

# **POLITICAL PARTIES, DELEGATION AND EUROPEANISATION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

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Paper presented at the EUSA conference, Montreal, May 17th-19th 2007

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## INTRODUCTION

For all the changes in European governance in recent decades, which some suggest have left the old "boundaries" of the state out of sync with each other (Bartolini 2005), national democratic systems remain the centrepiece of politics. And, moreover, despite their frequently alleged decline (see Daalder 1992), parties remain absolutely central to political competition. It is hard to envisage a genuine alternative to them so long as parliamentarism remains the majority of European countries' democratic system of choice.

As is well known, parties make the process of selecting a collective decision-making body, parliament, one in which voters can exercise a reasonably informed choice. By aligning themselves under a common party banner, and signing up to a common party platform, individual candidates can make more credible promises about what they might achieve in the post-election parliament. Their behaviour will subsequently be constrained by the need to maintain their party's reputation among voters until the following election. With their personal reputations bound to that of the party, individual parliamentarians are forced to share responsibility for the action of that party if and when it gets the chance to govern. (See Strøm, Müller and Bergman 2006.) Thus, parties offer citizens a means of holding their political elites to account. If, moreover, citizens choose to engage in a party as members, and that party has any sort of internally democratic structure, then party members will be able to recall a public-office-holder by withdrawing its confidence in her. Nearly all members of these elites are party figures; prime ministers are usually the leaders of their parties.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the conditions in which parties operate have unquestionably changed. Party democracy - which, in practice, is a reasonable synonym for parliamentary democracy - has been firmly associated with the national state. Nationally delimited elections mean nationally delimited parties. But what happens when the national parliament is no longer unequivocally the highest political authority in the state, as is the case in the modern European Union?

Since the European Court of Justice established the primacy of European law over national law, and since the Single European Act introduced the real possibility of member states being outvoted in the Council of Ministers, accountability through parties has been harder to exercise. A minister can hardly be sanctioned by her government, and the government by parliament, and parliamentarians by voters, if that minister did her best to pursue the preferences of both parliament and government in negotiations with her counterparts from other member states, but failed to win them over. The policy that those other member states' ministers preferred, however, will become law in the recalcitrant state all the same. This, in essence, is what the much-discussed "democratic deficit" in the EU is all about. It is deepening in tandem with the expanding policy competences of the Union. In short, the EU is creeping into ever more areas of public policy, but its authority is not being held properly to account - not, at least, according to traditional democratic measures.

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<sup>1</sup> This might only happen rarely. But the fall of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1991 offered spectacular proof that it can.

A great deal of research, both normative and empirical and too voluminous to be listed here, has been devoted to this democratic deficit. But the vast majority of it focuses on the institutions of the Union. Only a small, albeit growing, section takes up the effect of European integration on national political parties; and only a small proportion of that looks inside the parties at the internal mechanisms of democratic accountability that they contain.

This paper is part of an attempt to help fill this gap. It serves as a draft introduction to an ongoing research project that investigates the effect of European integration on Nordic political parties - that is, the parties represented in the national parliaments of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.<sup>2</sup> The aims of the project are threefold. First, it seeks to peer into the black box of party organisation, and to do so through a rather novel conceptual lens, that of a principal-agent model. In doing so, we hope to derive a clearer understanding of how power within parties is delegated and accountability exercised. Second, the project compares these mechanisms of delegation and accountability according to how they work at two different levels: at the customary national level and at the EU level. Of course, such a comparison will be of limited scale in the parties operating in the two Nordic non-EU-member-states, Iceland and Norway. But it is far from meaningless even in those cases, thanks to the two countries' involvement in the process of European integration via the European Economic Area (EEA). Third, the project aims to compare these mechanisms across cases - that is, to shine a comparative light on the way that parties operate across the Nordic region, with particular emphasis on the effect of European integration.

The rest of the paper unfolds as follows. First, we peruse the research context. The concept of Europeanisation is discussed, and special attention is given to a recent research project with a similar theme. The contribution of the current project is then presented, in two main sections: one conceptual, one methodological. Finally, our concluding section summarises and suggests some of the features of intra-party delegation and accountability at national and European levels that, prior to the project's country studies, we expect to find in our parties.

## **THE RESEARCH CONTEXT**

In this section, we review the development of the literature on Europeanisation (without even attempting to review this rapidly expanding literature itself) and, in particular, its treatment of political parties.

### **Europeanisation**

The capacity of the term Europeanisation to exasperate has grown in step with the literature on it. The main problem is the variety of definitions.<sup>3</sup> Olsen (2002:923-43) summarises many of them in five categories: changes in external boundaries, developing institutions at the European level, central (that is, EU) penetration of national systems of

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<sup>2</sup> The research project involves the current authors plus Torbjörn Bergman. It is funded by the Swedish Research Council (grant 2004-3641).

<sup>3</sup> In 2005 one of the current authors presented one of five papers in a panel on Europeanisation at an international conference. Each paper had a different definition of the concept.

governance, exporting forms of political organisation and "a political unification project". None of these is obviously a misuse of the term. But their very different meanings clearly create problems.

In recent years, most major studies of Europeanisation, though far from all, seem to have landed in the vicinity of Olsen's third category. In other words, interest is largely in how the EU affects its member states. "Europe" is no longer the dependent variable, influenced by the various ways ("policy styles") in which the states build it; instead it has become the independent variable, a way of explaining outcomes at national or sub-national level (Anderson 2002:796). For political scientists, the outcomes of interest concern public administration, public policy, political institutions and political representation.

Somewhat more precise definitions of this sort of "top-down" Europeanisation are offered by, for instance, Ladrech (1994:71, 2002:391-3) and Radaelli (2000:4). Even here, however, there is plenty of room for disagreement. One point of contention concerns the mechanisms of EU-induced change. The discussion displays clear parallels to the broader debate about how institutions affect political behaviour. A rationalist "logic of consequentialism", which stresses the institutional impact on the strategies of actors that are bestowed with exogenously defined preferences, is said to compete with a social-constructivist "logic of appropriateness", according to which institutional affiliation shapes the preferences that actors have in the first place (Börzel and Risse 2000, drawing on March and Olsen 1996). Perhaps more immediately relevant for our purposes is the extent to which Europeanisation is commensurate with convergence. Does the influence of the EU mean that member states' institutions, processes and policies will look increasingly similar? Radaelli (2002:6), for one, insists that "Europeanization is not convergence." Nor, he claims, should it be "confused with harmonization". But that may not be the whole story.

Mair (2004) offers an illuminating conceptual take on Europeanisation. He takes two of Olsen's categories, which he calls "the INSTITUTIONALISATION of a distinctly European political system" and the "PENETRATION of European rules, directives and norms into the otherwise differentiated domestic spheres" (2004:340-41, emphasis in original; see also Börzel and Risse 2000:3), and describes them as the two faces of Europeanisation, one at supranational level, one at national (or sub-national) level, each affecting the other. The national-level face is further divided into three types. The first concerns the "ever-growing body of rules" that flows from the EU into national law. As Mair points out (2004:431), "this very formalized Europeanization has usually resulted in a growing standardization and homogenization of policy and of political, administrative and social practices." Much the same applies to the third type, which involves "cultural practices and lifestyles", and which "is often simply convergence".<sup>4</sup>

In practice, it is only really regarding Mair's second type of EU-to-member-state Europeanisation that Radaelli's (2000:6) important distinction between Europeanisation and convergence - "there is a difference between a process and its consequences" - begins to bite. According to Mair (2002:341), this level is about "the more or less formalized agreements that are reached by some or all of the member

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<sup>4</sup> "It may also have little to do with the EU as such" (Mair 2002:342).

states with one another, and that may include states that are not formally members". But it could surely also include the effects of formal EU-level institutions that informally but perceptibly influence national-level institutions and processes - such as national-level political parties and their intra-party organisation and decision-making, the area with which this paper is concerned. These two second-level processes are similar, in that particular national institutional and cultural features will "refract" the EU's effect, leading to variations in outcome.<sup>5</sup> They are distinct, however, in that whereas Mair's definition implies some sort of EU-wide model that the states can approach in their own way,<sup>6</sup> ours implies no such model around which convergence could take place. There is no "EU model" of political party, for instance. National refraction - that is, variation - is obviously likely to be greater here.

This relationship between Europeanisation and convergence is worth being clear about. If we envisage Europeanisation as a process and convergence as an outcome, which seems sensible, then the two cannot be synonymous. Yet it would seem odd to suggest that Europeanisation has nothing to do with convergence. Let us say, then, that Europeanisation will often be accompanied, and often be signalled, by outcome convergence; but this need not necessarily be the case. Change in domestic political institutions induced by EU-level structures and processes is, for the purposes of our project, how we view the general process of Europeanisation.

There is a further conceptual issue to be discussed. How can Europeanisation be operationalised in empirical inquiry? European integration can be measured fairly easily. Depending on treaties or court decisions, for example, EU-level institutions can be more or less powerful. That makes it an operationalisable independent variable in a way that Europeanisation is not. Nor, moreover, can Europeanisation be understood as a causal mechanism; there is nothing so tangible in any of its definitions that might be said to link a causal condition to an outcome. What is it, then, apart from a "process"? Pointing to "the range of usage, the complex ontology, and the problems of research design in the study of 'Europeanization'", Featherstone (2003:19) suggests that it offers "a gateway to developments across the continent that are both current and complex". That may be as good as we can do.

## **European integration and political parties**

Parties have only seldom been central to studies of European integration. When they have, the focus has often been on the transnational party federations, or "Europarties", rather than national parties (recent examples include Bardi 2002; and Johansson and Zervakis 2002). When national parties have taken centre stage, most attention has been paid to their policy stances vis-à-vis the EU (Gaffney 1996). Earlier examples of such studies sometimes used Europeanisation as shorthand for becoming more friendly to the EU (Daniels 1998). More recently, considerable effort has been made to address cross-party variation in EU-related preferences. Studies have ranged from large-N, with data drawn from party manifestos (Gabel and Hix 2004) and expert surveys (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2004; Ray 1999), to small-N (Sitter 2001). Mair (2000) examined the

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<sup>5</sup> The "goodness of fit" between national and EU policies and institutions is the expression often used (eg, Risse, Cowles and Caporaso 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Mair's example is the Bologna process in higher education. An even better one, now seen in various fields, might be the so-called open method of (policy) co-ordination.

effects of Europe on national party systems (and found little such effect). Scholars have also looked below national level at how regional parties have reacted to growing political authority at supranational level (Hepburn 2007).

Not much research has so far sought to explore the impact of European integration - or the process of Europeanisation, if the term is preferred - on how parties work on the inside, that is, on intra-party politics. An exception is Blomgren (2003), who took up the "cross-pressure" that MEPs feel as both intra-party actors at national level and as affiliates of Europarties and European parliamentary groups at supranational level. Raunio's work (2000, 2002; Raunio and Hix 2000) gets still closer to the theme of institutions and power relations that interest us in this paper. But the project that lies most adjacent to our own, and with which our work is indeed closely connected, has recently been published by Poguntke et al (2007).

That project starts with some basic hypotheses about how European integration has affected the internal power relations of national parties (Carter et al 2007:12-15). The first is that "European integration has resulted in a shift of power within national political parties in favour of national party elites". This is partly an extension of the democratic-deficit argument. If national parliaments have trouble holding ministers to account when the latter can be outvoted in binding decisions by their counterparts in the Council of Ministers, then the same will apply to parties - at least when a party is in government, and its leadership holds offices within that government. Instructions can be given to party leaderships by the organs of the party organisation, from the executive committee to the national executive and congress, and also by the parliamentary group.<sup>7</sup> But there is no real way to ensure that such instructions are followed. Indeed, mandating an agent too tightly before negotiations, and thus restricting its scope to bargain and log-roll, may be counter-productive. Furthermore, information about EU-level policy-making is likely to find its way first to elite-level party actors, which offers a further advantage to them in intra-party games.

The second hypothesis is that so-called EU specialists - "a heterogeneous group of actors who are characterized by the fact that a considerable part of their political activity is related to the process or substance of European governance", which includes primarily MEPs, "national politicians with an EU brief", and party staff with EU-related responsibilities - have become more powerful. This is because of their expertise. The ways of the EU are seen as inherently complex, which leaves most party actors at sea. At the same time, of course, the supranational level has become ever more central to national policy-making, which means that the EU cannot be ignored. In these circumstances, specialist knowledge of how the Union functions should become a sought-after resource. This should be reflected in formal intra-party structures, in the allocation of funds and personnel, and in decision-making processes.

In Poguntke et al (2007), these two hypotheses are tested on data drawn from 30 national parties in five pre-2004 member states - Austria, Britain, France, Germany, Spain and Sweden. They receive only limited verification (Aylott et al 2007). Party leaderships do seem to have become more powerful vis-à-vis other intra-party power centres. But it is not clear that the rise of "the party in public office" (Katz and Mair

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<sup>7</sup> The organisational terminology used here is consistent with that used by the Katz and Mair project (1992, 1994).

2002) is anything more than marginally connected to European integration - which raises a methodological problem that we return to below. The hypothesis about EU specialists receives even weaker support. A large minority of parties in the set had the primary type of EU specialist, MEPs, represented on their executive committees, sometimes thanks to party rules. A similar minority of parties tried, at least, to integrate their MEPs into their national-level activities. But national-level EU-related politicians were not seen as influential, at least not because of their EU-related role. EU-specialist functionaries, meanwhile, had increased in number, but this was largely confined to the European parliamentary groups; and they were mainly junior figures.

What do we seek to add to the literature on parties and European integration in general and, in particular, to that on intra-party organisation and power? An obvious contribution is empirical. A Nordic survey will produce detailed information about party organisation and management of EU-related issues and processes in 34 new cases. This is valuable in itself. With only one country-overlap between the projects, we hope to add to the knowledge acquired by Poguntke et al (2007).

We also contend that our project has two additional qualities. One is theoretical, the other methodological. The following two sections describe these qualities.

### **PRINCIPAL-AGENT MODELS, PARTIES AND THE EU**

The crucial phenomenon in representative democracy is delegation of political power. We select representatives who act on our behalf. According to many theorists, in order for representation to actually occur, there should not be any fundamental difference between the will of the represented and the acting of the representative (Pitkin 1972). Representation, therefore, is a concept that legitimates transfer of power, but at the same time circumscribes the representative's scope to act contrary to the will of the represented. This is, however, an ideal. We cannot, in reality, assume that representatives act in accordance with this principle. Indeed, the starting point should be that delegation of political power is a complex process in need of both empirical research and theoretical development.

Principal-agent (PA) models constitute one attempt to understand delegation relationships. They were originally used in economics for modelling asymmetric information among contracting actors, but they are now frequently applied in the study of power relations within or between political institutions. The basic definition of delegation in this perspective is that one person or group, the principal, relies on another person or group, an agent, to act on the principal's behalf (Lupia 2003:33). The agent has goals of its own, however, that sometimes contradict those of the principal; and when the agent acts to pursue its own objectives (shirking), delegation has been obstructed (agency loss) (see discussion in Lupia and McCubbins 2000:294). The principal may use a number of strategies in order to minimise agency loss: screening and selection, contract design, monitoring and reporting requirements, and institutional checks (Kiewit and McCubbins 1991). These are further described below.

When delegating political power, the principal can screen candidates-agents and eventually select one of them. The obvious screening and selection procedure is public

elections, but more or less the same procedure is also evident within party organisations. Parties select their leaders and parties have an important role in selecting candidates for parliamentary representation. This power over the screening and selection of agents is a vital tool of control.

Thereafter, the agent's assignment is defined through contract design. What exactly does the principal want the agent to do? In politics, contracts are often less formal than in economics (see Saalfeld 2000:357). For instance, a party's election manifesto, in which a party commits itself to certain tasks, might be seen as a kind contract with voters. Within a party, the process of contract design is even less obvious. Yet there are examples of more formal contracts. Some parties require from their candidates prior to an election a written pledge to support the party's programme.

Once a delegation relation is constituted, the principal employs monitoring or reporting requirements to keep track of the agent. To do that, a number of strategies may be applied. The principal may constantly audit the agent; but this is usually costly. Therefore, the principal often reviews stochastically actions taken by the agent in what McCubbins and Schwartz (1984) call police-patrol oversight, even if this risks missing instances of agency loss. A second strategy is to set up a system of more constant overview with the help of a third party, known as fire-alarm oversight. An example is citizens' right of access to public records. Within a party, the requirement that the leadership reports annually to the party congress falls into this category.

The final mechanism is institutional checks. The principal may require approval from different agents for a decision to be made. A bicameral constitution is built on this logic, but we might also think of various arrangements on a smaller scale. For example, multiple agents might have to countersign an order or refer to a "second opinion" before taking a decision. In an ordinary party organisation, it is harder to see the obvious instances of institutional checks. But they do exist. The party leadership may be entitled to make certain decisions on its own, while some issues must be handled in a larger assembly. One might define a hierarchy of organisational bodies within a party, all with different decision-making power, as a form of institutional check. These various procedures constitute constraints on the party leadership.

The constitutional chain of delegation in representative democracies has received significant attention in the literature (Strøm et al 2003). However, the intra-party environment is usually treated as something outside the scope of the model, despite the fact that, as Müller argues, two kinds of delegation occurs - one constitutional, to the government institutions, and one political, to political parties (Müller 2000). In this study, we try to disclose some of the content in the black box of intra-party politics. In order to do that, we need a general perspective on the concept of power within political parties.

### **A perspective on intra-party power**

Party organisations are just that - organisations. This means that parties consist of formal and informal relations, in which members delegate authority and an elite executes this power. However, since Michels's (1966) formulation of the famous "iron law of oligarchy", a common picture has been that party organisations are helplessly



undemocratic. However, the fact that party organisations consist of vertical, asymmetrical power relations does not necessarily mean that there are no accountability mechanisms. According to Panebianco (1988:22), the relationship between leader and members can be expressed as an unequal exchange, in which the leader is favoured. Yet the relation is still reciprocal; the leader must give something in return. Power, in other words, is never absolute.

In order to grasp the complexity of the power relations within parties, Panebianco distinguishes between VERTICAL and HORIZONTAL power games. A fundamental logic in Panebianco's argument is that the greater the freedom of action won by the agents in a vertical power game, the stronger they are in the horizontal power games. Koelbe (1996:256) similarly argues that party activists prefer strict control mechanisms over party representatives' actions, while leaders prefer a greater part of the decision-making to be unconstrained. This means that the more open the mandate given to an agent (for example, a party chairman) by party members (a vertical game), the stronger the leader is vis-à-vis internal contestants in the horizontal game. The nature of the delegation to intra-party agent is therefore of fundamental importance when analysing power relations within parties.

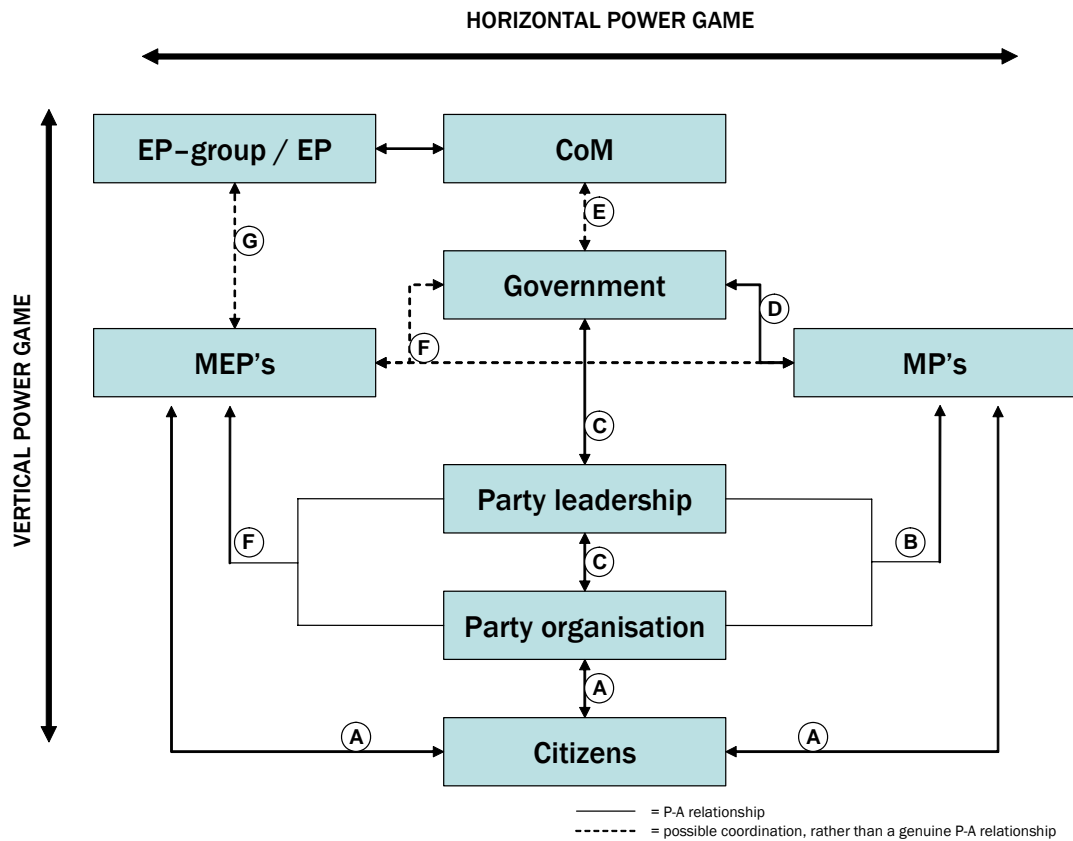
A party consists of various elected representatives (agents) that may have different sources of legitimacy (principals), as well as different interests in a party's development. For example, an MP is elected by the voters. But if the party organisation controls the selection of parliamentary candidates, the organisation clearly has power vis-à-vis the MP - at least if the MP has any interest in being re-elected at the next election. This means that the power of different agents within a party varies depending on (1) the trust given to them, which is manifested in a range of formal and informal rules that constrain action to a greater or lesser degree; and (2) the existence of an alternative principal, which may legitimate action contrary to the interests of other principals.

From this conceptual starting point, we analyse the various relationships within party organisations. However, in order to do that, we need to clarify the specific chains of delegation in focus in this study.

### **Principal-agent relationships in party organisations**

In Figure 1, we display a simplified description of the main links in the channels between the voters to political decision-makers through a party apparatus in an EU member state. In what follows, we outline the delegation relationships in each of these links.

Figure 1: *Principal-agent relationships in party organisations*



**A. Citizens to MPs, MEPs and parties.** In a representative democracy, delegation starts at the ballot box. However, different electoral systems afford voters varying degrees of input into the process. If voters are able to influence directly the selection of an MP or MEP through some form of preferential voting, the winning candidate receives an important power resource vis-à-vis the party apparatus in the horizontal power game. In most parliamentary democracies, however, the electorate has only limited scope to influence the selection of individual candidates. Candidate selection is more or less monopolised by the party organisations.

The second purpose of an election, besides selecting representatives, is for the parties to signal their policy preferences. This can be understood as the electorate's explicitly defining the terms of delegation by voting for one of the manifestos that the parties put forward. To continue the above argument, the agents (a party's candidates) must find a balance between a detailed and consistent contract, which increases their chances of winning the electoral battle, and a flexible mandate, which empowers them in both vertical and horizontal power game (for example, in a coalition negotiation).

How the selection of candidates and the procedures to adopt manifestos differ between the election to the national parliament compared to the European Parliament is of course very important for this study. As is the electoral system as such, especially in light of the variation that exists both between the countries in our study (Finland has a greater degree of preference voting) and within them (procedures for national and European elections are often different). It can be seen as an intervening institutional

variable, one that is likely to refract the effect of European integration on our dependent variable.

**B. Party organisation to MPs.** As described above, candidate selection - in the language of PA, the screening of potential agents - usually occurs within party organisations. Therefore, in most cases, the party organisation is in practice the most important principal of the elected representative. Parties thus provide what Jones and Hudson (1998:185) describe as an "implicit contract" between the voters and the elected representatives. Yet parties differ in terms of how centralised the process of selecting candidates is (see Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Rahat and Hazan 2001). This, in return, is important when looking at power relationships within parties. In some parties, candidate selection is situated at regional or local level; in others, intra-party primaries are used; in some, the process is centralised in the party leadership. Again, the nature of the procedure affects MPs' power resources in the horizontal power game. For example, intra-party primaries give the representative leverage vis-à-vis the party leadership. The more centralised the procedure, the less independent the representative.

As we have seen, the party manifesto forms a vital component of contract design. Again, though, procedures for formulating the party's platform vary considerably. In some parties, formulation is controlled by the elite, with little room for input by the membership and activists. Other parties conduct the process in a much more deliberative and inclusive way. The firmer the party leadership's control of manifesto formulation, the stronger its influence over agent-candidates, and subsequently agent-MPs, is likely to be.

Another tool in the arsenal of the party organisation is a more formal contract with individual candidate-agents. These contracts might vary in content and in meaning (Blomgren 2003:161). For example, some might just regulate the the use of funds, while others might forbid the candidate from contradicting the party programme during the election campaign. Although these contracts do not have any judicial implications, it presumably influences the behaviour of the candidates and therefore promotes a more consistent signal to the electorate. Such contracts might well be more likely when preference voting applies. If the candidate may become popular on her own, even by criticising the party leadership, the party organisation needs something with which to control the candidate.

Once MPs have been elected, the party might use a number of monitoring and reporting mechanisms in order to keep track of their agents' behaviour. At the same time, the representative has an incentive to keep contact with the party organisation in order to sustain the contract. Therefore, the level of contacts may indicate the impact of different intra-party bodies on these representatives (see Heidar 2000). For example, do parliamentarians have contacts with the regional/local level? Are they involved in specific policy-orientated bodies (such intra-party committees)? Are there any mandatory reporting rules to the party congress? All these informal and formal regulations constitute the intra-party environment that defines the principal-agent relationship.

The leadership of the party organisation is usually an integrated part of its parliamentary group. Parties may differ, though, in how they control individual

parliamentarians. For example, who controls the subsidies to MPs bestowed by parliament, or the hiring of staff for individual parliamentarians? In many of these issues, the party leadership and the individual parliamentarian have an incentive to cooperate. By pooling resources and dividing labour within the parliamentary group, both the leadership and the individual MP are better off. On the other hand, these mechanisms may be used to constrain the MPs' room for manoeuvre.

Candidate-selection procedures, manifesto formulation, formal pre-electoral contracts and post-electoral contact and integration are obviously highly germane to our study. They constitute central indicators on our dependent variable. Variation between and within our cases will be mapped and analysed.

**C. Party organisation to party-leadership-in-government.** Most parties are conglomerates of sub-national units, but they differ in the distribution of power between levels. In candidate selection, for example, the party leadership can be more or less involved. Traditionally, the party congress is seen as the decisive body in a party organisation. It is here that sub-national branches are represented, broader political decisions are made and the party leadership appointed.

It is possible to define the party organisation as the principal and the party leadership as the agent in an intra-party hierarchical system. However, this is probably not an accurate description of how parties actually work, especially today. A common notion is that party organisations have become more stratarchical rather than hierarchical, with the different levels more autonomous vis-à-vis each other (Katz and Mair 1994:17). If this is true, it would severely damage the delegation and accountability link within parties. The extent to which it is true, and to which hierarchical delegation and accountability has thus been obstructed, is clearly of great theoretical and empirical importance.

As far as parties in government are concerned, research suggests that the influence of the party leader - who, especially in a single-party government, is usually the prime minister - has increased at the expense of other ministers (Strøm et al. 2003:736). In some respects, it is possible to understand this, at least in part, as an effect of EU membership. This is an underdeveloped area of research and there is a need for more empirical work. In our research, we rely on detailed questioning of informants to uncover this sort of information. Conceivably, it could be either an intervening variable or a part of the dependent variable, depending on the degree to which European integration has actually served to empower a chief executive.

**D. MPs to party-leadership-in-government.** When it is in government, either alone or in coalition, the relationship between a party's MPs and the party leadership will obviously be different to that which obtains in opposition. This is because there is usually extensive overlap between the party's leadership and its ministers in government.

For a party in opposition, MPs' power is defined by the overall relationship between the parliament and the government, defined in the constitutional system. One vital aspect of this power relation concerns the parliamentary committee system (Polsby 1975:278; King 1976:67; see also Norton 1998:196; Saalfeld 2000:367). Specialised committees

are one crucial institutional means of monitoring the executive and acquiring information. It is safe to say that strong committees are a necessary condition for effective parliamentary influence in the policy-making process (Mattson and Strøm 1995:250). How the committee system works is therefore one way of measuring the relationship between MPs and the government.

The legislature-executive relationship is especially certainly relevant to the connection between national and EU levels. As we saw earlier, national parliaments are largely sidestepped in European decision-making. Yet they have not been entirely passive. Among mechanisms formed to monitor governments' actions are formal reporting requirements and, especially, European affairs committees (EACs). The way national parliaments organise these control mechanisms, and how parties use them to influence the government, is of central importance for this study. In general, our knowledge of how parties try to co-ordinate their EU policies is very limited. The monitoring devices in national parliaments are used by opposition parties, but they may also be used in horizontal power games within government parties.

Naturally, variation in this area is of great interest to our study. Although it is the parties themselves that establish parliamentary committee systems, these systems were largely established long before the advent of European integration, at least in Western Europe. We thus prefer to treat these systems as another intervening institutional variable, refracting Europeanisation. EACs, however, are an exception. As these were formed specifically in response to European integration, and in a process in which governing parties acquiesced, we see these as endogenous to intra-party games, and thus as an indicator on our dependent variable.

**E. Government to Council of Ministers.** As we have seen, the EU's style of policy-making has favoured governments at the expense of the national parliaments. This raises a number of questions. First, in each Council of Ministers, a government is represented by an individual minister. Each one needs to co-ordinate her position with her colleagues at national level. To what extent does this actually occur, or do these ministers control their field of expertise and consequently undermine the collective character of government? In a single-party government, this coordination, if it exists, is probably organised through intra-party channels. In a coalition government, specially designated co-ordinating devices might handle these relationships. A third possibility is that these relationships are overseen by the prime minister (and perhaps the foreign minister), who thereby constitutes the focal point of governmental decision-making.

A second aspect of the link between the government and the EU-level is the government's delegation to civil servants. In general, negotiation between the member states are handled by appointed diplomats or policy experts sitting in Brussels. This delegation is certainly surrounded by a number of mechanisms that ensures the governments (principal) influence over the civil servants (agents) behaviour (Larue 2006). It is the government that selects the agent, and the principal obviously has some scope to sanction agency loss.

This particular delegation relationship is largely outside the scope of our study, as the involvement of party becomes weak, perhaps non-existent. Still, if the case studies reveal exceptions to this assumption - especially, perhaps, in Iceland and Norway, where

national parties have so many fewer formal avenues into EU institutions - then that would obviously be of interest to us.

**F. National parties to MEPs.** Screening procedures, contract design and monitoring devices are all equally important as in the previously discussed party-to-MP relationship. Any differences between how a party handles the MPs and MEPs would be especially interesting. For example, candidate selection more centralised when it comes to MEPs than MPs? Do parties use more detailed contracts for MEPs than MPs? Answers to these kinds of questions might offer clues as to how a party tries to handle the fact that it is represented at European level.

At the same time, we already know that there are some fundamental differences between these two groups of parliamentarians. MEPs are elected to represent certain policy positions, just like any elected parliamentarian. At the same time, the notion of what they do is very limited among those who elect them. The feeling that "Europe" is something out there, rather than integrated with the national political arena, is common among national electorates. MEPs' political environment is thus rather different to that which MPs experience.

As in national elections, parties should serve as a link between the electorate and MEPs, and thereby help ensure the alignment of preferences between them. Consequently, MEPs have to consider a national position, articulated within the national party organisation, the government or the national parliament. At the same time, though, there is a European position, articulated by the party group within the European Parliament or the Europarty - as we see in the next sub-section.

Parties, then, might build up specific organisational devices to coordinate between these different intra-party bodies. For example, there is no principal-agent relationship between the government (or MPs) and MEPs. However, the parties might promote contact mechanisms for these different groups of decision-makers. If so, this is of great interest to us. Such devices might serve to monitor the behaviour of the agents (MEPs). If so, it is reasonable to argue that this circumscribes the agents' scope to act outside the party's mandate, and so constrain their flexibility in the European political arena. On the other hand, the role of the party as providing the "implicit contract" between the electorate and the representative might be maintained. Whichever, the intra-party co-ordination between various organisational bodies is of pivotal significance for this study.

**G. European parliamentary groups to MEPs.** Since the relationship between the individual MEP and the European parliamentary group can hardly be defined as a formal principal-agent relationship, it is a bit different from the other forms of relationships in the schema. This does not mean, however, that MEPs will be indifferent to the relationship within European parliamentary group. As much as MEPs must consider the national arena, they also must adjust to the European arena. As in most political institutions, there is a multitude of assignments and duties that constitute the organisational structure of the European Parliament. These assignments serve as instruments of cohesion and control, and they structure the incentives for a future career in European politics. Transgressing the informal rules too often can affect an MEP's access to political opportunities, such as influential committee positions, speaking time in plenary sessions and rapporteurships (Hix and Lord 1997:135). However, in

practice the possibility for the leadership of the European parliamentary group, which comprises numerous like-minded national party delegations, to sanction behavior, or indeed to reward it, is limited (Nugent 1999:228; Raunio 2000:240) and prominent positions in the Parliament are based on complex negotiations.

All this creates an environment characterised by duality for the MEPs, with cross-pressure applied between the levels by two competing principals (Blomgren 2003). Depending on the political issue, these two principals vary in importance. It is also likely that this cross-pressure varies according to national contexts. Party organisations and individual MEPs deal with these relationships in different ways. The parties (as principals) use different controlling mechanisms and how these functions in practice are of great importance in this study. While the literature on the interaction of national party delegations and European parliamentary groups has developed, we still need information on how this affects the work of the individual MEP and especially the relationship to the national level.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In an important article, Haverland (2005) alludes to an obvious research-design problem that the vast majority of studies of Europeanisation have nevertheless overlooked. Most methodologists in most circumstances warn against "no-variance" designs - that is, comparisons in which the cases to be explored, whether many or (more likely) few, do not differ significantly on one of the crucial study variables. The commonest way of committing this methodological sin is to choose positive cases on the dependent variable - when research "tries to explain the outbreak of war with studies only of wars, the onset of revolutions with studies only of revolutions, or patterns of voter turnout with interviews only of nonvoters" (King et al 1994:129). But in Europeanisation research, the problem lies when EU-to-national-state effects are explored through examination of cases that do not vary on the INDEPENDENT variable - in other words, through studying only EU member states.

Such a research design is by no means necessarily disastrous. For a start, essentially descriptive endeavours, which may be very useful for theory building, need not get too worried about case selection. Such studies can include those that take Europeanisation more or less for granted, but which seek to identify and describe variation in its consequences (Haverland 2006:136). Furthermore, the defence of no-variance designs that, for example, Dion (1998) offers can be adapted to justify some Europeanisation inquiries that seek causal explanation. In the same way that hypotheses framed in terms of necessary conditions can, logically, be tested only by examining cases in which the outcome occurs, hypotheses framed in terms of sufficient conditions can be tested only with cases in which the suspected cause is present (Haverland 2006:135-36 puts the point in a slightly different way). In practice, however, few hypotheses about Europeanisation effects are so firm and precise that they can be convincingly defended in this way.

An additional mitigating feature of member-state-only designs is if process tracing - specific, detailed description of how the cause induces the outcome - is effectively deployed. But this, too, has its limits; the technique is not the magic bullet that some its

advocates sometimes seem to suggest. Partly this is because it can be hard to do well (and intra-party politics may be an especially challenging arena for its deployment). More fundamentally, while it can be an excellent way to marshal supporting evidence for inferences derived from robust, theory-based cross-case comparison (Gerring 2007:185), it cannot be a substitute for such comparison.

As it happens, we intend to use process tracing in exactly this way. This is because the cases that we examine include, as Haverland proposes, non-member states - namely, Iceland and Norway. What is more, parties in those countries are "most similar" to the other cases in the set. This serves to eliminate a lot of potentially confounding background variables, as the cases in all five countries have so much in common historically, culturally and geographically, especially within party families.<sup>8</sup>

Our general methodological approach to our topic, then, can be described as involving a medium-sized N and use of largely qualitative data, derived from secondary literature, party documentation and, above all, semi-structured interviews with relevant party actors. These actors are located within the party organisations, including secretaries-general and international officers; and within the parliamentary groups, both at national and - where relevant - at European levels.

Our comparison is partly within-case and diachronic - that is, examining how individual parties have changed in their organisational structures and decision-making procedures. But such comparison presents considerable empirical challenges, especially when the number of cases is as high as ours. Informants may be too inexperienced to recall previous practice; or their memories may be less than totally reliable. In the main, then, our comparison is cross-case and synchronic. The actual technique of comparison is a relatively simple one. The number of cases lends itself towards a sophisticated technique, such as a variant of "qualitative comparative analysis" (Ragin 2000). However, because of the nature of our data and, even more importantly, because of our uncertainty about the extent of variation on our dependent variable - namely, intra-party organisational change - among our cases, we will instead compare of results through the partly inductive construction of mainly bivariate tables.

In short, we explore the extent to which the sort of systemic and party-specific variables outlined above refract the effect of European integration. These variables include the rather fundamental one of EU membership itself. Does Europeanisation affect only parties in EU member states, or does its reach extend to those in affiliated, EEA states? Indeed, has Europeanisation had much effect on intra-party life at all? With luck, and as argued above, our case selection should offer a means of getting closer to the causal impact of European integration.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND EXPECTATIONS**

What sort of patterns might we expect to find among our cases on the relevant indicators - candidate selection, manifesto formulation, formal pre-electoral contracts,

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<sup>8</sup> Haverland (2006:139-40, 144) has his reservations about the most-similar-countries strategy. But we are less certain about his "theoretical concerns" in using it, and we agree with the "methodological reasons" in its favour.



control of resource allocation to MPs and MEPs, EACs and mechanisms for co-ordination and integrating MPs and MEPs into intra-party life? And what effect might the major institutional intervening variables - the electoral system and legislature-executive relations, especially parliamentary committee systems - have on the outcomes that interest us? Although firm predictive hypotheses are usually desirable before data collection and analysis get underway, such hypotheses are hard to formulate in our project. This is because equally plausible cases could be made for very different outcomes.

It could be argued that a party organisation's ex ante and ex post mechanisms for minimising agency loss - screening, contract design and monitoring - will be tougher when applied to agents at European level than at national level. This is for various reasons. Leaderships of often-governing parties, which lack the sort of disciplinary incentives that they can dangle in front of national MPs (such as the promise of a ministerial career as a reward for good behaviour), may be especially keen to keep their MEPs in tune with the preferences of the party's representatives in the Council of Ministers. Similarly, parties with relatively large European parliamentary delegations, which therefore have relatively large clout there, may think in the same way. Moreover, as the public subsidies on offer to MEPs are generous compared to those in most member states, the national party organisation may be keen to establish as much control over those resources as it can. This might be more urgent in small parties, where EU-level subsidies may well form a large proportion of its overall income.

Two important inferences follow from such reasoning. One is that, in addition to the intervening variables already mentioned, two more - a party's governing propensity and its size, especially that of its European parliamentary delegation - could be relevant. It also seems logical that a further intervening variable, ideology, is worth exploring. Might left-wing parties keep their MEPs on a tighter leash than they do their MPs, or than right-wing parties do? Might Eurosceptical parties do the same? All these factors might well refract the impact of Europeanisation.

The second, more fundamental inference concerns precisely this effect of Europeanisation. If we do find that party controls of elected representatives at European level ARE tighter than those at national level, this would be convincing evidence of the EU having an effect on intra-party politics. If, in addition, we also find that NATIONAL-LEVEL controls are tighter in parties from EU member states than they are in parties from non-member states, the evidence of Europeanisation - of the EU's institutions and procedures changing even national practices - would be strong indeed. Practices specifically designed for the EU arena might be inferred to have leaked into the national arena.

On the other hand, precisely the opposite scenario is at least as likely. It may be that party controls on EU-level representatives are looser than they are on those at national level, indicating that the national party organisations, rather like national electorates, are still insufficiently interested in the EU to care much about what their representatives get up to at that level in their name. Indeed, the null hypothesis - that there are no discernible correlations across cases between national- and EU-level procedures, and between national-level procedures in EU member states and non-member states - is also

quite plausible. Ours would not be the first study to find that national party organisations are resistant to environmental change.

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