increased politicization of integration. Brexit in turn fuelled concerns about the rise of Eurosceptical movements and the democratic legitimacy of integration. In the wake of the Brexit vote in the summer of 2016 several key figures—notably the French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker—gave high-profile speeches that included initiatives for debates about the future of integration. The Commission headed by Juncker (EPP) proposed five scenarios for the future of Europe in March 2017, and this was

crucial in triggering the subsequent reflections and concrete initiatives for reforming the Union.[2]

Simultaneously the Commission had experimented with wide-ranging consultations with citizens (e.g., Butcher & Stratulat, 2019). The European Year of Citizens was in 2013 and saw the emergence of the more regular Commission's Citizens' Dialogues (the first one had taken place on 27 September 2012 in Cadiz, Spain), essentially 'town hall' type of discussions on the future of Europe. Juncker's Commission, appointed in 2014, intensified such efforts, so that 'since the beginning of the Juncker Commission, 1,572 citizens' dialogues have taken place in 583 locations. In addition, on 9 May 2018 the Commission launched an online consultation on the Future of Europe, with questions designed by a panel of citizens reflecting the diversity of Europe.'[3]

In September 2017, President Macron proposed 'citizens' conventions' throughout the EU,[4] and the idea was endorsed by the European Council in February 2018. In addition to the above-mentioned actions of the Commission, such 'European Citizens' Consultations' were to be organized by governments in their respective member states. These consultations did materialize in all member states except Italy and the United Kingdom (which was about to exit the EU in any case). The Parliament had continued its long-standing tradition of adopting resolutions in favour of both deeper integration and of increasing its own powers.[5] Antonio Tajani, the EP President, invited the heads of state or government of EU countries to give their visions on the Future of

[2] White Paper on the Future of Europe: Reflections and Scenarios for the EU27 by 2025. European Commission, COM(2017)2025, 1 March 2017.

[3] European Commission, Citizens' Dialogues and Citizens' Consultations. Key Conclusions, 30 April 2019, https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/get-involved/past-initiatives/citizens-dialogues/list-citizens-dialogues-events-2015-2019/progress-reports-citizens-dialogues_en.

[4] Office of the President of the French Republic, Discours du Président de la République devant le Parlement réuni en congrès, 3 July 2017, https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/07/03/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-devant-le-parlement-reuni-en-congres.

[5] See for example European Parliament resolution of 16 February 2017 on improving the functioning of the European Union building on the potential of the Lisbon Treaty (2014/2249(INI)); European Parliament resolution of 16 February 2017 on possible evolutions of and adjustments to the current institutional set-up of the European Union (2014/2248(INI).

Europe in the EP plenaries.[6] Building on these plenary debates with national leaders, in February 2019 the Parliament outlined its vision and priorities for the future of Europe.[7] In the report, the Parliament exhibited once again strongly pro-integrationist goals, including commitment to the *Spitzenkandidaten* process. In March 2019 Macron, in an 'open letter' addressed to all Europeans, specifically called for the establishment of a 'Conference for Europe' that should proceed 'without taboos' and be based on wide-ranging consultation with citizens and civil society actors.[8] The European Council in May adopted the Sibiu Declaration, outlining ten commitments for the future of Europe.[9] And MEPs surely felt relieved when turnout increased in the EP elections held the same month quite significantly to just over 50% and the predicted rise in the Eurosceptical vote did not materialize.

In terms of agenda-setting, there was thus clearly in the aftermath of the multiple crises a 'policy window' open for debates about engaging with citizens and improving the democratic credentials of the EU. And in terms of the origins of the agenda items, we note the influence of both the international environment and the interests of the actual stakeholders, the EU institutions, and actors within them. Much of the efforts rested on the belief in a 'democratic' Europe and in an understanding that, in the words of Alemanno (2020: 508), 'once Europe's democratic genie is out of the bottle, it will be difficult to put it back in'.

The Parliament did not appreciate the European Council held in early July 2019 ignoring the *Spitzenkandidaten* process when choosing the candidate for the Commission president. But the candidate, Ursula von der Leyen (EPP), needed the majority of MEPs behind her. Thus, under

[6] The Future of Europe debates in the European Parliament, 2018–2019: A synthesis of speeches by EU Heads of State or Government, In-Depth Analysis, European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 637.948—May 2019.

[7] European Parliament resolution of 13 February 2019 on the state of the debate on the future of Europe (2018/2094(INI)).

[8] «Pour une Renaissance européenne»: la lettre d'Emmanuel Macron aux Européens, http://www.leparisien.fr/politique/pour-une-renaissance-europeenne-la-lettre-d-emmanuel-macron-aux-europeens-04-03-2019-8024766.php#xtor=AD-1481423553, 4 March 2019.

[9] The Sibiu Declaration, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/05/09/the-sibiu-declaration/, European Council, 9 May 2019.

the heading 'A new push for European democracy' in the guidelines for her Commission, von der Leyen expressed her commitment to a Conference on the Future of Europe:

> I want citizens to have their say at a Conference on the Future of Europe, to start in 2020 and run for two years. The Conference should bring together citizens, including a significant role for young people, civil society, and European institutions as equal partners. The Conference should be well prepared with a clear scope and clear objectives, agreed between the Parliament, the Council and the Commission. I am ready to follow up on what is agreed, including by legislative action if appropriate. I am also open to Treaty change. Should there be a Member of the European Parliament put forward to chair the Conference, I will fully support this idea.[10]

The same guidelines stated that CoFE should address both the *Spitzenkandidaten* system and the introduction of transnational lists in EP elections. Not surprisingly, both items have long been on the agenda of both the Europarties and the Parliament. In particular, the *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism has been defended by referring to fundamental values such as democracy and citizen participation. Von der Leyen further specified her thoughts on the Conference in the 'mission letter' to Dubravka Šuica, at that point the vice-president-designate for Democracy and Demography.[11] Šuica, a former MEP and vice-chair of the EPP Group, was responsible for dealing with the Conference in the Commission.

In subsequent position papers we can detect elements of both issue framing and venue shopping. On 26 November 2019, France and Germany published a paper that could be interpreted as trying to steer the process in a more intergovernmental direction and as an attempt to keep CoFE more focused on policies instead of institutional questions.[12] However, the joint contribution from France and Germany

[10] Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2019–2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/media/20190716RES57231/20190716RES57231.pdf, 16 July 2019.

[11] Ursula von der Leyen, President-elect of the European Commission, Mission letter, Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President-designate for Democracy and Demography, Brussels, 10 September 2019.

[12] Conference on the Future of Europe, Franco-German non-paper on key questions and guidelines, https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Conference-on-the-Future-of-Europe.pdf.

simultaneously gave a 'strong push' for the Conference (Fabbrini, 2019: 6), offering legitimacy and highest-level political support for the project amidst some more lukewarm receptions in select member state capitals—and of course it was Macron who had initiated the whole Conference with his 'open letter'. The European Council of December 2019 gave a mission to the Croatian Presidency to prepare the Council position, underlining the need to focus on policies instead of institutional questions.[13] Also various interest groups intervened. For example, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) called for the inclusion of social and labour market issues on the agenda.[14]

The Parliament and its main political groups had actively campaigned for the 'conference format', both in the various documents, including the final EP resolution adopted on 15 January 2020, and in their informal interactions with the Commission and other actors. On 22 January 2020 the Commission presented its Communication,[15] according to which CoFE should deal with policies and institutions. Regarding the latter, the Communication restated the need to re-examine the *Spitzenkandidaten* process and the idea of transnational lists. While largely agreeing with the viewpoints of the Commission, critical voices among MEPs saw that the Commission was not as ambitious as the Parliament, both in terms of the format and the outcome of the Conference.[16] On the Council side, the General Affairs Council addressed the issue on 28 January 2020, concluding that ministers 'underlined the need to ensure a balanced

[13] European Council meeting– Conclusions, Brussels, 12 December 2019, EUCO 29/19.

[14] Social issues should be priority for the Conference on the Future of Europe, https://www.etuc.org/en/pressrelease/social-issues-should-be-priority-conference-future-europe, 16 January 2020.

[15] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, Shaping the Conference on the Future of Europe, Brussels, 22 January 2020, COM(2020) 27 final.

[16] Commission to Parliament: Let's calm down on EU makeover, https://www.politico.eu/article/european-commission-to-parliament-lets-calm-down-on-eu-makeover-ursula-von-der-leyen-emmanuel-macron/, 21 January 2020; Conference on the Future of Europe: Don't mention the T word, https://www.politico.eu/article/conference-on-the-future-of-europe-dont-mention-the-treaty-word-european-commission-parliament-ursula-von-der-leyen/, 22 January 2020.

representation of the three EU institutions and to fully involve national parliaments'.[17]

But after the COVID-19 pandemic set in, there was mainly silence until in early February 2021 the Council adopted its position.[18] This paved the way for the joint statement of the three EU institutions adopted on 10 March, which outlined that CoFE operates under the authority of the Joint Presidency (presidents of the EP, Council, and Commission) and has an Executive Board where the three institutions have three seats each—Guy Verhofstadt from Renew Europe (the liberal group) was a co-chair of the Board and the other two MEPs were Manfred Weber from EPP and Iratxe García Pérez from Socialists & Democrats (S&D); accordingly the three biggest political families were represented. CoFE revolved around a multilingual digital platform,[19] citizens' panels organized nationally and by the EU institutions, and a Plenary.[20] It was officially launched on 9 May 2021, Europe Day, and reached its conclusions a year later. Table 5.1 contains the organizational set-up of the Conference.

CoFE was thus a mix of bottom-up deliberations and more top-down leadership (see e.g., Abels, 2023a, 2023b; Alemanno, 2020; Fabbrini et al., 2021; Oleart, 2023; Patberg, 2023). The Plenary and the Executive Board were expected to base their discussions on ideas emanating from the digital platform and the citizens' panels. The Parliament was represented in the Plenary, the Executive Board, and the Joint Presidency, and especially the Plenary provided the EP political groups a direct channel of influence. Throughout the preparatory phase there were disagreements between the EU institutions about the organization of CoFE, including who would chair it, its content, as well as whether it could result in Treaty changes. The position of the Council was decidedly more intergovernmental than those of the EP and the Commission, with most national governments against or at least very hesitant about Treaty change

[17] Council of the European Union, Outcome of the Council meeting, General Affairs, Brussels, 28 January 2020, 5573/20.

[18] Council of the European Union, Conference on the Future of Europe—Revised Council position, Brussels, 3 February 2021, 5911/21.

[19] https://futureu.europa.eu/.

[20] Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe, Engaging with Citizens for Democracy—Building a More Resilient Europe, 10 March 2021.

Table 5.1 The organization of the Conference on the Future of Europe

Multilingual digital platform	A place for citizens to share ideas and send online submissions. The platform is divided into the following topics: Climate change and the environment; Health; A stronger economy, social justice, and jobs; EU in the world; Values and rights, rule of law, security; Digital transformation; European democracy; Migration; Education, culture, youth, and sport; Other ideas. These ideas are collected and analyzed throughout the Conference
Decentralized events	Events organized by civil society actors and national, regional, and local authorities across the Union
European Citizens' Panels	Four panels, each with 200 citizens chosen randomly to ensure that they are representative of the EU's diversity, in terms of geographic origin, gender, age, socioeconomic background, and level of education. Young people between 16 and 25 make up one-third of each panel. The panels focus on specific themes: Values, rights, rule of law, democracy, security; Climate change, environment/health; Stronger economy, social justice, jobs/education, youth, culture, sport/digital transformation; EU in the world/migration Representatives from each panel take part in the Plenary, presenting the outcome of their discussions and formulating recommendations for the Union to follow up on
Conference Plenary	Composed of 449 representatives: 108 from the Parliament, 54 from the Council (two per member state), 3 from the Commission, 108 representatives from all national parliaments, and 108 citizens (80 from the European Citizens' Panels, 27 from national Citizens' Panels or Conference events, and the President of the European Youth Forum), 18 from the Committee of the Regions, 18 from the Economic and Social Committee, 6 from regional authorities, 6 from local authorities, 12 from the social partners, and 8 from civil society The Plenary is structured thematically around recommendations from the Citizens' Panels and input gathered from the Multilingual Digital Platform. The Plenary will submit its proposals to the Executive Board
Executive Board	Co-chaired by the Parliament, Commission, and the Council, with three representatives each. It reports to the Joint Presidency and monitors the operation of the Conference. It draws up the final report together with the Plenary
Joint Presidency	The Presidents of the Parliament, the Council, and the Commission, acting as its Joint Presidency

and other binding outcomes.[21] Also the Commission was hesitant about public commitments to Treaty reform. The institutional set-up of CoFE thus reflected contestation between more intergovernmental and supranational approaches, but the Commission and particularly the EP managed to win support for the 'conference format'. Here the initiative of Macron was clearly influential.

Partisan Advocacy: Alone and Together

Turning to partisan activity, we explore first coalition-building in the Parliament before analyzing the advocacy of the Europarties. We can see from the beginning the EP trying to claim 'ownership' of the Conference. There was clearly from the outset rather high interest in the Conference among MEPs. As expected, the leaders of political groups were strongly involved. The Conference of Presidents—the body responsible for organizing Parliament's business that consists of the EP president and the political groups' chairs—established in October 2019 a Working Group on the Conference on the Future of Europe, with the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) having the main responsibility for dealing with the matter. Chaired by the late EP president David Sassoli (S&D), the Working Group brought together representatives from the party groups, including Paulo Rangel (EPP), Gabriele Bischoff (S&D), Verhofstadt (Renew Europe), and Tajani (EPP) in his capacity as the AFCO chair.[22] AFCO did not appoint a rapporteur, as it did not issue a report, just the opinion mentioned below.

AFCO organized a public hearing on 4 December 2019 that featured a long list of speakers from EU institutions, academia, and civil society.[23] AFCO adopted its opinion on 9 December but not before sifting through

[21] Future of Europe: EU Council Vetoes Treaty Change, https://euobserver.com/institutional/148755, 25 June 2020; Dozen EU States Spell Out 'Future of Europe' Priorities, https://euobserver.com/democracy/151319.

[22] Preparing the Conference on the Future of Europe, Briefing, European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, December 2019; https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2019)644202.

[23] Conference on the Future of Europe: hearing with Parliament and Commission VPs, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20191205IPR68320/conference-on-the-future-of-europe-hearing-with-parliament-and-commission-vps, 5 December 2019; https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/product-details/20191120CHE06561.

the 238 amendments tabled by the MEPs seated on the committee.[24] This was the only 'outreach' effort by AFCO, but interviews suggest that MEPs spread the word about the Conference in different ways, from engaging with civil society actors to blog texts to speaking about the Conference within their national parties or with colleagues from domestic legislatures. The Working Group reported to the Conference of Presidents on 19 December, stating that the 'note reflects the current consensus among a majority of the political groups on the scope, governance and outcome of the Conference'.[25] The fact that the preparations for the Conference were overseen by the Conference of Presidents indicates the high salience of the topic in the EP—and was simultaneously also meant as a signal to the other EU institutions that the Conference deserves to be taken seriously.

The main contents of the Working Group paper were included in the subsequent EP resolution adopted on 15 January 2020.[26] The motion for the resolution was tabled by MEPs from all political groups with the exception of the two Eurosceptical groups, European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Identity and Democracy (ID). On behalf of EPP it was signed by Weber, Rangel, Tajani, and Danuta Hübner; from S&D by García Pérez, Bischoff, and Domènec Ruiz Devesa; and from Renew Europe by Dacian Cioloş, Verhofstadt, and Pascal Durand.[27] The EP plenary discussed the issue in the presence of commissioner Šuica and the Council Presidency, with active input from across political groups.[28]

[24] Opinion on the Conference on the Future of Europe, Constitutional Affairs Committee, 10 December 2019; https://emeeting.europarl.europa.eu/emeeting/committee/agenda/201912/AFCO?meeting=AFCO-2019-1209_1P&session=12-09-18-00.

[25] Conference on the Future of Europe, Main outcome of the Working Group, 19 December 2019.

[26] European Parliament's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe. European Parliament resolution of 15 January 2020 on the European Parliament's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe (2019/2990(RSP)), European Parliament's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe, 15 January 2020.

[27] Motion for a resolution to wind up the debate on the statements by the Council and the Commission pursuant to Rule 132(2) of the Rules of Procedure on the European Parliament's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe (2019/2990(RSP)), 9 January 2020; https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2020-0036_EN.html.

[28] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-01-15-ITM-006_EN.html.

The debate reflected the broad partisan consensus, with the Eurosceptics adopting more critical positions.[29] After the debate and votes on 37 amendments, the Parliament adopted its rather detailed resolution with 494 votes to 147 and 49 abstentions. In the EPP Group cohesion was 97.3%, in S&D 95.7%, and in Renew Europe 95.5%.[30] Examining the composition of the Working Group and the actors involved in the Parliament, we note the presence of group leaders—Weber and vice-chair Rangel from EPP, García Pérez from S&D, and Cioloş from Renew Europe—and other seasoned veterans, such as Verhofstadt, of inter-institutional bargaining.

The EP resolution highlighted listening to the citizens, identified a broad range of policies to be tackled, and opined that 'issues such as the lead candidate system and transnational lists should be taken into consideration'. According to the resolution CoFE plenary should involve representatives from the Parliament, the Council, the Commission, national parliaments, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, as well as EU level social partners, but it did not hide the ambition of the EP to lead the Conference. The next day the Conference of Presidents outlined its proposal for the composition of the Executive Coordination Board for the Conference, with MEPs from EPP, S&D, and Renew Europe and a representative each from the Council and the Commission. According to this plan, Verhofstadt would have been the Conference president, with Weber (EPP) and a representative of the S&D Group as his deputies.[31] After the COVID-induced silence, on 10 June 2021, the EP's Conference of Presidents announced the names of the 108 MEPs, members of the EP delegation, to take part in the CoFE Plenary.[32] Respectively, 28, 23, and 15 seats, were allocated to the three biggest political groups. Key MEPs had a strong base in their respective political groups but also acted in concert to promote their ambitions.

[29] Parliament kicks off debate on the Future of Europe conference, https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/parliament-kicks-off-debate-on-the-future-of-europe-conference/, 16 January 2020.

[30] Voting statistics from https://www.votewatch.eu/.

[31] Parliament picks Verhofstadt for new president role, https://www.politico.eu/article/parliament-picks-guy-verhofstadt-for-new-president-role/, 16 January 2020.

[32] Parliament's delegation to the Conference on the Future of Europe, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/hr/press-room/20210610IPR05901/parliament-s-delegation-to-the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe, 10 June 2021.

These political dynamics inside the Parliament, with group leaders prominent in guiding the issue through the committees and the plenary where the resolution reflected the tradition of building large coalitions between the main groups, indicate the salience of CoFE for the political groups and the EP as a whole. Overall, the political families have a legacy of advocating both deeper integration and a stronger position for the Parliament and the Europarties, and certainly the 'future of Europe' featured consistently in the various documents and events of the three political families. For reasons of space, the analysis below does not cover all their events or documents. Instead, it focuses on the main events that are also more directly linked to agenda-setting and advocacy. It is also important to note that in the political families the caucuses organized by the EP political groups were significantly larger than just MEPs; they also consisted of members from other delegations such as national parliamentarians. Let us next examine the activities of the three largest Europarties.

EPP/EPP Group

The EPP came up with a staunchly pro-integrationist vision for CoFE. However, the EPP Congress in November 2019 in Zagreb had a particular focus on climate change. Had it been someone from their own ranks and not President Macron who took an initiative to establish the CoFE, then perhaps the EPP would have shown more interest in the issue. In any case, it is evident that from early on it was the EPP Group that was more actively involved in the CoFE, not the Europarty.

The EPP Group organized various meetings and events involving its members and its partners. Notably, the EPP Group on 21 April 2021 hosted the live webinar event 'The Future of Europe', which brought together several participants including German Chancellor Merkel and EPP Group leader Weber.[33] Merkel said that she wanted 'concrete' proposals to emerge from the Conference.[34] She was not opposed to Treaty change to reset the bloc's future. The comments from Merkel

[33] EPP Group LIVE Event: The Future of Europe, https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/events/the-future-of-europe, 21 April 2021.

[34] Conference on Future of Europe must not be 'pie in the sky' affair warns Angela Merkel, https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/article/conference-on-future-of-europe-must-not-be-pie-in-the-sky-affair-warns-angela-merkel, 26 April 2021.

reflected a strong will to extend the competences of the EU in particular areas. Weber in turn commented that 'we should use the upcoming Conference on the EU's future, to think long and hard as to whether we need Treaty change.'[35] Among the speakers in the specific panel on the CoFE were two MEPs who were members of the EPP Group Task Force on the Future of Europe—Vladimír Bilčík and Jeroen Lenaers. Soon they would be appointed as EPP Group members of the EP delegation to the Conference. Concluding remarks were given by Rangel and Commission vice-president Šuica, who in the Commission dealt with CoFE and is also from the EPP family. The event demonstrated that this political family was fully committed to reinvigorating the debate on European integration. Another example of Europarties facilitating links between EU institutions came when the Bureau of the EPP Group met in Rome on 20–22 September 2021 to discuss with members of the Italian government and parliament various topics including 'the future of Europe'. Commission President von der Leyen addressed an internal meeting with EPP Group members (in camera), and among the speakers were other members of the Commission, including Šuica.[36]

Interaction between the EPP and the EPP Group took place primarily through the EPP Group Caucus, constituted in June 2021, with Rangel as the EPP vice-president and EPP Group vice-chair a key figure and interlocutor. Rangel also chaired the EPP Group Task Force on the Future of Europe, a de facto working group, which monitored proceedings in CoFE. As EPP Group chair, Weber also was centrally involved in the various activities of the EPP Group in relation to CoFE, for example when the EPP Group Position Paper on the Future of Europe was adopted on 19 May 2021 (see below). A year later, just before the CoFE was about to end, Weber stated that 'it is time to organize a convention to prepare Europe for the new realities of the decades to come'; and Rangel said: 'Now we have to follow up the Conference with a convention to give

[35] Treaty change may be needed to give EU powers it needs to tackle future health pandemics, https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/article/treaty-change-may-be-needed-to-give-eu-powers-it-needs-to-tackle-future-health-pandemics, 23 April 2021.

[36] EPP Group Bureau meeting in Rome to discuss agriculture, migration, jobs and the future of Europe, https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/news/epp-group-bureau-meeting-in-rome, 16 September 2021.

institutional and concrete answers to European citizens' expectations'.[37] However, the EPP Congress at the turn of the month in May-June 2022 cautiously called for a 'follow up' on the proposals endorsed by the CoFE, including a stronger EP, without explicitly suggesting a constitutional convention and saying that it 'can include treaty changes'. That reflects compromise and the lack of consensus inside the EPP over treaty change and what should happen next in the process.

PES/S&D

The PES political family has also invested resources in 'the future of Europe' for a longer time, with various resolutions adopted and working groups established that deal with both the future of integration and the role of the PES family in the process. As with EPP, these resolutions have called for a stronger EU with more supranational elements. The S&D Group and PES organized a range of events relating broadly to the 'future of Europe'. For example, they organized jointly a streamed event in Brussels titled 'The Political Vision of the EU's Constitutional Future' on 6 February 2020, with representatives from EU institutions, FEPS, civil society actors, and academics among the speakers.[38] Later that year, in December 2020, the S&D Group adopted its strategy on CoFE, claiming their political family 'has the most far-reaching vision on the future of Europe'.[39]

A few weeks ahead of the launch of CoFE, the S&D Group on 16 April 2021 launched the *#Progressives4Europe* initiative as a debate platform to promote 'progressive' views and voices to feed into the Conference on

[37] EPP Group, Time to organize a convention to prepare Europe for the future, https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/news/time-to-organise-a-convention-to-prepare-europe-s-future, 3 May 2022.

[38] The Political Vision of the EU's Constitutional Future, https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/events/political-vision-eus-constitutional-future, 6 February 2020.

[39] 'The Conference on the Future of Europe should be extended until 2023', say Iratxe García and Marek Belka, https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/newsroom/conference-future-europe-should-be-extended-until-2023-say-iratxe-garcia-and-marek-belka, 10 December 2020; S&D Strategy on the Conference on the Future of Europe, https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/publications/sd-strategy-conference-future-europe, 9 December 2020; https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/sites/default/files/2020-12/sd_strategy_CoFE_en_201210.pdf.

the Future of Europe.[40] This initiative, developed in cooperation with PES and FEPS, among others, was promoted at a high-level hybrid event in Rome on 3 May,[41] with several more events organized across Europe. Moreover, the initiative included a multilingual debate platform in 24 EU languages alongside a Facebook page (Progressives 4 Europe) that encouraged people to submit views and ideas online and to help shape the Progressives' contribution to the debate on the future of Europe. Events continued in autumn 2021 and included a citizens' debate or a conversation on the topic of the future of Europe with the group chair and others; a meeting in Malta of S&D Group members including an event with citizens in the context of CoFE; and an S&D/Progressive family meeting in Florence on 11 December 2021 to debate the future of Europe.[42]

The day before the inaugural Plenary of CoFE, the first 'Progressive Caucus' took place in Strasbourg on 18 June 2021 to set priorities.[43] The meeting was co-hosted by the S&D Group and PES, with contributions from S&D Group chair García Pérez, PES President (and MEP)

[40] Conference on the Future of Europe #Progressives4Europe. Your views, your voice, our future, https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/channel/conference-future-europe-progressives4europe-your-views-your-voice-our-future, 16 April 2021.

[41] The initiative was also developed in cooperation with PES Women, Young European Socialists (YES), the PES Group in the Committee of the Regions and SOLIDAR, the European and worldwide network of civil society organizations. See The Conference on the Future of Europe: our future is in YOUR hands!, https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/channel/conference-future-europe-our-future-your-hands, 3 May 2021; Conference on the future of Europe—our Europe, our future, https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/events/conference-future-europe-our-europe-our-future, 3 May 2021.

[42] See https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/search-page?keys=Conference%20on%20the%20future%20of%20Europe; https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/futureofeurope; S&Ds: Progressive family meets in Florence to debate the Future of Europe. This time is different, https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/newsroom/sds-progressive-family-meets-florence-debate-future-europe-time-different, 6 December 2021; The Future is Democracy: Progressive Europe at crossroads—Saturday 11 December from 9.45 to 18.00, https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/events/future-democracy-progressive-europe-crossroads-saturday-11-december-945-1800, 11 December 2021. The meeting in Florence was in connection with the third and last session of one of the European Citizens' Panels of the Conference, Panel 2 'European democracy/values, rights, rule of law, security', held at the European University Institute in Florence.

[43] First Progressive caucus on the Future of Europe set for eve of plenary, https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/events/first-progressive-caucus-future-europe-set-eve-plenary, 18 June 2021.

Sergei Stanishev, and EP President Sassoli. The caucus meeting brought together MEPs, MPs, Commissioners, and the Portuguese EU presidency. A week later, after the inaugural Plenary session, there was the PES conference on the Future of Europe, gathering 'progressives' in Berlin on 25–26 June 2021 to set out their ambitions for Europe.[44] The event brought together leaders and prime ministers of PES member parties. Ties between the PES and the S&D Group were strengthened by the fact that the PES president Stanishev, from Bulgaria, is also an MEP. And García Pérez (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, PSOE), the chair of the S&D Group, is the first vice-president of the PES. These ties make it easier to reach out to the entire political family. S&D MEPs centrally involved in CoFE included Ruiz Devesa, S&D spokesperson/coordinator for AFCO, and Gabriele Bischoff, AFCO's vice-chair and a member of the EP's Working Group on the Conference on the Future of Europe. Responsible for CoFE within S&D, Bischoff took a leading role in the group's internal work with the Task Force. Bischoff was also involved and active in FEPS.[45]

Ahead of each meeting of the CoFE Plenary, a political caucus was organized by the PES with the social democratic members of the Plenary. This offered an opportunity to discuss policy priorities with local and national CoFE members—showing thus how the European, national, and local levels coordinate inside the political family. While the PES (co-) organized various events, the S&D Group was more influential in relation to CoFE itself. Drawing on EP resources, not least staffing, the group provided the framework for CoFE activities. S&D organized a horizontal Task Force on thematic priorities with partner organizations, experts, and national as well as local politicians. This horizontal working group was open to all S&D members. Cohesion among the social democrat members of the Conference plenary was described in the interviews as 'strong'.

[44] With Courage. For Europe. high-level conference: progressives to gather in Berlin, https://pes.eu/news_content.php?id=1420, 15 June 2021; PES Conference: For Europe. With Courage—Berlin, https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/events/pes-conference-europe-courage-berlin, 26 June 2021. It was a hybrid conference, live-streamed from Berlin.

[45] E.g., How can the Conference on the Future of Europe pave the way for the realization of our dreams for Europe? https://www.feps-europe.eu/resources/publications/734-com_publications.publications.html, 8 May 2020.

ALDE/Renew Europe

The third largest political grouping, the liberal family consisting of ALDE and Renew Europe, not only presented a strongly pro-European vision for CoFE but also underlined the group's role behind it. When the Parliament in January 2020 adopted the resolution backing the CoFE, the Renew Europe Group claimed the resolution included most of its proposals and those of its negotiators Verhofstadt (Open-VLD, Belgium) and Durand (Renaissance, France).[46] The next day, another press release even claimed that 'Renew Europe put forward the proposal on the Conference' and noted that 'our family will play a central role in driving it', referring to the proposed leading role of Verhofstadt.[47]

As is typical for the congresses of the Europarties, institutional questions and the 'future of Europe' featured on the agenda of the ALDE Congress held in Athens in October 2019.[48] ALDE had made plans prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic about organizing events involving member parties and individual party members to collect and shape ideas feeding into CoFE. In November 2020, ALDE Council issued a rather detailed position paper on the Conference, recommending a series of concrete changes to how the EU institutions work—and that after CoFE, 'a European Convention should be convened in order to implement necessary treaty adjustments'.[49] ALDE also stated that it 'will, in the second half of 2021, organize its own Conference on the Future of Europe'.[50] However, it appears that no such event took place.

[46] Conference on the Future of Europe: The Time Has Come to Democratize the European Union, https://www.reneweuropegroup.eu/news/2020-01-15/conference-on-the-future-of-europe-the-time-has-come-to-democratize-the-european-union, 15 January 2020.

[47] Renew Europe will have a Central role in the Conference on the Future of Europe, https://www.reneweuropegroup.eu/news/2020-01-16/renew-europe-will-have-a-central-role-in-the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe, 16 January 2020.

[48] The programme for the ALDE Congress had a panel on 'Debating Our Future! – Young Liberals on Pan-European Challenges', while the congress adopted resolutions on 'Transnational lists' and on 'Strengthening European democracy and values'. The latter resolution called for 'the ALDE Party to provide its contribution to the "Conference on the Future of Europe" in the most effective way(s)'.

[49] ALDE input to the Conference on the Future of Europe, ALDE virtual council, https://www.aldeparty.eu/tags/council_online_november_2020.

[50] Liberal pre-summit meeting ahead of crucial EU Council, https://www.aldeparty.eu/liberal_pre_summit_meeting_ahead_of_crucial_eu_summit, 16 December 2020.

In early 2021, ALDE launched an Action Plan on the Future of Europe, which included a dedicated digital hub, a series of townhall meetings organized with ALDE member parties, as well as an (intended) ALDE conference dedicated to CoFE.[51] Throughout October 2021, ALDE member parties and partners across Europe held a series of events to discuss the future of Europe, also involving MEPs, and events on Europe's future, focusing on the CoFE, were organized by member parties—for instance, in Belgium, Estonia, Ireland, and Spain.[52] Furthermore, ALDE partners, such as the European Liberal Youth (LYMEC) and the Renew Europe Group in the Committee of the Regions, which is part of CoFE, contributed to the ongoing debate on democracy and citizens' engagement in the context of the Conference.

Renew Europe launched on 1 June 2021 a series of monthly 'Values Talks' with the participation of the then Renew Europe chair Cioloș and leading politicians of the Renew Europe liberal and pro-European family.[53] Against the background of CoFE, the talks included questions from civil society organizations, citizens, and journalists. In a series of interviews (from June 2021) with members of its CoFE delegation, Renew Europe addressed the same set of questions, one of which was 'Renew Europe has initiated the idea of the Conference. What will be the Group's priorities?'[54] And on a more individual level, 'What topics will you be focusing on?' While there was much consistency in the answers, particularly relating to citizens and democracy, including transnational lists for EP elections, it is obvious that the members were not controlled by any common talking points. In connection with CoFE's second plenary in Strasbourg on 22–23 October 2021, Renew Europe organized a Caucus meeting on 22 October to discuss common priorities.[55] Durand, coordinator of Renew Europe in AFCO, coordinated the group regarding CoFE, while Verhofstadt, co-chair of the Executive Board of the Conference, coordinated matters at that and the EP level and

[51] See https://www.aldeparty.eu/CoFE.

[52] Liberals Take Action on the Future of Europe, https://www.aldeparty.eu/liberals_take_action_on_the_future_of_europe, 3 November 2021.

[53] Renew Europe launch 'Values Talks', with Estonian PM, https://euobserver.com/stakeholders/152001?utm_source=euobs&utm_medium=email, 1 June 2021.

[54] See https://reneweurope.medium.com/.

[55] Liberals take action on the Future of Europe, https://www.aldeparty.eu/liberals_take_action_on_the_future_of_europe, 3 November 2021.

was the spokesperson for Renew Europe on CoFE. Cohesion within the Renew Europe Conference Caucus was said to be 'fine', but an important cleavage in Renew Europe/ALDE is the one over the EU itself, regarding European integration. The majority of the liberal members is pro-integrationist and with Renew Europe MEPs and staff active in the Spinelli Group, a pro-federalist approach comes naturally for them with, for example, calls for transnational lists in European elections.[56]

The cases of EPP and PES already showed that the EP political groups were more present in CoFE than the actual Europarties, and this applied perhaps even more so in the liberal party family. According to an interviewee, ALDE was 'not very much present in the Conference'. However, ALDE organized, occasionally together with ELF, different events, sometimes upon requests from the Renew Europe Group. There seemed to be limited political coordination between Renew Europe and ALDE regarding CoFE. That said, there were individual MEPs who held prominent positions in ALDE,[57] and thereby interaction between ALDE and Renew Europe was stronger, at least on a personal level. There may also be a natural explanation for ALDE being less active in the CoFE, as the degree of overlapping membership between ALDE and Renew Europe is significantly lower than between the EPP/EPP Group and PES/S&D (see Chapter 1). It appears as if the latter two political families tend to have stronger cooperation and coordination overall. That said, ALDE

[56] The cross-party Spinelli Group brings together federalist-minded politicians and others advocating a constitution for the Union. That requires a constitutional Convention (The Spinelli Group, 2018). This is where you find MEPs and CoFE representatives like Bischoff (S&D), Durand (Renew Europe), Hübner (EPP), and Verhofstadt (Renew Europe). There was even a Spinelli Group Caucus, with the participation of several members of CoFE Plenary. See The first meeting of the 'Spinelli Caucus and the Spinelli Manifesto for the Conference on the Future of Europe', https://thespinelligroup.eu/the-first-meeting-of-the-spinelli-caucus-and-the-spinelli-manifesto-for-the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe/, 18 June 2021; see also https://thespinelligroup.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SPINELLI-MANIFESTO_V_light.pdf.

[57] Notably, Dita Charanzová, MEP (Czechia), a vice-president of the Parliament and member of Renew Europe's Delegation to CoFE, was one of the vice-presidents of the ALDE party. Ilhan Kyuchyuk (Bulgaria), another MEP and member of Renew Europe's delegation to CoFE, was ALDE party's acting co-president. Yet another ALDE party vice-president, Luis Garicano (Spain), was MEP but was not in the Conference.

continued to set out its vision for the Future of Europe, suggesting the launch of a Convention 'to implement the conclusions of the Conference and lay the foundation for a European Constitution.'[58]

Political Foundations

The contribution of political foundations attached to the Europarties should not be underestimated, even though their influence is more indirect and harder to detect. Most of the interaction between political foundations, Europarties, and the EP political groups is informal and active, with overlap in terms of personnel. WMCES, FEPS, and ELF hosted various events and produced a steady stream of publications, often drawing on academic expertise, which specifically either directly dealt with CoFE or more generally with the future of Europe and institutional or policy questions. WMCES organized events and published material about CoFE on its website, including blogposts.[59] ELF was an additional resource for ALDE/Renew Europe,[60] with, for example, the ELF's *Liberal White Book: Europe 2030* (2021) intended to feed into the future of Europe debate and ELF also organized events specifically linked to CoFE.[61] FEPS was also highly active and the publication *Our European Future* (May 2021), containing proposals to CoFE, was among its contributions to the debate about the future of Europe.[62] Other contributions were made through the FEPS Policy Brief, for example.[63] The political foundations also provided platforms for activists in the respective political families to outline their goals for the CoFE. Finally, the political foundations collaborated, for example through organizing in September 2020,

[58] ALDE, A liberal vision for the Future of Europe, https://www.aldeparty.eu/CoFE_alde_party_policy (accessed 15 August 2022).

[59] Prospects for the Conference on the Future of Europe, https://www.martenscentre.eu/blog/prospects-for-the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe/, 16 December 2021.

[60] See https://www.aldeparty.eu/CoFE_resources.

[61] See https://liberalforum.eu/think-tank/liberal-white-book-europe-2030/.

[62] Book: Our European Future, FEPS contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe, https://www.feps-europe.eu/resources/publications/797-our-european-future.html, 27 May 2021.

[63] E.g., 'A progressive approach to the Conference on the Future of Europe' by Richard Corbett, former MEP for the S&D Group, https://www.feps-europe.eu/resources/publications/810-com_publications.publications.html, 27 July 2021.

with the Former Members Association and the European University Institute, a webinar on 'Together for the future of Europe'.[64]

To summarize, the transnational party networks were clearly active regarding CoFE and the broader theme of the 'future of Europe'. EPP/EPP Group, PES/S&D, and ALDE/Renew Europe each organized a variety of events and produced documents and resolutions, but in all three families the EP political group was more prominent than the Europarty. The networks are horizontal, bringing together MEPs, Commissioners, the political foundations, European level interest groups, members from the Committee of Regions, as well as the youth and women's organizations of the Europarties—and vertical, as they also include national member parties and occasionally also activists. These networks have developed over decades, but they can essentially be understood as networks or advocacy coalitions of European and national party elites. Overall, the (transnational) partisan networks keep up the momentum and join together European and national politicians to discuss the future of the EU.

Comparing the Positions of the Europarties and the CoFE Conclusions

This section of the empirical analysis explores the objectives and priorities of the three political families and compares them with the conclusions of CoFE. We focus deliberately on institutional questions, but include also policy issues, as often the two are directly related, for example when the documents speak about extending qualified majority voting (QMV) in Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)/Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) or deeper economic integration. As detailed above, the Europarties and their EP political groups adopted a variety of resolutions and documents relating both to CoFE and the broader theme of the 'future of Europe'. Most of these are fairly short texts about current decisions and policy processes. Hence, we focus in our analysis on the key position papers of the Europarties or their EP political groups on CoFE that are longer and cover the entire spectrum of issues—essentially these position papers are comparable to the party or election programmes of

[64] See https://www.formermembers.eu/event/2020-eprs-event/.

national parties or the Europarties. We first explore the political families individually before providing a comparative summary of their positions.

EPP/EPP Group

The EPP Group adopted its position paper on the Future of Europe on 19 May 2021.[65] The paper is in line with EPP's long-standing pro-European heritage and demonstrates a willingness to reform the Union, institutionally and structurally. EPP links the Conference directly to Treaty change: 'we might consider designating the [Conference] with the task to prepare a new Convention to draft a revised treaty'. This is significant given opposition to Treaty change among national governments, and the cautious wording used by EPP Group chair Weber on various occasions.

> We want the Conference on the Future of Europe to be meaningful in developing the future polity and policy of the EU. Hence, we want to put forward profound questions about Europe's democratic future. It is important that the Conference will not be misconstrued as an alibi event for pursuing only cosmetic changes to the EU's political system. Otherwise, we risk our legitimacy and gamble on the future of Europeans. The European People's Party has always been the driving force behind European integration. We are proud of the legacy of leaders like Robert Schuman, Alcide de Gasperi and Konrad Adenauer. Now our generation is called upon to do its part and start a new chapter in the history of the European Union.

Treaty change is thus openly advocated, and reforms are linked to global crises:

> We want to further equip our Union with the right and sufficient resources and structures to be able to tackle effectively the next emergencies, including the climate challenge. The European Union has to be the problem-solver of the next crisis and at the forefront of the technological and environmental challenges in the coming years.

The EPP sees Europe'as a democratic role model for the world'. It believes in a 'strong and united Europe' and recognizes that

[65] EPP Group Position Paper on the Future of Europe, May 2021.

> answering people's concerns might demand institutional and structural reforms, at Union and national level, that make Europe stronger and more resilient while building a real connection with citizens across the EU. These reforms shall not be limited to internal matters, but shall also envisage an international and global orientation. Europeans need to assert themselves in a world of uni-laterally acting superpowers with which no European state can compete alone.

EPP calls for accountability and transparency, while emphasizing that 'all levels of the European Union need to communicate with one voice and provide solutions to political issues'.

The solution is stronger EU level representative democracy. The EPP sees Europe 'as a democratic role model for the world', and it wants

> to ensure greater citizen participation and engagement, greater accountability for decisions, with a livelier parliamentary democracy at the national level and a stronger European Parliament at its core. Democracy and the safeguard of human rights and freedoms, the rule of law and separation of powers are at the heart of our European identity. But democracy needs to be deepened and developed at European level.

The European Parliament is at the core of the argument:

> The European Union has to become a representative democracy where people have a greater say on matters of EU competence: we want to show that the European Union can be the leading role model for the effective representation of its citizens. Only with political competition at European level will the people have a clear say about their own future. 'Take back control' was the Brexiteers' slogan. Brexit has instead shown that being out of the decision-making process only results in a loss of control. The European Parliament, as the people's representation, ensures that Europeans have a say in the future of our Union. For this reason, we want to boost representation and parliamentarism at the European level.

The Parliament 'should have full legislative and budgetary powers, including the right to initiate, amend, and repeal any European legislation in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure. The MFF [Multiannual Financial Framework] should have the same time frame of the Parliament's mandate'. In terms of accountability, the EPP sees that

> the Commission must become more accountable to Parliament by strengthening Parliament's political control through an updated and effective right of inquiry, the ability to impeach single Commissioners as well as the introduction of a constructive motion of no-confidence, allowing the European Parliament to choose the new President of the Commission with an absolute majority.

The EPP also opines that 'each Commission should be built on a concrete coalition agreement based on the political guidelines and concrete projects'. Regarding the European elections, the EPP Group wants to reinforce the *Spitzenkandidaten* system:

> To strengthen democracy at European level and accountability in the eyes of Europeans, we also want to reinforce the 'Spitzenkandidaten' system. This means that the biggest party shall form the governing majority and will get the right to nominate the President of the Commission, who then needs a majority support of the EP ('biggest party has the first choice' rule). The candidature of every lead candidate shall be conditional on the support of their respective national parties and they shall undertake a process of democratic nomination from European parties. To strengthen the democratic selection of the Commission, it would be convenient if every future Commissioner could also run in a prominent position in the elections in his respective Member State. This will contribute to increase the transparency of their nomination in the European executive and show a real impact on citizens' preferences. As a consequence, every Commissioner can be a Member of the European Parliament.

However, the EPP reiterates its earlier negative position on transnational lists:

> As in every multi-level governance system, such as the European Union, the geographical representation is, next to ideological representation, crucial. Therefore, we reiterate our disagreement over transnational lists as they run against the principle of territorial representation, and they would put smaller Member States' candidates at a competitive disadvantage compared to those of larger Member States. We want to reform the electoral law to create a vibrant party competition that mirrors the nature of our Union and ensures that every European voter has an equal and broad right to participate in European elections regardless of his or her place of residence and every Member of the European Parliament is connected to his/her constituency.

The EPP Group further notes that

> a strong democracy requires lively political parties and civil society. Therefore, we should reflect on a reform of the party law at European level to improve citizens' involvement in European democracy. Furthermore, we want to strengthen the democratic links between the various political levels in the EU. For example, there should be the possibility of permitting the President of the European Commission and Commissioners to also hold functions in their respective parties.

Overall, the position paper is strongly in favour of deeper integration across policy domains while referring to the EU's values and solidarity. It calls for more powers to the various agencies of the Union. Regarding external action, the EPP argues that new institutions are needed:

> In a world in turmoil, we should take a step further and work closer together when it comes to defence. The EU should establish its own military unit, with Joint Headquarters, based on volunteers coming from the Member States. Such a unit, complementing national military forces and compatible with NATO, could be an important European defence capability. This military unit would be financed by the EU, would report to a newly established Defence Affairs Council and hold a duty to involve and report to the European Parliament. For Europe to act as one, a new Defence Commissioner should also be established.

QMV should apply to all areas that enhance the external action capability of the European Union. 'Only then will we be able to truly speak with one single voice as Europeans'. For this purpose, the European Union should move towards holding a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, as an additional seat to the one held by France. In addition, in economic governance the EPP believes in institutional reform:

> We intend to strengthen and deepen the Single Market further, especially in the area of free movement of services, to speed up on the completion of the Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union and implement a forward-looking reform of our Economic and Monetary Union. Moreover, we must strive to develop a well-functioning Single Market for retail financial services. For a well-functioning Economic and Monetary Union, economic convergence between Member States should be further stimulated and our fiscal policies aligned in a more effective way while considering further progress towards a European Monetary Fund.

Other goals include 'a Health Union that brings true added value for the Member States and operates in fields that cannot be covered by Member States alone' and a digital tax as part of stronger own resources: 'For the EU to act more effectively, the EPP Group intends to make significant progress on the European Union's own resources, proposing the introduction of a basket of new sources of revenues for the EU, without increasing the overall tax burden on citizens'.

PES/S&D

Next, we turn to PES/S&D, which was the first of the three biggest political families studied here to outline its priorities in a position paper presented on 9 June 2020.[66] The paper reflects the position of the S&D Group—in the preface portrayed as 'the most progressive and pro-European family' in the Parliament—on the constitutional future of Europe. It also intends to offer a first contribution regarding the institutional dimension to CoFE. In the preface, S&D further notes that this exercise comes two decades after the launch of the last official debate on the future of Europe: European Council of Nice, 2000, followed in 2001 by the Laeken Declaration.

The S&D position paper has a lot in common with the EPP's equivalent document, both regarding overall commitment to the European project and more specific institutional questions. However, S&D emphasizes strongly the social dimension of integration while devoting less space to CFSP/CSDP and other forms of EU's external action. It also uses the crises as a starting point for arguing that the EU needs to be reformed and strengthened. Without reforms, the EU will not be able to tackle future challenges. S&D is ready for Treaty change but sees that steps forward can also be taken in the current constitutional framework.

> A deep debate on the revision of the treaties – after almost 20 years – can be envisioned: it is time to start by taking stock of the State of the Union as well as by finding solutions within the provisions of the existing treaties, as the EU constitutional structure is only half built but has shown to be unfit for dealing with important crisis (migration, Euro area, health).

[66] S&D Paper on the EU's constitutional future: towards a stronger political union, https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/publications/sd-paper-eus-constitutional-future-towards-stronger-political-union, 9 June 2020; https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/sites/default/files/2020-06/eu_constitutional_future_en_200609.pdf.

> This can be realized by making the best possible use of the planned Conference on the Future of Europe, but also by concentrating on the parts of the current Lisbon Treaty that still need to be fully exploited…

In terms of institutional reforms, S&D states that

> The Conference should concentrate its reflections on the options about a possible deeper political integration of the EU and discuss the parliamentarisation of the Union, a strengthened right of legislative initiative, unanimity, qualified majority vote in Council on key policy fields such as foreign affairs, climate, energy, taxation, social policy, a stricter political control on the application of the rule of law. … The above-outlined political goal of discussing the implementation of new and more advanced rights should orient the reflections of the Conference on the European Parliament's prerogatives, in line with the parliamentary tradition of the majority of Member States and with the goal of achieving a true European political system founded on the European parties.

S&D puts forward a list of its political priorities for the Conference:

- Full exploitation of the Lisbon Treaty to ensure the best execution of European policies, including the activation of *passerelle* clauses for extending Qualified Majority Voting in Council,
- Completion of the monetary union with the financial union and reform of the Stability and Growth Pact and of the mandate of the [European Central Bank] ECB,
- Constitutionalization of new policies and competencies on social Europe, climate change, and public Health Union,
- A stronger European budget backed by new own resources, including common taxation and more power for the EP on revenues,
- A stronger European Parliament: right of legislative initiative, full co-decision, stronger political control over the Commission,
- Substantial improvements in the transparency of the institutions, notably within the Council,
- Including the Social Progress Protocol and European Pillar of Social Rights in the event of Treaty changes,
- Permanent and structured forms of citizens' participation—based on gender and social balance—and new models of EU citizenship education,
- Improvement of the *Spitzenkandidaten* process,

- Introduction of transnational lists for the election of part of EP members, with rules that ensure the respect for balance between large, medium, and small-sized Member States,
- Defence of the quality of democracy in the EU and in the functioning of the European Institutions as well as of the EU democratic project.

The S&D thus has a long 'shopping list' aiming at a major 'update' of the EU's institutional structure:

> We believe our European constitutional framework requires an update on its contents (policies), resources, decision-making (procedures) and democratic legitimacy, thus resulting in a stronger, more perfect political union. These three dimensions are closely connected, since we realise that the implementation of our ambitious progressive agenda in the social and ecological fields depends also on more democratic and efficient decision-making at the European level.

Essentially the social democratic party family wants to strengthen supranational policymaking:

> This process should aim at shifting the executive authority towards the Commission, which needs to be turned into the government of the EU. In this respect, more coherent and effective decision-making can also be fostered by making the [Commission's] composition more reflective of electoral outcomes, as well as by rebalancing the role of the European Council.

The Council's working methods should become more 'efficient and transparent, notably by respecting the provisions on the public deliberation of the Council and the publicity of Member States' positions', while QMV should apply 'in all policies (own resources, taxation, foreign policy, social affairs, etc.), initially by activating the *passerelles* in the Lisbon Treaty'. A further empowerment of the European Parliament is at the core of S&D's agenda: extending co-decision procedure to all legislation, the right of legislative initiative, stronger control of the Commission, and consolidation of budgetary powers. Here S&D makes historical references:

> Given this environment, stronger European unity is a necessity, as a fully democratic Union of democratic states. Thus, the historic mission of building a sovereign European transnational democracy in the form of a parliamentary political union, as envisioned in the Ventotene Manifesto of 1941, is now more valid than ever, by underlining the constitutive intertwining between EU and Member States and by developing true and clear multilevel governance.

S&D has also specific proposals concerning the political accountability of the Commission: full implementation of the Parliament's right of inquiry; detailed commitments set out in a renewed and enhanced framework agreement; the introduction of a periodic Question Time in the plenary; and introducing mechanisms to hold individual Commissioners to account. At the same time, S&D suggests further developing existing frameworks of interparliamentary cooperation and endowing national parliaments with the right of proposing initiatives to the European Parliament. S&D is in favour of both the *Spitzenkandidaten* process and transnational lists:

> Firstly, consolidating the Spitzenkandidaten process, in line with the Lisbon Treaty's provisions and based on the Parliament's requests to appoint as President of the Commission the candidate which can be backed by the majority of its component members. Secondly, by adding to this process an ambitious electoral reform that sets up once for all a pan-European constituency in the Union electing part of the EP Members, while taking into account the need to ensure geographical balance, particularly as regards the smaller member states. This could enhance the European dimension of EU elections, and strengthen the democratic life of the Union.

Regarding economic governance, S&D supports a 'real financial union', 'transnational redistribution' measures, and more budgetary resources. S&D has an ambitious agenda and recommends the establishment of several new institutions: a European treasury financed by common forms of taxation and empowered to issue Eurobonds; a potential Employment and Social Affairs (EPSCO) ministerial Euro Group besides the existing Financial Ministers' Euro Group; the Commissioner of Economics should act as the Euro Area Finance Minister and in this capacity, chair the Eurogroup; the European Stability Mechanism should be incorporated into the Treaties; and the MFF should be aligned to the duration of the

EP mandate. The paper states that 'a key feature of any serious European Anticyclical Tool, avoiding the mistakes of the post-2008 aftermath, is a set of strong own resources for Europe, making public budgets and social safety nets stronger through raising revenues at EU level that could not be raised at national level'. Potential sources of revenue are 'a fraction of the Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base, the Financial Transaction Tax, the digital tax, income from ETS/C02, ECB profits, etc.'. Other goals include "raising the 'constitutional' profile of the European Pillar of Social Rights" through integrating it within Treaty provisions, and a 'public health union' as 'a key component part of vision for a Social Europe, together with the introduction of a European System of Minimum Wages and decent minimum old age pension as well as with a European Unemployment Benefit Scheme, and with a strengthened common framework for the reception and integration of refugees and migrants into the increasingly multi-ethnic, multi-cultural European society'.

ALDE/Renew Europe

For the liberals we rely on two documents. The Renew Europe's position paper from spring 2021 addresses priorities for CoFE.[67] However, the document focused very much on policies and values without more detailed objectives regarding institutional questions. Hence, we also include a second document, 'A liberal vision for the Future of Europe', adopted in the autumn of 2021.[68] At the outset, the former document notes how the Renew Europe, 'dedicated pro-Europeans', 'campaigned for the setting up of the Conference on the Future of Europe'. It also highlights CoFE as an opportunity for strengthening and democratizing the Union. Like the other position papers, this one also emphasizes the role of citizens and their active involvement.

On democracy, Renew Europe is in line with EPP and S&D in calling for greater involvement of the European Parliament:

[67] Renew Europe, Reshaping our future together. Priorities for the Conference on the Future of Europe, 2021.

[68] See https://www.aldeparty.eu/cofoe_alde_party_policy.

> Renew Europe believes that fostering transparency of EU decision making and democratic legitimacy is fundamental to regain trust in the Union and to promote citizens' involvement in shaping EU policies. We pledge for substantial changes to enable better democratic control of the decisions made by the national governments within the Council and we support strengthening European democracy by having genuine European elections, with candidates that campaign through European political parties on transnational lists in a joint European constituency. Reinforcing the concept of European citizenship and, finally completing the Parliament's right of legislative initiative, are also direct tools to improve democratic legitimacy and participation.

The document 'A liberal vision for the Future of Europe' lists several goals:

- A single European Parliament seat in Brussels, with the power to initiate legislation and remove individual Commissioners.
- Harmonization of EU Member States' laws for European Parliament elections.
- Introduction of transnational lists.
- Reduction of the number of EU Commissioners to 18, nominated by the European Commission President-elect.
- Strengthening of the involvement of national parliaments in EU affairs.
- Launch a Convention on the Future of Europe to implement the conclusions of the Conference and lay the foundation for a European Constitution.

From these objectives we can infer considerable similarity with the positions of EPP and S&D. Importantly, the final point concerns time beyond CoFE, the conclusions of which should be used as a starting point for drafting a proper EU constitution. This readiness for Treaty change is another factor in common with EPP and social democrats. Transnational lists are supported, but there is no mention of the *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism.

Throughout the document, Renew Europe places a lot of emphasis on companies, entrepreneurship, individual rights, as well as emphasizing the rule of law principle. The further development of the single market and EMU is deemed as important, with investments in research and

innovation and creating a 'true common, borderless, digital European ecosystem'. Like EPP and S&D, Renew Europe also supports a 'European Health union'. However, the liberals do not really present any institutional reforms in economic governance beyond arguing that the EP should have a stronger say in economic and monetary policy, including improved accountability of the ECB through an inter-institutional agreement. On the budget, Renew Europe calls for 'higher resources', including new own sources of revenue, and again a stronger role for the Parliament:

> we shall strengthen the efficiency of the legislative decision making as well as democratic legitimacy and accountability of the Union budget and its own resources by granting the European Parliament enhanced competences and a more active role in the monitoring of the implementation of the own resources system. We therefore call for a deep review of the design and the adoption process of the EU budget, including a discussion on the possibility of approving the MFF through co-decision, within the framework of the Conference for the Future Europe.

Regarding external relations, Renew Europe envisions streamlined decision-making:

> The EU must move towards [QMV] in foreign policy. As a first step, the passerelle clause, article 31 (3) TEU, should be put in force. QMV should be expanded to other areas of CFSP decision-making as well, with a particular focus on human rights. Furthermore, there should be a clear division of tasks between the Commission President, the Council President and the [High Representative], in which the latter should get a stronger mandate to act combined with a strengthened role for the European Parliament to increase the democratic oversight in foreign policy matters.

Renew Europe also supports a 'real European Defence Union', and as 'European Defence is advancing, a formal Defence Council should also be put in place, as the proper forum for discussion at Council level. By analogy, a fully-fledged Security and Defence Committee should be set up in the European Parliament to make sure that the European citizens' voices are properly reflected'. The document 'A liberal vision for the Future of Europe' includes several concrete goals: institutionally reinforcing the European External Action Service and the High Representative of the EU, who should act as an EU Foreign Minister; a

European seat in the UN Security Council and other organizations; QMV for decisions on foreign and security policies; and the establishment and implementation of the European Defence Union subject to parliamentary control.

Comparative Summary

Turning to the comparison of the positions, Table 5.2. summarizes the main findings.

The first point to note is the discourse and framing of the positions. The Europarties legimitize their pro-integrationist objectives with big words such as 'democracy', 'participation', 'transparency', and 'representation', in general arguing that the voice of citizens should become stronger in EU politics. Such framing is ever-present in the advocacy of Europarties and should be understood in the context of the gradual empowerment of the Parliament and Europeal level democracy (Héritier et al., 2019; Rittberger, 2005). The multiple crises, Europarties claim, only reinforce the need for change as otherwise the EU will fail to meet the demands of its citizens.

The Europarties are ready for Treaty change, which stands in contrast to the positions of the majority of national governments (Ålander et al., 2021). In fact, the Europarties tended to see the CoFE as a kind of sounding board and platform for proper Treaty reform resulting in a European constitution. The Europarties did not directly call for major changes to the balance of power between the EU institutions. The S&D was the only one explicitly arguing that the Commission should become the government of the EU, although the EPP Group mentioned that the Commission should be based on a concrete coalition agreement. However, all three political families supported considerably stronger competences for the Parliament—extending the co-decision procedure to all policy areas, the right of legislative initiative, increased budgetary powers and involvement in economic governance and external relations, and improved control of the Commission, including the right to remove individual Commissioners. In the Council, the Europarties favoured the application of QMV across all issues. As a result, the Europarties agreed about reinforcing both the role of the Parliament and the leadership capacity of the Commission—thus signalling their clear support for strengthening supranational elements in EU decision-making.

Table 5.2 Comparing the positions of the EPP/EPP Group, PES/S&D, and ALDE/Renew Europe on the Conference on the Future of Europe

	EPP/EPP Group	*PES/S&D*	*ALDE/Renew Europe*
Treaty change	For	For	For
Parliament	Full legislative powers The right to initiate, amend, and repeal any European legislation in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure	Right of legislative initiative Full co-decision powers	Right of legislative initiative Single EP seat in Brussels
Commission	More accountability to the EP through the right of inquiry The possibility to impeach single Commissioners A constructive motion of no-confidence, allowing the EP to choose the new Commission President with an absolute majority Commission based on a concrete coalition agreement	The Commission should become an EU government Composition should be more reflective of electoral outcomes Full implementation of the EP's right of inquiry Introducing mechanisms to hold individual Commissioners to account	Reducing the number of Commissioners to 18, nominated by the Commission President-elect The EP should have the right to remove individual Commissioners
Europarties	Reform of the party law at European level Allowing the Commissioners to hold functions in their respective parties	'Achieving a true European political system founded on the European parties'	

(continued)

Table 5.2 (continued)

	EPP/EPP Group	*PES/S&D*	*ALDE/Renew Europe*
Spitzenkandidaten	The 'biggest party has the first choice' rule Commissioners could simultaneously serve as MEPs	Consolidating the Spitzenkandidaten process, based on the Parliament's requests to appoint as Commission President the candidate who is backed by the majority of MEPs	
Transnational lists	Against, as such EU-wide lists would undermine territorial representation and be disadvantageous to candidates from smaller member states	Introduction of transnational lists for the election of some of the MEPs, with rules that ensure the respect for balance between large, medium, and small-sized member states	Introduction of transnational lists to have 'genuine European elections, with candidates that campaign through European political parties on transnational lists in a joint European constituency'
External action	The EU's own military unit, with Joint Headquarters, that would report to a Defence Affairs Council and the EP The post of a Defence Commissioner QMV should apply to all areas of external action The EU should have a permanent seat in the UN Security Council	QMV should apply in all issue areas, foreign policy included	QMV in foreign policy Stronger role for the Foreign Minister (High Representative) and the Parliament A 'real European Defence Union', with a Defence Council and a Security and Defence Committee in the EP A European seat in the UN Security Council and other organizations

(continued)

Table 5.2 (continued)

	EPP/EPP Group	*PES/S&D*	*ALDE/Renew Europe*
Economic governance	Completion of the Banking Union and the Capital Markets Union EMU reform, including progress towards a European Monetary Fund Stronger resources: the introduction of a basket of new sources of revenues for the EU and full budgetary powers for the EP MFF should have the same time frame as the Parliament's mandate	A 'real financial union', with 'transnational redistribution' measures Stronger budgetary resources and increased budgetary powers for the EP A European treasury, Employment and Social Affairs ministerial Euro Group, the Commissioner of Economics should act as the Euro Area Finance Minister and chair the Eurogroup MFF should have the same time frame as the Parliament's mandate	Stronger role for the EP, including improved control of ECB 'Higher resources', including new own sources of revenue Approving the MFF through co-decision
Other points	Deepening the single market Health Union	Social Europe, including a European System of Minimum Wages, decent minimum old age pension, and a European Unemployment Benefit Scheme Including the European Pillar of Social Rights in the Treaties Public Health Union	Emphasis on companies and entrepreneurship and the further development of the Single Market 'European Health Union'

The position papers of the EPP Group and S&D contained only short remarks regarding Europarties, but obviously the empowerment of the Parliament as well as the *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism and transnational lists would elevate their status in EU governance. The EPP Group and S&D supported the *Spitzenkandidaten* system, while S&D and Renew

Europe were in favour of transnational lists while the EPP was against. Therefore, we again find the transnational partisan actors pushing for reforms that do not enjoy similar support among the governments of the member states. Turning to external relations, we note strong convergence as all three Europarties envisioned the EU becoming a stronger and more independent actor on a global stage. This requires more efficient decision-making, with the EPP Group and Renew Europe, in particular, putting forward concrete proposals for institutional reforms. The EPP Group, S&D and Renew Europe also championed stronger institutions and democratic accountability in economic governance. On the budget they all recognized the need for stronger resources and new sources of revenue. Interestingly, they argued that the current seven-year cycle of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) should have the same time frame as the Parliament's five-year mandate. This reform would certainly streamline budgetary rules and potentially make the EU's budget a more important part of the campaigns in European elections (e.g., Leino-Sandberg & Raunio, 2023).

Overall, as expected there were striking similarities between the position papers. This applies to institutional questions as well as policy issues. To be sure, there were also differences stemming from the ideological backgrounds of the political families. The social democrats emphasize a 'social Europe', while EPP and liberals devote more space to reforming and deepening the single market. Referring to the crises, they all argue that the EU needs stronger institutions and more policy competences. Without such reforms, so the argument goes, the EU fails to provide leadership in tackling the challenges. Considering that COVID-19 pandemic coincided with the Conference, it is not surprising to find the Europarties and their EP political groups advocating a European health union.

CoFE Conclusions

Comparison of the Europarties' objectives with the final CoFE report suggests that the transnational partisan actors were highly successful in mobilizing support for their initiatives during the Conference.[69] In fact, the convergence between CoFE conclusions and the positions of the

[69] Conference on the Future of Europe, Report on the Final Outcome, May 2022. We focus here on the 'Plenary proposals'. The annexes to the report also include the recommendations of the citizens' panels that were discussed in the Plenary.

Europarties is remarkable. The only major difference regarding democracy and institutions, perhaps understandably, is that the CoFE report strongly underlines the need to engage with citizens and the civil society, for example through 'increasing the frequency of online and offline interactions between EU institutions', 'a user-friendly digital platform where citizens can share ideas, put forward questions to the representatives of EU institutions and express their views on important EU matters and legislative proposals, in particular youth', 'online polls', 'a system of local EU Councillors', 'holding Citizens' assemblies periodically, on the basis of legally binding EU law', and summarizing 'elements of citizens' participation in an EU Charter for the involvement of citizens in EU affairs'.

Under the heading 'democracy and elections' the Plenary proposal basically repeated the shopping list of the Europarties. The CoFE report recommended:

- 'Conceiving a EU wide referendum, to be triggered by the European Parliament, in exceptional cases on matters particularly important to all European citizens'
- 'Amending EU electoral law to harmonise electoral conditions (voting age, election date, requirements for electoral districts, candidates, political parties and their financing) for the European Parliament elections, as well as moving towards voting for Union-wide lists, or 'transnational lists',[70] with candidates from multiple Member States, having taken into account the views expressed among citizens across the EU Member States on this issue. Some of the Members of the European Parliament should be elected through a European Union-wide list, the rest being elected within the Members' States.'
- 'European citizens should have a greater say on who is elected as President of the Commission. This could be achieved either by the direct election of the Commission President or a lead candidate system.'[71]

[70] 'European Commission representatives explained it should be implemented after a transition period, not to rush things through'.

[71] 'EP position: the lead candidate of the European political party that has obtained the highest share of votes at European elections, who is able to be supported by a majority of European Parliament's Members, shall be elected President of the European Commission'. In case a coalition majority cannot be reached, the task should be assigned to the

- 'The European Parliament should have the right of legislative initiative.'
- 'Political parties, civil society organisations, trade unions should be more lively and accessible in order for citizens to be more involved and engaged in European democracy. This would also contribute to stimulate the inclusion of EU topics in public debates via political parties, organised civil society and social partners, not only during European elections but ahead of national, regional and local elections as well'.

Under the heading 'EU decision-making process', the proposals included:

- 'All issues decided by way of unanimity should be decided by way of a qualified majority. The only exceptions should be the admission of new membership to the EU and changes to the fundamental principles of the EU as stated in Art. 2 TEU and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.'
- 'The European Parliament's right of inquiry should be strengthened'
- 'Inter-parliamentary cooperation and dialogue should be strengthened. National parliaments should also be closer involved in the legislative procedure by the European Parliament, e.g. by way of participation in hearings.'

next lead candidate. To this end, European political parties may nominate candidates to run for the Commission President's post. Mr Paulo Rangel: in order to reinforce the lead candidate process the positions of the European Parliament and the European Council should be reversed and this implies a treaty change: the Parliament would propose and the Council would approve the President of the Commission. MDP (Final Kantar Report: 'Group of contributions discusses the election of the Commission President and appointment of commissioners, including the Spitzenkandidaten system'). EYE [European Youth Event], pag. 23: 'The candidates for the President of the Commission should not be elected in backroom negotiations among winning parties. We should enforce the so-called "Spitzenkandidaten" system, where each party announces their candidate for the President of the Commission before the election campaign in the case that this party gains a majority. Through active participation in the campaign and direct interaction with the citizens, the future President could become more closely connected to the European population'.

- 'Considering changing the names of EU institutions to clarify their functions and respective role in the EU decision-making process for citizens … For example, the Council of the EU could be called the Senate of the EU and the European Commission could be called the Executive Commission of the EU.'

In economic governance, the report recommended that 'European Parliament should decide on the budget of the EU as it is the right of parliaments at the national level'.[72] Regarding foreign and security policy, the CoFE report sought a stronger and coherent EU on the global stage, and that 'in the area of the CFSP, issues that are currently decided by way of unanimity to be changed, normally to be decided by way of a qualified majority'.

Conclusions

This chapter provides further evidence of how Europarties and their EP political groups shape the agenda and debates at the European level, in this case debates that will also have potential consequences for the division of competencies between the EU and its member states. Connecting our findings to the agenda-setting literature, we see these transnational partisan actors justifying their pro-integrationist or federalist-minded positions with reference to 'democracy', 'participation', and other such keywords, arguing that without reforms the EU and its member states will fail to tackle future challenges. This discourse is typical in the advocacy of the Europarties and their MEPs, and the CoFE, held in the middle of COVID-19 pandemic and preceded by multiple crises affecting the EU, provided another 'window of opportunity' for advancing their objectives.

In terms of the venue, the partisan actors were not the only ones pushing for the 'conference format' as opposed to a more intergovernmental set-up. The initiatives of Macron and the Commission were influential, but clearly the CoFE model benefited especially the MEPs. The EP political groups in particular did their best to make the Conference more supranational, and they succeeded, at least partially, as the format of CoFE was very much in line with the vision of the Parliament.

[72] 'The Council does not consider that this proposal is based on a recommendation from the citizens. It is therefore not in line with the agreed methodology'.

It is obvious that the Europarties utilized their networks and experience for shaping the debates throughout the Conference. Here the advocacy and agenda-setting preceding the start of CoFE was significant, with the rhetoric of the Europarties feeding into the debates in not just the Plenary but also in the citizens' panels and the digital platform. Interestingly, under the topic 'European Democracy' on the multilingual CoFE digital platform, the most endorsed ideas were 'Stronger together: A democratic European Federation', 'For a clarity mechanism on the right to self-determination', 'Abolish the Council Veto!', 'A reform plan for a citizen-based European Democracy', and 'There can be no real European democracy without an autonomous fiscal power of the EU', thus suggesting that Europarty activists may have contributed to the online debates.[73] While the Europarties had stated that the Conference should proceed 'without taboos', the partisan actors nonetheless outlined clear objectives before it was even launched, objectives which included the strengthening of the EP and the Commission, support for the *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism and transnational lists (although not by the EPP), extending QMV to all issues in the Council, and in general further empowerment of the EU through new and bigger resources, speaking with one voice in external relations, and deepening economic integration. The convergence between the three political families was striking, and obviously was facilitated by their continuous interaction in the framework of EU institutions.

In similar vein, we see a clear pattern of agenda-setting and continual advocacy of further European integration in its broadest sense. The 'future of Europe' featured consistently in various documents and events of the three political families. Agenda-setting and advocacy are thus constantly intertwined. The transnational partisan networks serve to keep up the momentum and join together European and national political actors to discuss EU reforms. These transnational networks bring together Europarty headquarters, MEPs, Commissioners, political foundations, various interest groups, youth and women's branches of the Europarties, as well as national member parties. In the run-up to and during CoFE these networks facilitated the diffusion of ideas and positions as well as policy influence.

[73] Multilingual Digital Platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe, Report February 2022, Kantar Public.

Inside the Parliament the usual pattern of coalition-building was evident, while the strong presence of political group chairs signalled that the issue was of high salience for the EP. The EPP Group, S&D, and Renew Europe worked together in guiding the preparations for CoFE from the initial working group to committee stage (AFCO) and to the eventual plenary resolution. Inside the political groups it was easy to identify key personalities: group chairs and vice-chairs or otherwise seasoned veterans of institutional questions—individuals that often also hold or have held important positions inside the Europarties. Hence, during constitutional reform processes the balance of power shifts towards political group leaders, unlike in normal legislation where particularly rapporteurs and MEPs seated on the respective committees are influential in shaping group positions. The actual Europarties were more in the background, but nonetheless together with their political foundations facilitated the exchange of ideas.

Our final remarks concern the nature of CoFE and next steps after it. The timing of the Conference was of course unlucky, as first COVID overshadowed it and then Russia invaded Ukraine three months before CoFE finished its work. We have deliberately avoided addressing the question of the legitimacy and 'success' (however one measures it) of CoFE, but even before the Conference was launched, it attracted strong criticism on the grounds of being too top-down and elitist, with particularly civil society actors calling for genuine dialogue with citizens.[74] Returning to the three types of agendas outlined in Chapter 2, there is hardly any evidence of the public finding the Conference salient, as most Europeans, including politically active ones, probably were not even aware of it, national medias covered CoFE only very sporadically if at all, and thus it was an issue belonging to the agenda of political decision-makers. It would be unfair to blame the EU, as the European level actors can only do so much in terms

[74] Recommendations for a successful and effective Conference on the Future of Europe, https://ecas.org/recommendations-for-a-successful-and-effective-conference-on-the-future-of-europe/, 18 December 2019; Alberto Alemanno, The EU won't fix its democratic deficit with another top-down 'conference', https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/21/eu-democratic-deficit-top-down-conference-verhofstadt, 21 January 2020; The Conference on the Future of Europe: an Open Letter, https://verfassungsblog.de/the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe-an-open-letter/, 1 February 2020; 'Top-down' future of Europe conference 'will fail' warning, https://euobserver.com/institutional/147431, 13 February 2020; Future of Europe conference: one year on standby, https://euobserver.com/institutional/150431, 21 December 2020.

of reaching European citizens. At the same time, CoFE was genuinely unique and innovative, and reflects the broader trend towards more direct participatory mechanisms (e.g., Alemanno, 2022; Alemanno & Organ 2021; Hierlemann et al., 2022; Gjaldbæk-Sverdrup et al., 2023; Oleart, 2023; Patberg, 2023; Seubert, 2023).

Almost two years after the conclusion of the Conference, it remains unclear whether it will result in more concrete changes. Both the content and format of CoFE were contested among the EU institutions and the member states, and this same disagreement is evident in how to move the process forward—or, if to move it at all (see also Abels, 2023a). But the main Europarties and their EP political groups are guaranteed to keep pushing for Treaty reform—especially reforms that would further empower the Parliament and increase the 'partyness' of the EU regime (Jacqué, 2022). Links constituted between the Europarties and the Commission are crucial in this respect, as is broader mobilization inside the Europarty networks. While the Europarties were clearly less important than their corresponding EP political groups over the course of CoFE, that pattern may well shift in the event of a constitutional convention (or similar) to prepare Treaty revisions (see Chapter 4). As one of our interviewees explained, the Europarties become more prominent in intergovernmental processes (such as IGCs), while in more supranational, inter-institutional bargaining the EP political groups are strongly engaged. These are among the issues we will address in the concluding chapter of the book.

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusions: Transnational Parties—Elusive, But Deserving More Attention

Introduction

When studying Europarties, scholars are not just analysing the organization and influence of political parties. Instead, and perhaps unintentionally, it means exploring the very essence of European integration and European Union (EU) governance. The EU is commonly viewed as a combination of intergovernmental and supranational features. On the one hand, successive Treaty reforms have significantly empowered both the Commission and the European Parliament (EP), while increasing the use of qualified majority voting (QMV) in the Council. Gradually, the competence of the EU has come to cover essentially all policy areas, although in several sectors the role of the Union remains very limited. On the other hand, the member states are still the 'masters of the Treaties' through their veto power, and the European Council is where (arguably) the most important decisions are taken.

This book has advanced the argument that the transnational character of Europarties is both the consequence of the development of European integration and a factor facilitating and constraining their influence. Europarties have both shaped their environment and are shaped by it. Regime type is a key variable explaining the balance of power inside political parties, and the 'in-between' nature of the EU shapes the way the Europarties organize, campaign, and take decisions. Within Europarties,

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national member parties retain significant authority and their own identities despite the gradual financial and legal consolidation of the Europarties (Wolfs, 2022). But more important for our argument is how the transnational aspects of the Europarties enable these partisan actors to wield influence in both intergovernmental and supranational arenas. The actual extra-parliamentary Europarties are more present in intergovernmental domains such as Intergovernmental Conferences (IGC), while their political groups and members of the EP (MEP) are more at home in normal, day-to-day EU policymaking.

Europarties are constantly engaged in agenda-setting and advocacy in support of a stronger EU. The main Europarties do this individually, but also together in the Parliament and more broadly in the framework of EU institutions. This applies particularly to the three largest Europarties analysed in this book—the European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). Over the decades, the Europarties have campaigned for and achieved stronger legal status for themselves while extending their networks of like-minded actors. These actors are found both at European and national levels and comprise Europarty organizations, EP political groups, European political foundations and their affiliates, national member parties, and grassroots activists. The networks operate as advocacy coalitions, building support for initiatives about the 'future of Europe'.

This concluding chapter returns in the next section to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, summarizes the main findings, and reflects in the concluding section on the current state and future prospects of the Europarties. It argues that Europarties are likely to remain in the background—and largely invisible and unknown to most Europeans—without institutional reforms to the electoral system or the institutional set-up of the EU, but they nonetheless continue to wield strong influence on the 'future of Europe' through multiple channels and in ways not recognized even by students of EU politics. The challenge is to bring the Europarties closer to the citizens and to avoid decoupling between national and European politics which may also erode the internal cohesion of the Europarties.

Lessons Learned and Avenues for Future Research

When contemplating our research design, we opted against a more empirically ambitious approach. To be sure, there remains a lot to learn from in-depth analyses of European-level policy processes and how the Europarties have attempted to shape their outcomes. We strongly encourage case studies or comparative research into individual political processes in the same way as scholars have examined legislative bargaining between EU institutions—bargaining where Europarties are obviously present, at least through their MEPs. Yet, such research designs are always selective and run the risk of scholars either underestimating or exaggerating the impact of the Europarties on the basis of case study evidence. In some processes, the Europarties are probably even decisive, in others their role is negligible or even non-existent.

As a result, we chose to formulate three broad research questions that have structured our book. Let us now return to those questions and elaborate on our main findings. Our first research question 'what strategies Europarties utilize for advancing their visions of Europe?' was particularly broad, and the answer to it contains two interlinked elements. First, let us not forget the sheer existence and organizational weight of the Europarties. As discussed in Chapter 3, the organizations of the Europarties have developed and matured over decades, and there is certainly continuity within those structures. And they are not just organizational structures, but also expressions of common identities—and these two are in constant interaction and evolution. We are not claiming that each national member party would have joined the Europarty due to a strong sense of ideological solidarity, but over time such ideological convergence may develop, and, in any case, national parties learn to use the Europarties for pursuing their objectives. The organizational reach of the main Europarties has also been extended to cover associations for youth, women, and select other groups of citizens, while the Europarties are present in parliamentary organs of various international organizations such as the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The second element is constant agenda-setting and advocacy. The Europarties and the European Parliament adopt annually a wide range of documents, decisions, and resolutions that deal with the broad theme of the 'future of Europe'. Particularly the congresses of the Europarties are important in this respect, as they gather chairs of the national

member parties and, at least occasionally, also receive media coverage. Future research should investigate in detail the discourse and contents of the speeches held in these congresses. Even casual browsing through the material of the congresses reveals the noticeable degree of commonality in the speeches. We certainly found strong evidence of shared values and core beliefs in the congresses we have followed and analysed.

But a much more significant behavioural pattern—and one that is tricky to trace and measure—is all the regular and even daily interactions occurring bilaterally and multilaterally inside the Europarty networks. Much of it happens outside of formal Europarty meetings and is informal and even spontaneous. Informal contacts are facilitated by formal meetings, with friendships formed and alliances built. For example, when two prime ministers belonging to the socialist/social democratic political family meet, they are of course leaders of their respective countries but also PES comrades. Views are exchanged during coffee breaks in Council and European Council meetings, and Europarties convene regularly with 'their' Commissioners, both in more formal events and informally via lunches, emails, and phone calls. It is not possible to determine which 'hat' national leaders wear—the national (or in the case of Commissioners, the EU) or the Europarty hat, and in the end, it may not matter that much. What matters is that individual politicians meet and that positions are coordinated.

The Europarty network consists of many layers and branches, it is a complex system of interconnected elements. Even though we explored in Chapter 4 the case of the employment title in the Amsterdam Treaty, where ideas originate inside the network can be difficult to identify. But gradually through informal negotiations and even hard bargaining support is gained for the initiative, and formal Europarty decisions are taken. The relevance of this informality, as well as the challenges it throws at researchers, is effectively captured by Chryssogelos (2022: 455–456):

> The main difficulty in the study of transnational party politics in the EU is establishing their tangible impact. Much of the alleged influence and practices of party families, Europarties and EP groups is predicated on high degrees of informality, which is difficult to be captured in transparent and quantifiable ways akin to EP voting records. … Perhaps the main change required for future research is one of mindset: appreciating that party politics can influence things in much more indirect but no less important ways than formal policymaking, EP votes or official decisions.

Obviously informal ties and personal contacts matter also inside national parties, but they acquire particular significance inside the Europarties because of their transnational character (see below). National-level political parties are on average quite centralized and hierarchical, with party leadership allowed at least some discretion in intra-party decision-making (e.g., Aylott & Bolin, 2021; Katz & Mair, 2018; Koskimaa, 2016; Passarelli, 2015). But such independent 'actorness' is very limited in the case of Europarties, and hence informal coordination and repeated personal interactions acquire special relevance. Decisions are based on unanimity or broad consensus, and the Europarties can hardly order the national member parties to implement or advance the agreed positions. In line with the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) approach, it is therefore a process of continual advocacy on different levels of the EU polity.

The second research question asked 'what is the relative influence of the actors in the networks of the Europarties?'. Here we compared two different forums, the IGCs and Treaty reforms versus the more supranational 'convention' or 'conference' format. Theoretically, the comparison drew on the argument about venue choice, with political actors seeking to shape the decision-making environment in their favour. To follow Princen (2011), 'venue shopping' means that actors seek a venue that is receptive to their objectives, while 'venue modification' occurs when actors alter the existing venues so that it serves their interests better. As we argued in Chapter 4, IGCs are rather inhospitable to partisan politics. European Council summitry in general and Treaty reforms in particular are the domain of national executives that further their national preferences. However, as explained below, we contributed to the line of inquiry uncovering significant party-political presence in such top-level meetings. But more pertinent here is the division of labour inside the political families. In IGCs and 'summitry' the Parliament is not present, and the whole process leans towards intergovernmentalism. As a result, the EP political groups do not really get involved at all, whereas the actual Europarty and its central office coordinate positions among the national member parties and particularly the heads of government representing their countries in the negotiations.

The story is very different in the context of the 'convention' format. A brief analysis of the Convention on the Future of Europe held in 2002–2003 (Chapter 4) displayed considerable partisan influence organized around political families. Particularly the EPP managed to shape

discussions in the Convention. There we also found significant ex-ante preparatory work carried out by the partisan actors ahead of the start of the Convention, with again agenda-setting and advocacy both in 'Brussels' and among national member parties. But the main lesson emerging from the Convention was the highly influential if not leading role of MEPs, with the extra-parliamentary Europarties remaining largely more in the background.

The in-depth examination of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE) held in 2021–2022 repeated the same pattern (Chapter 5). Both President Emmanuel Macron through his concrete ideas and the Commission through its wide-ranging citizens' consultations were important in initiating the process, but the Europarties and their EP political groups, benefiting from their decades-long advocacy in support of deeper integration, did not hesitate to join them in calling for a novel European-level deliberative conference. In late 2010s, the Europarties and the EP began adopting positions and resolutions about both the format of CoFE and its contents. Not surprisingly, and surely still remembering the Convention on the Future of Europe held two decades earlier, the transnational partisan actors were consistently championing the 'convention' format, with the multilingual digital platform and citizens' panels complemented with a full plenary (as in parliaments) and an executive board through which the EU institutions oversaw the proceedings.

In terms of content, the Europarties and especially the political groups as well as the Commission were claiming that CoFE should proceed 'without taboos' and that all issues were open for debate, yet the various documents and speeches identified topics—including transnational lists for EP elections and the *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism—that could or should be debated in the Conference. This is where we come to the concepts of negative and positive power. The partisan actors were shaping the agenda by bringing up certain matters and leaving out others. Agenda-setting and advocacy around CoFE provided further evidence of the importance of framing and discourse (e.g., Daviter, 2011). The terminology employed by the MEPs and the Europarties drew on big words such as democracy, representation, participation, citizens, and transparency, linking them often to major societal challenges such as climate change or economic governance. These terms appear in essentially all position papers and are particularly utilized to defend the further empowerment of the Parliament and to make the EP elections more 'European' (see below).

In CoFE we saw again MEPs as driving forces of partisan activity, with the contribution of the actual Europarties more visible in the run-up to the Conference. To be sure, the Europarties provided the broader setting for partisan coordination, but the main movers were the EP political groups and especially select key 'entrepreneurs' within them. The analysis of Parliament's proceedings brought up time and time again not just the group chairs but also other well-known advocates of a stronger and even a federal Europe. This has important implications for future constitutional reform processes. Clearly, the Convention format is more conducive to transnational partisan influence. The composition is diverse, bringing together representatives of the EU institutions and national governments and parliaments. Such diversity of membership facilitates organization along partisan lines—and this is where the Europarties, drawing on their already existing coordination structures and common identities, are at home. To simplify: IGCs centre around national governments, the Convention format around transnational partisan coalitions.

The political foundations should not be forgotten. Their contribution is constant and multidimensional—the foundations, drawing on collaboration with national and EU-level partners, academic experts included, produce a wealth of material from brief press releases and policy briefs to longer reports and organize a variety of events that bring together key Europarty figures, MEPs, and other members of advocacy networks. The impact of foundations is also difficult to pin down, but in our opinion, their role has been underestimated and future research should pay them more attention (Gagatek & Van Hecke, 2014). What struck us particularly was their ability to forge links between different actors and potentially also extend their respective political families through involving individuals and associations across Europe in their work.

The answer to the second research question therefore depends on the venue or forum. On the other hand, we can see this as a neat division of labour—the Europarties focus on coordination positions more broadly in the EU political system while the EP political groups manage affairs in the Parliament and in day-to-day legislative bargaining among the EU institutions. Yet, future studies should examine the relations and policy coordination between the Europarties and their political groups—based on a combination of formal procedures and informal understandings—in more detail, as there are also unresolved questions and tensions between the two sides, for example over the selection of the *Spitzenkandidaten*

(Ahrens & Miller, 2023; see also Wolfs et al., 2021). MEPs often prioritize their own institutional agenda, and this may not always please all national member parties of the Europarties, especially those that favour more intergovernmental solutions.

Our third question, 'how successful have the Europarties been in shaping the future of Europe?', receives an answer that is perhaps not surprising and largely confirms those reported in the previous literature. European integration has a significant transnational partisan dimension, but the extent to which the Europarties shape EU policymaking is conditional on their internal cohesion and capacity to mobilize their member parties in support of the initiatives. Obviously much depends also on numerical strength in the European Council, the Parliament, and in the Commission. Yet, every round of Treaty reform from the 1950s to the present day has been influenced, even significantly, by the Europarties and their predecessors. We must emphasize that Europarties adopt positions not just regarding institutional questions but also about the role of the EU across different policy sectors. Hence, the footprint of the Europarties is visible throughout the Treaties. Viewing European-level constitutional processes and Treaty outcomes as simply the product of intergovernmental bargaining is misleading and fails to capture the interdependence between the formation of national preferences and the agenda-setting and advocacy of the Europarties.

European integration is very much the lifeblood or *raison d'être* of the Europarties. This applies arguably most to EPP, which more than the other Europarties underlines its historical importance as an engine of integration. The speeches and resolutions adopted by the EPP are full of such discourse even as the political family has become less cohesive due to the inclusion of more conservative parties in its ranks. Overall, the Europarties appear to be increasingly struggling to maintain cohesion. Their memberships have become more diverse through the enlargement of the EU and changing cleavage structures, and at the same time many of the earlier goals of the Europarties have simply been met[1]—the EU in the 2020s is a fundamentally different polity than the European Community (EC) of

[1] This becomes evident when comparing the earlier documents of the Europarties (or party federations) and those of the Parliament, including the famous Spinelli Report adopted in 1984, and the present Treaty provisions. This is also reflected in the EP where there are notable divisions among MEPs over the further empowerment of the Parliament (Van der Veer & Otjes, 2021).

the 1980s. These days we do not hear much of any explicitly federalist ambitions. We detected a tendency that is of course typical also in the case of national parties: the Europarty leaders or political group chairs proclaim consensus and unity, while tensions beneath the surface were clearly evident.

When reviewing our findings in comparison with the literature from the 1990s and 2000s, it is remarkable how much similarity comes through (see for example Bardi, 2002; Bell & Lord, 1998; Delwit et al., 2004; Hix & Lord, 1997; Johansson, 1997; Johansson & Zervakis, 2002; Ladrech, 2000; Lightfoot, 2005). That earlier scholarship characterized the Europarties by and large as transnational partisan actors whereas the literature on the EP political groups has referred to them as supranational actors—even though also inside the political groups the negotiations often take place between national party delegations (e.g., Ahrens et al., 2022). In addition to being described as 'transnational', the Europarties were seen as party federations, coalitions of national parties, or 'parties of parties'. More recent contributions to the debate—including Van Hecke (2010), Day (2014), Johansson and Raunio (2019), Kinski (2022), and Wolfs (2022)—have followed along similar lines, often emphasizing the continued importance of national member parties.

In terms of subsequent research, it is important to examine further those political families that have limited or no representation in the European Council and whose MEPs sit in smaller political groups in the Parliament. For them, the chances of directly impacting IGCs or European Council summits are essentially zero, although our analysis did show that MEPs from such political groups contributed actively to the debates on CoFE in the Parliament. As a result, their activities and organizational choices should differ from those of the three largest Europarties, EPP, PES, and ALDE. Overall, their Europarty structures tend to be looser and less institutionalized. The situation is even more challenging for the Eurosceptics given their internal disunity—which has hampered group formation in the EP—and the fact that such parties are to varying extents opposed to European integration. In the Parliament, these smaller political groups have either chosen to cooperate with the mainstream groups or have voted against them. Particularly the Eurosceptic groups have tended to favour the latter alternative, voicing their opposition to the adopted measures, or using the Parliament and the job of an MEP primarily as a platform for providing information about the EU (and its failures) to their electorates. On the other hand, a more

coherent, transnational Eurosceptical alternative would certainly liven up EP election campaigns.[2]

Summing up, while our central argument has focused on the transnational partisan dimension in EU politics, and more specifically on European-level constitutional processes, we are not in any way neglecting the relevance of national parties and identities.[3] Quite the opposite, that is why we have deliberately used the term 'transnational' throughout the book. The independent actorness of the Europarties has grown but remains limited. Europarties are influential when they have the necessary numerical strength, are cohesive, and overall can mobilize national member parties and their networks behind the common positions. But, overall, in line with the agenda-setting and ACF approaches, it is the ever-present networking and coalition-building that matter more and in ways that easily escape scholarly attention. Returning to the multiple streams framework (MSF) scheme, the temporal dimension is therefore significant:

> What emerges as a potential solution in response to the opening of a policy window is the result of prior advocacy for ideas and proposals by entrepreneurs, in particular their skill, persistence and resources in pushing particular project. For MSF applications to the EU, it is their ability to sell these ideas to policy makers in response to policy windows—and thereby couple the politics, problems and policy streams—that explains whether windows of policy opportunity actually result in policy change. (Ackrill et al., 2013: 880)

[2] Examples of such research are Bomberg (1998), Dietz (2000), and Shemer-Kunz (2017) on the Greens, and Dunphy and March (2020) and Bortun (2023) on the European Left. Research on radical right has almost exclusively focused on their work in the Parliament (e.g., Brack, 2018; McDonnell & Werner, 2019; Steven, 2020; but see Gómez-Reino, 2018).

[3] National parties thus remain primarily national organizations, also in terms of identity, and this stands in the way of the further development of Europarties. The literature on the Europeanization of national parties has understandably focused on organizations and intra-party balance of power and linkages with the European level (e.g., Hertner, 2018; Ladrech, 2012; Pittoors & Gheyle, 2024; Poguntke et al., 2007; Raunio, 2002), but more challenging is to trace the potential transformation in the identities or cultures of the parties.

What Next for the Europarties?

That the future trajectory of the Europarties is firmly tied to the institutional development of the EU is self-evident. And currently, there are big question marks hanging over European integration. The multiple crises have resulted in increasing top-level summitry, with European Council meetings held much more frequently than before. At the same time, the crises have brought about further transfers of authority to the EU institutions, especially the Commission but also the Parliament (e.g., Beach & Smeets, 2020; Bickerton et al., 2015; Costa, 2022; Hodson, 2023; Smeets & Beach, 2020). Amidst recurring talk of Treaty change, there is a notable diversity of preferences among the member states about the future of Europe (e.g., Góra & Zgaga, 2023; Góra et al., 2023). It is difficult to see European integration taking great leaps forward any time soon even though the Europarties, MEPs, and the more integrationist member states are guaranteed to keep up the pressure. And should the EU acquire considerable new powers, the more likely it is that the Europarties and their MEPs would be closely scrutinized from the headquarters of national parties.

If the status quo persists, and even allowing smaller modifications to the EU regime, the Europarties are likely to remain rather invisible among the large majority of Europeans. It is perfectly possible that even most activists within national parties lack a genuine understanding of what Europarties stand for and how they operate. According to the 'Party Article' in the Treaties, the European-level parties should 'contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of the citizens of the Union'. That, however, is a tall order. And it has also normative dimensions. A wide range of scholars, think tanks, political foundations, and indeed the Europarties themselves have recommended a variety of reforms that would elevate the status of the Europarties in EU governance. Instead of discussing them in any detail, we concentrate in the final paragraphs of our book on larger questions that impact the future of the Europarties.

The first concerns the European elections—or, specifically, how to make them more European. The Europarties and the EP have for long advocated both the institutionalization of the *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism and the introduction of transnational lists, although particularly

the latter has divided opinions. The 'added value' of the *Spitzenkandidaten* remains doubtful,[4] with the lead candidates not really utilized by national parties or individual candidates in their campaigns. Moreover, even though the lead candidates have engaged in serious campaigning across the Union, with informative websites, active social media profiles, and visits to member states, their faces and names are primarily known only in the countries they come from and among those already following (EU) politics more closely.

However, we see the *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism as an important step towards a more European election campaign, but of course, much depends on the willingness of the national parties and their candidates to advertise their lead candidates. As a result, any European level minor reform of the process does not really change the status quo without the contribution of national politicians. Yet, the uncertainty over the future of the mechanism undermines its legitimacy. There should therefore be a binding inter-institutional agreement on the *Spitzenkandidaten* process, with the European Council, the Council, the Commission, and the Parliament committed to the jointly decided rules (Kotanidis, 2023). This way both the Europarties and their national member parties would know the situation and could take this into account when planning their campaigns. It is also important that Europarties across the spectrum, the Eurosceptics included, field their own candidates.

The *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism is directly connected to the reform of the electoral system through the introduction of transnational lists. The EP has for a long time campaigned in favour of EU-wide transnational lists headed by the lead candidates, whereby a certain share of MEPs would be elected from such EU-wide lists. There is a variety of alternatives how to exactly design the system, but in one scenario voters would have two votes: one for their local or national representatives, and one for the transnational Europarty lists. Whatever the exact solution, the hope is that once the Europarties and their EP political groups appear on the ballot paper, voters would pay more attention to them and what they stand for. Besides, this would give the voters the opportunity to vote for proper EU-level candidates coming from another member state

[4] The evolution of the *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism is briefly reviewed in Chapters 1 and 4. Drawing on the relevant literature, Kotanidis (2023; see also Costa, 2022: 25–37) provides a thorough summary of the lead candidate process.

(Bol et al., 2016; Bright et al., 2016; Van Hecke et al., 2018: 50–56).[5] However, national parties have tended to resist transnational lists as they would impact candidate selection processes through the addition of the EU-wide lists. Candidate selection is a key mechanism for rewarding or punishing MEPs (e.g., Hix, 2002), and thereby the candidates elected from the EU-wide constituency would not be directly accountable to the national parties.

We realize that our recommendations are not exactly breaking any new ground, but it is perfectly understandable that the Europarties and their MEPs have advocated these ideas. Both would bring a significant European element to the campaigns and probably would at least partially alleviate the problem of decoupling between national and European politics—a problem we see as arguably getting even more serious. Despite the fact that European elections have been held since 1979 every five years, the Europarties and their election manifestos remain very much in the margins of the campaigns, with national parties and individual candidates, in line with the 'second-order' logic of the EP elections, often highlighting country-specific themes and with a notable discrepancy between the manifestos of national parties and their respective Europarties (Hackemann, 2023). As mentioned above, the Europarties are clearly struggling to maintain internal cohesion. Of the three Europarties analysed here, this applies especially to EPP and ALDE, but also the social democratic political family has its challenges. Pressure from right-wing populists is also affecting the positions and cohesion of the Europarties.[6] Cox and McCubbins (1993) argued that members of Congress have an incentive to be loyal to their parties because the reputation of the parties is important in terms of re-election. Applying this logic to European elections,

[5] A promising move would be the Europeanization of ballot papers as incorporated in Council Decision 2018/994 as a measure the member states could implement. It would mean that the ballot papers showed the names and logos of the Europarties that the respective national parties belong to. Cicchi (2021) considers it an important recommendation deserving attention, as that way the voters would have the opportunity to learn about the European level reference groups of the national parties. In the 2019 EP elections in only Ireland and Italy around half of the parties had such European references on the ballot, while 18 member states had no European reference at all on ballots.

[6] The rise of radical right parties and their potential European level collaboration has raised concerns among the (pro-integrationist) Europarties and MEPs, with such concerns surfacing also in the debates of the 2010s on the funding regulations of the Europarties (Norman, 2021).

individual candidates or national parties might therefore be incentivized to distance themselves from the Europarty in situations where the position of the national party differs from that of the Europarty. For example, a national party might be less 'federalist' than the Europarty. Nonetheless, through the *Spitzenkandidaten* mechanism and particularly the transnational lists the Europarties, and in general, 'European' issues, would presumably become more visible throughout the EU, especially as their national member parties would have a stronger incentive to use Europarty material and the lead candidates in their campaigns.[7]

But Europarties could also implement internal organizational reforms that would bring them closer to the citizens. Such reforms would not require any inter-institutional agreements or changes to legislation or the Treaties. The Europarties and even MEPs are easily perceived as being part of the 'Brussels bubble' that should do more to reach out to civil society and citizens (e.g., Norman & Wolfs, 2022; Van Hecke et al., 2018). Europarties have introduced membership for individuals, but in her pioneering study Hertner (2019) showed that Europarties had only very small numbers of individual members, with national member parties often against giving individual members stronger participation rights in terms of leadership selection or policy formulation. Hertner thus argued that Europarties should empower their grassroots activists by granting them real participatory opportunities. Analysing the impact of EU on three social democratic parties in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, Hertner (2018) further found that European policy was very much the domain of party elites, but she also reported that the grassroots members were interested in EU matters. Clearly, the Europarties could do so much more in terms of connecting with grassroots supporters. This would add an important dimension to the already existing European or transnational civil society, where in particular a variety of sectoral interest groups and issue-based civic associations coordinate their activities and unite individuals from across the EU.

There is thus room for improvement in engaging ordinary party activists and members in European questions. Interestingly, Hertner (2019) showed how the PES had before the 2009 EP elections launched

[7] An interesting recent development is Volt, a federalist pan-European party that has national branches. The German branch won a single seat in the 2019 EP elections (Otjes & Krouwel, 2023).

an open consultation process that enabled the activists and other stakeholders to send in their written contributions. The activists clearly appreciated the consultation process as did many MEPs and national member parties, and it resulted in a comprehensive election manifesto. After the 2009 elections PES adopted the 'the PES activists initiative', whereby an initiative was tabled at the PES presidency if backed by 2.5% of activists from at least 15 member parties or affiliated organizations—and the activists were also successful in using the initiative. PES activists can participate informally in PES policy discussions through various online platforms and have a special 'PES Activists Forum'. At the same time PES had not granted activists any real decision-making rights or representation in PES congress or other bodies. Hertner (2019: 497) thus concluded that 'the PES has the highest number of activists and a lively community spreading across Europe, but the PES activists' scheme is only a type of "light membership", as the formal powers of the activists remain very weak'. More worryingly, she also reported that the momentum had been lost as the activists were frustrated with the strong opposition from national member parties that were not willing to give the activists a bigger role inside the Europarty.

That example indicates that grassroots members are willing to participate if only given meaningful opportunities.[8] We acknowledge that reaching out to the grassroots level is of course no easy task for Europarties in an era when even national parties are suffering from diminishing memberships and vanishing local branches. But here we must remember that digital means of communication, social media, and various online discussion boards included, have become increasingly important, particularly among younger age groups. Political parties have likewise invested in their online presence and in utilizing digital tools in intra-party communication and decision-making. As the digital platforms of CoFE (Chapter 5) showed, technically it is therefore easy to bring people together from different corners of the EU. Hence, the question is whether Europarties consider it worth the effort.

The biggest question mark concerns the mobilization of activists. The best way to achieve participation is through ensuring that the views of the activists are taken seriously by the Europarties. Indeed, in the context

[8] According to The Good Lobby, at least some of the Europarties had (online) public consultations as part of the process of drafting manifestos for the 2024 EP elections. See How to influence the Europarties' 2024 election manifestos | The Good Lobby.

of local or national politics a major challenge for democratic innovations has been their low impact: politicians have often praised citizens' input without taking on board their recommendations. In addition, the activists should be given representation in Europarty organs, with financial rewards offered for those individual members organizing the online discussions. Engaging with the grassroots members has at least three main benefits. First, it is an investment in the future, as younger age cohorts appreciate and utilize online participation mechanisms and a bottom-up approach would make the Europarties and their national member parties more appealing to younger voters. Second, active consultation of grassroots members would bring about more informed or 'Europeanized' policymaking. Currently, the Europarties mainly aggregate the positions of their national member parties, whereas, through a participatory mechanism bringing together activists from across the EU, the Europarties would receive views and arguments not tied to the positions of the national parties. Third, engaging with the grassroots activists would make the Europarties—as well as their national member parties—organizationally more vibrant and dynamic and increase their presence in the member states. Such a participatory approach could be organized in a variety of (complementary) ways, from more permanent platforms to consultations and decision-making more geared towards EP election campaigns or Europarty congresses, and it is paramount that the participatory mechanism is designed for and run by the activists (see Raunio, 2022).[9] But whichever organizational approach is adopted, it is essential that the outcomes of the deliberations are not ignored by the Europarties. The most transparent way of achieving this would be that the positions of the activists are debated and voted upon in Europarty organs where the activists would also be represented.

[9] In terms of participants and organization, it would be a question of finding a balance between self-organization and top-down coordination. One option is delegating the design and implementation of the deliberations exclusively to the activists themselves, but even then the Europarties would need to appoint someone as a designated person for overseeing the process—coordinating discussions, maintenance of digital platforms, translation help, and just as a contact point in Brussels. Ideally, the Europarties should have a staff member, or maybe a coordinating team, for interacting with the activists. The political foundations could also be involved in managing the processes, but it is important that the activists have a direct link to the Europarties so that they feel belonging to the same organization. It is probable that coordinating the debates would not require many organizational resources, either in terms of working hours or funding.

Bringing our book to a close, we hope to have convinced the readers about the importance of party politics in EU policymaking. The Europarties remain first and foremost transnational actors that are simultaneously present at both intergovernmental (IGCs, European Council) and supranational (EU legislation) levels of governance. The Europarties are constrained by their national member parties, yet they have influenced both every round of Treaty reform as well as day-to-day legislative processes. But even more significant is their constant agenda-setting and advocacy in support of the EU and the further development of European integration. Here the Europarties can draw on their extensive networks and often the Europarties also join forces behind a common cause. They are not just 'parties'; they symbolize commitment to the idea of ever-closer union as well as the common identity of belonging to the EU. Too often this transnational partisan dimension is overlooked by the media and even by scholars. We hope this will change.

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