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## The Dimensionality of the EU Policy Space : The European Elections of 1999

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# The Dimensionality of the EU Policy Space

## The European Elections of 1999

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### ABSTRACT

In any full-grown democracy, parties must confront voters with real choices that matter. The European Union is often said to be devoid of these choices owing to minor policy differences between parties. The manifestos issued at European Parliament elections by party groups are often perceived as being bland and indistinguishable from each other. How correct is this perception? In this article, the diversity of policy positions within and between the main European party groups is analyzed by means of the European election manifestos of 1999. The content analysis of these manifestos shows that there are significant differences both within and between the party groups. These differences indicate that these groups are (potentially) able to present meaningful choices to voters.

### KEY WORDS

- content analysis
- European elections
- party cohesiveness
- party groups
- party manifestos

## Introduction

The strengthening of the European Parliament (EP) in the 1990s increased the significance of programmatic differences within and between party groups. In particular, programmatic cohesiveness (i.e. differences within groups) affects the impact of party groups on EU policy-making. Their influence rests upon the capacity and willingness to unite and to formulate a common policy position on a multitude of issues.

Some claim that the party policy differences at the EU level are limited. Three types of arguments are used. First, the manifestos of EU party groups are said to be indistinguishable from each other, which suggests that there are no significant policy differences between these groups (Gallagher et al., 2001; Irwin, 1995). Secondly, the analysis of roll-call votes (RCV) has shown high levels of political group cohesion because EP members vote according to their ideology (i.e. party group membership) and not according to nationality (Attina, 1990; Kreppel and Tsebelis, 1999). Thirdly, the EU policy space is claimed to be mainly two-dimensional since the main conflicts can be reduced to Left versus Right and pro versus anti European integration.

In this article, these propositions are nuanced by showing, first, that EU party groups are, at least programmatically, not as cohesive as is suggested on the basis of roll-call analysis; secondly, that these groups are very well distinguishable from each other; and, thirdly, that more than two dimensions are structuring EU politics.

A computerized content analysis of policy documents is used to unravel the main conflict dimensions within and between party groups. In most other studies the policy dimensions are reduced to a few (mostly two) dimensions that are imposed on the data. In this study a much larger variety of issues and conflict dimensions is used in order to arrive at an in-depth mapping of the dimensionality of the EU policy space. The data used are two types of election manifestos:

1. national party manifestos issued for the explicit purpose of fighting the June 1999 European Parliament elections;
2. the European election manifestos of the five main transnational Euro-parties issued in 1999.

The focus is on issue saliency, i.e. on the emphasis that these parties put on policy issues. This approach is based on the so-called 'saliency theory' (Budge et al., 1987; Schmitt and Thomassen, 1999: 116), which assumes that parties try to render selective emphases by devoting most attention to the types of issues that favor themselves and give correspondingly less attention to issues

that favor their opponents. This theory is based on the assumption that parties compete by emphasizing policy areas that give them electoral advantages and by ignoring those areas that belong to other parties or groups.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, both at the national and at the European level party competition is assumed to be only indirectly a confrontation of opposing policies.

## Mapping the EU policy space

Two contrasting positions dominate the literature on the positioning of political actors in the EU. According to some political scientists, transnational party groups are programmatically very alike; according to others they differ significantly on salient policy dimensions. The following overview shows that the latter point of view is the most likely one. But it also indicates a major weakness of the existing research, namely that policy differences are described on the basis of very few dimensions (mostly only two: Left versus Right and pro versus anti European integration). I hypothesize that the EU policy space varies more because it also includes, for example, ethical and environmental issues.

Most of the main research programs on EU politics involve the positioning of actors on salient policy dimensions.<sup>2</sup> Below follows a short introduction to the main findings. Hix (1999) has extended the coding scheme of the Manifesto Research Group (MRG) in order to make it suitable for a content analysis of numerous European policy documents. He imposes two salient dimensions within the EU:

- an Integration–Independence dimension based on pro- and anti-European issues;
- a Left–Right dimension subdivided into a Libertarian–Authoritarian dimension and a Intervention–Free Market dimension.

The results show that the main party groups occupy distinct clusters in the socioeconomic policy space of the EU. On the other hand, between 1979 and 1994 there was convergence of the same groups on a pro-integration position on the Integration–Independence dimension. Hix's conclusion is that parties are able to articulate the socio-economic divisions in EU politics, but are unable to do so on the national/territorial divisions because of intra-party disagreement over European questions. The party groups PES (Party of European Socialists), EPP (European People's Party) and ELDR (European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party) form a pro-integration cartel at the core of the EU political space.

Ray (1999) has examined the Integration dimension more closely by means of an expert survey of party positions on the issue of European integration. Ray's data confirm that parties, on average, became increasingly pro-European over the period 1984–96. The results suggest that both the salience of the issue of integration and the extent of intra-party disagreement increased during this period.

Laver (1997) determines the core players in the EP on the basis of expert opinion data, namely the Laver–Hunt (1992) data set. This provides estimates for almost all EP constituent parties, using the same scales on a range of different policy dimensions. The analysis is based on the equilibrium concept of the 'dimension-by-dimension median' position, which is the set of policy positions of the party or parties controlling the median legislator on one or more dimensions. The main conclusion from this analysis is that the Liberals hold the balance of power, leaving them in a strong position to dictate the terms of government formation (if the EP had the power to choose a political executive for the EU). However, the Liberal group comprises a relatively diverse collection of parties, so the question arises whether or not it would survive if it were to be placed in a pivotal position. Therefore, some have argued that it is not the pivotal position of the Liberals but the frequent cooperation between the EPP and the PES that determines the effect of the EP on the legislative process (Kreppel, 2000).

A frequently used way to position actors is the analysis of roll-call votes (RCVs). Hix et al. (1999) have shown that both the Left–Right and the pro/anti-Europe dimension are salient in EU politics, but voting behavior in the EP is structured more on the first than on the second dimension. The location of parties on the traditional Left–Right dimension is primarily defined by redistributive socio-economic issues rather than by regulatory and European issues. In the EP, party group alignments are stronger than national interests. Similarly, Kreppel (2000) has analyzed the EP voting behavior and found that there are real ideological divisions within the EP and even between the EPP and the PES. There are clearly areas where these two groups disagree and refuse to compromise. Until now party group cohesion has been mainly studied by means of RCVs. But, under realistic conditions, RCVs will be biased toward higher levels of party group cohesion and discipline than are characteristic of the universe of legislative votes (Carrubba and Gabel, 1999). This bias makes RCVs less suited for analyzing party group cohesiveness.

Finally, there is a tradition of research on electoral participation and party choice on the basis of European Election Study data (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1995; Schmitt and Thomassen, 1999). The main conclusion on the basis of this research is in line with the findings discussed above. Namely, that European parties offer voters a programmatic choice that is clearly

structured along the Left–Right dimension. European party groups are no less distinct and cohesive than their constituent national parties (Schmitt and Thomassen, 1999).

These examples of existing academic research on the positioning of actors show that party policy positions at the EU level are distinguishable. They are also very different in the type of data that are used: RCVs, perceptions of electors, expert opinions and party manifestos are all different ways to answer similar questions. As will be argued hereafter, party manifestos are relatively well suited to analyzing policy differences between political actors.

### Estimating policy positions with content analysis

Of the existing data sources, election manifestos offer the most appropriate data for the analysis of programmatic differences because of several important advantages. First, they can be obtained at *low costs* in a machine readable format through the Internet or by contacting EU institutions. Secondly, they are *reliable* because they are issued by the actor that is studied (this does not imply, of course, that the policy estimation itself is reliable; see Budge, 2000; Laver, 2001). And, thirdly, they are *comparable* because they are issued by actors that are part of the same political system.

To summarize, party manifestos and policy programs in general offer free, up-to-date, reliable and comparable data, although the degree to which this is the case differs according to the policy domain, time period and actor. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques can be used on the same documents in order to make sense of the positioning of actors in the EU and the consequences of these positions for the output and outcome of the policy-making process. These data can be linked to other databases holding performance indicators (e.g. OECD, Eurostat), which opens up a new universe of research possibilities. But there are also limitations. First, since manifestos express an official policy stance of one actor, the use of these documents is based on the assumption of unitary actors. Second, these documents are produced by actors with bargaining power. As a consequence, voters are excluded from the research design (although their preferences remain relevant as far as they are represented by national parties and the median voter position can be determined on the basis of election manifestos; see Budge et al., 2001).

The starting point of the analysis is the coding scheme, which has been applied to nearly 2000 party manifestos in 27 countries by the Manifesto Research Group (MRG; later transformed into Comparative Manifestos Project) (Budge et al., 2001). This scheme has also been used to study

government activity by coding government declarations and by linking party emphases to public expenditures (Budge and Hofferbert, 1996). The coding scheme comprises 56 categories, which are divided into 7 domains.<sup>3</sup> On the basis of frequencies (counts as a proportion of the whole document), percentage scores are obtained and added to the MRG data set. The MRG approach to analyzing political texts can be characterized as *thematic content analysis* rather than *relational content analysis*, since the frequency of issues or themes rather than (the direction of) their relationships with actors/other themes is the focus of research (Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings, 2001; Popping, 2000). The principal advantage of the relational approach over the thematic approach is that the latter disregards the sentence structure (and thus context).

The MRG approach is not completely thematic however, but slightly relational too (McDonald and Mendes, 2001). The aim is to measure the direction of issue positions with respect to 13 issues (e.g. the military, welfare state expansion, traditional morality). Thus, a majority of 2x13 categories is actually based on a pro-con distinction. Coders have to specify whether a sentence on these topics belongs to the set of 'positive' remarks or to the set of 'negative' remarks.

In the relational approach to content analysis, information on party positions is represented in 'party/issue position/issue' relationships. Both the saliency of specific issues (how many sentences with a given party-issue dyad) and the direction of issue positions (mean of issue positions in separate sentences on a given party-issue dyad) can be extracted once texts have been coded relationally. Until now this approach has been mainly applied to headlines of newspaper articles and has proven to be reliable. Yet the relational approach is so time consuming that it is not suited to analyzing the full content of a large number of documents.

Data on party policy positions may seem a very specific type of data with limited possibilities for applied political research. But the contrary is true. These data have been fruitfully linked to many central variables in modern political research, such as public opinion, median voter positions, party systems, political and socio-economic institutions, government formation and public expenditures. The MRG codings of party policy positions not only are suited to the study of political parties, but enable the analysis of the democratic process as a whole. An ongoing methodological debate is linked to these research topics, concerning the way in which categories of different data sources can be matched and also relating to the pitfalls of (pooled) time series analysis. I will not go into these matters here (because they are discussed extensively elsewhere; see Pennings et al., 1999) and instead focus on the application of computerized content analysis of party manifestos.

The content analysis is restricted to the five largest groups that are most

relevant for the decision-making process in the European Parliament and cover all (or at least most) member states: the social democratic PES, the Christian democratic EPP, the liberal ELDR, the Greens and the radical Left (EUL). All Euro-parties and their members (as far as they gained seats in 1999) are listed in Table 1. Only parties with at least two seats are included in the content analysis since it is assumed that parties with one seat are too small to have any real impact on the policy orientation of a party group. In total, 56 parties are included in the analysis.<sup>4</sup> Since the documents are in 10 different languages they have all been translated into English with the help of machine translation.<sup>5</sup> These translations do not match professional ones, but they suffice because words and not sentences are the units of analysis. What affects the outcomes of the method of content analysis is the correct translation of words rather than of sentences.

The content analysis is based on a keyword approach to the estimation of policy positions. All documents are coded by the program TEXTPACK with the help of a content analysis dictionary or classification scheme.<sup>6</sup> The dictionary consists of 2800 keywords, word sequences and character strings (beginning of a word) that describe the 56 categories of the MRG coding scheme. The dictionary is validated by means of the KWIC (KeyWord In Context) procedure, which highlights key words within the context in which they are used. By locating key words in the text file the most appropriate category is determined.<sup>7</sup> 'Stop words' are used to exclude words from the text that would otherwise dominate particular categories without adding much substantive meaning. An example is the word 'green,' which suggests an emphasis on environmental issues, whereas the context reveals that this word is most often used in the phrase 'Green Party.'

The keyword approach is generally vulnerable to the problem that the ambiguity of words may distort the results. In the case of party manifestos this problem is less pressing for two reasons. First, political parties are inclined to express their views in a positive way by stating what they are in favor of. Hence the keyword dictionary is based on the general assumption that parties distinguish themselves from each other by means of positive statements. Secondly, the same dictionary is also applied to party manifestos that have been coded manually in order to determine the degree of correspondence between the manual and the automated codings (Laver, 2001). It turns out that the computerized codings are able to identify the correct policy domain (e.g. environment, economic goals, social welfare) but have difficulty in determining some specific issue categories, especially those that are overlapping. In order to enhance the reliability of computer codings it is necessary to reduce the overlap between categories. This is done by condensing the original 56 categories into 20 and by leaving out categories that are hardly filled.



**Table 1** Distribution of seats in the European Parliament after the elections of 1999

<i>State</i>	<i>PES</i>	<i>EPP</i>	<i>ELDR</i>	<i>GR/EFA</i>	<i>EUL</i>	<i>UEN</i>	<i>EDD</i>	<i>n.i.</i>
Austria 21	SPÖ 7	ÖVP 7	–	Grüne 2	–	–	–	FPÖ 5
Belgium 25	PS 2	CBP 3	VLD 3	Ecolo 3	–	–	–	VB 2
	SP 3	PSC 1 CSP 1 MCC 1	PRL 2	Agalev 2 VU-ID21 2				
Denmark 16	SDE 3	KF 1	V 5 RV 1	–	SF 1	DF 1	JB 3 FmEU 1	–
Finland 16	SDE 3	KOK 4 SKL 1	KESK 4 SFP 1	GR 2	Vas 1	–	–	–
France 87	PS 18 PRG 2 MDC 2	RPR/DL 12 UDF 9	–	Verts 9	PCF 4 ind. 2 LO 3 LCR 2 PDS 6	RPFIE 13	CPNT 6	FN 5
Germany 99	SPD 33	CDU 43 CSU 10	–	GRV 7		–	–	–
Greece 25	PASOK 9	ND 9	–	–	KKE 3 SAP 2 DIKKI 2	–	–	–
Ireland 15	Lab 1	FG 4 Ind 1	Ind 1	GR 2	–	FF 6	–	–

Italy 87	PDS 15 SDI 2	FI 22 PPI 4 CCD 2 CDU 2 UDEUR 1 RI 1 SVP 1 Pens 1	Dem 6 PRI/Lib 1 LN 1	Verdi 2	RC 4 PCI 2	AN/Segni 9	-	Bonino 7 LN 3 MS-FT 1
Luxembourg 6	LSAP 2	CSV 3	DP 1	GAL 1	-	-	-	-
Netherlands 31	PvdA 6	CDA 9	VVD 6 D66 2	GL 4	SP 1	-	RPF 1 SGP 1 GPV 1	-
Portugal 25	PS 12	PSD 9	-	-	CDU 2	PP 2	-	-
Spain 64	PSOE 24	PP 27 UDC 1	CDC 2 CC 1	PA 1 PNV 1 EA 1 BNG 1	IZQ 4	-	-	EH 1
Sweden 22	SSA 6	M 5 KD 2	FOL 3 C 1	MPG 2	VAN 3	-	-	-
UK 87	Lab 29 SDLP 1	Cons 36 UUP 1	LIB 10	GR 2 SNP 2 PC 2	-	-	UKIP 3	DUP 1
EU 626	PES 180	EPP 233	ELDR 51	GR/EFA 48	EUL 42	UEN 30	EDD 16	n.i. 26

Source: <http://www.agora.stm.it/elections/europeanunion.htm>.

Notes: EPP = European People's Party/European Democrats; PES = Party of European Socialists; ELDR = European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party; GR/EFA = European Federation of Green Parties/European Free Alliance; EUL = European Unitary Left/Nordic Green Left; UEN = Union for a Europe of the Nations; EDD = Europe of Democracies and Diversities; n.i. = non-affiliated. From the GR/EFA group only the Green parties are selected.

## The programmatic cohesiveness of party groups

Programmatic cohesiveness is defined as the congruence of policy agendas (Thomassen and Schmitt, 1999: 116). It refers to the degree to which parties that belong to the same party group emphasize the same policy issues. Cohesiveness enhances the group's capability to unite and may significantly strengthen its influence in the EP. As stated before, the EU policy space is conceptualized as multi-dimensional instead of merely two-dimensional. At the same time it is recognized that the MRG coding scheme is too crowded with similar categories, which hampers the identification of policy dimensions. In order to overcome this problem, Laver and Budge (1992) have condensed the original coding scheme into a 20-dimensional one. The resulting scheme (presented in Table 2) is the basis of the computerized content analysis.

**Table 2** The 20-dimensional policy space and the variance of policy positions in the 1999 European election manifestos of the national parties (standard deviations)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Main party groups</i>						
	<i>ELDR</i>	<i>EPP</i>	<i>EUL</i>	<i>GR</i>	<i>PES</i>	<i>DIM1</i>	<i>DIM2</i>
State intervention	1.1	1.9	1.3	1.3	1.7	-0.36	-0.51
Quality of life	2.7	2.3	2.7	9.4	2.5	-0.44	0.22
Peace and cooperation	3.5	2.9	3.3	3.0	2.2	-0.16	0.24
Anti-establishment views	1.0	0.6	1.0	0.8	1.1	-0.13	0.36
Capitalist economics	2.1	3.3	3.4	2.1	2.8	-0.61	-0.18
Social conservatism	3.6	5.9	2.6	3.8	3.7	0.66	-0.02
Productivity and technology	2.3	3.2	2.0	2.9	2.5	-0.28	-0.55
Military: positive	1.3	1.3	1.8	2.3	1.3	-0.39	0.06
European community: positive	1.6	0.9	2.3	1.1	0.4	0.04	0.54
European community: negative	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.3	0.0	0.00	0.40
Freedom and domestic human rights	1.4	1.9	0.8	1.4	1.0	0.39	-0.22
Democracy	8.1	3.0	3.0	2.7	3.0	0.10	0.70
Decentralization: positive	2.0	1.9	1.4	1.0	1.0	0.32	0.08
Government efficiency	1.0	1.8	0.8	0.7	1.8	0.62	0.07
Social justice	1.2	2.0	2.2	1.8	2.4	0.59	-0.17
Social services and expansion: positive	2.5	2.7	2.7	2.6	3.3	0.22	-0.36
Education: positive	1.4	1.7	0.7	0.7	0.9	0.17	-0.57
Labor groups: positive	1.4	1.5	3.2	1.3	3.5	0.02	-0.25
Agriculture and farmers	1.8	3.0	1.9	2.6	1.0	-0.38	0.00
Underprivileged minorities	1.6	1.6	0.6	0.8	1.5	-0.03	0.41
Average	2.1	2.2	1.9	2.1	1.9		

*Notes:* DIM1 and DIM2 are the rotated factor scores, which are discussed in the text (in relation to Figure 6). See notes to Table 1 for key to party groups.

Despite the reduction in the number of issues from 56 to 20, it is still the main objective of this scheme to capture the full contents of election manifestos. The 7 categories topping the list in Table 2 are based on combinations, whereas the 13 categories that follow stem from the original coding scheme. The merged category 'State intervention' refers mainly to intervention in the economic domain, i.e. economic regulation and planning. 'Quality of life' embodies environmental protection and cultural issues. 'Peace and cooperation' includes a positive orientation towards internationalism. 'Anti-establishment views' incorporates negative attitudes towards constitutionalism and traditional morality; far more important for the European elections of 1999 is the issue of corruption, because this problem discredited the Commission. 'Capitalist economics' involves issues in favor of free enterprise and economic efficiency and against social services expansion. 'Social conservatism' embodies a positive attitude towards constitutionalism, government effectiveness and authority, the national way of life, traditional morality, law and order and social harmony. The meaning of the remaining categories is self-evident.

The main statistical indicator that is used to measure programmatic cohesiveness is the standard deviation, which reveals the degree of internal divergence on policy issues (Schmitt and Thomassen, 1999: 118). The higher this score is, the less united a group is on a particular issue. Table 2 incorporates the standard deviations of the five main party groups on the 20 dimensions. There are only two outliers, defined as cases that are more than 10 percentage points removed from the others. These outliers are not removed from the data set since inspection shows that they do not significantly affect the mean scores of the party groups or the scores on the 20 dimensions.

The internal programmatic cohesiveness is explored in more detail by means of bivariate scatterplots on the basis of policy dimensions on which party groups are internally most divided (i.e. with the highest standard deviations). The aim of the analysis is not to specify all internal policy differences in a party group, but to map the positioning of parties on two dimensions on which party groups appear to be (most) divided. The scatterplots are presented in order to explore the degree of internal programmatic difference. They suffice to determine whether the degree of intra-party cohesiveness is 'very high' as is suggested by the EP roll-call data (Bardi, 1994: 367). The spacing of the parties over the four quadrants of each plot is used as a criterion to distinguish between high and low cohesiveness. Only when all parties are concentrated in a single quadrant is the party group considered to be highly cohesive. In all other cases the cohesiveness is low to moderate.

The Left is expected to be more cohesive than the Right because its party group formation is based on parties that traditionally stem from the same

party families across countries. Party groups near the Center-Right, such as the ELDR (liberals) and the EPP (Christian democrats), are expected to be more diverse because they combine parties from different families and traditions (Hix and Lord, 1997: 165).

Naturally, group cohesion is not a constant but a dynamic process. Raunio concludes on the basis of voting behavior studies that the EPP has been most consistent in its cohesiveness, the PES is improving its cohesiveness and the performance of the ELDR and many smaller groups has varied (Raunio 2000: 241). The data presented here are restricted to the situation of 1999 and can generate no more than a snapshot of the recent situation.

The main divide within the EUL group is between those parties that support the working class (mainly the French parties) and parties that put less emphasis on the class cleavage (Figure 1). The first group must not be seen a 'class bloc' within the EUL because they are divided on issues such as peace and cooperation, which is strongly emphasized by the PCI but not by the French PCF.

Table 2 indicates that the PES group is most divergent on two issue dimensions: labor groups and social conservatism. The scatterplot (Figure 2) shows that the high standard deviation on labor groups is partly induced by the high score of the Finnish SDE. The distances between the other parties on this dimension are small to moderate. The range of divergence on this

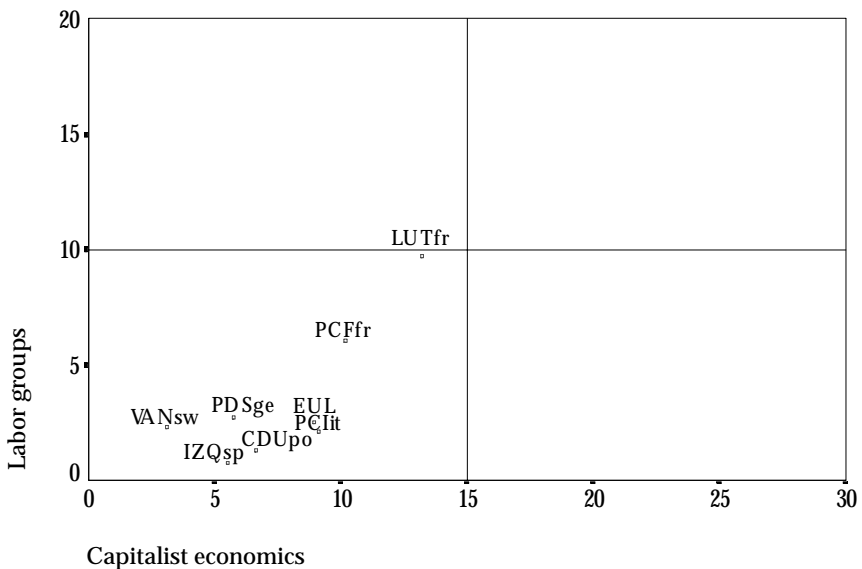


Figure 1 EUL: Labor groups and capitalist economics.

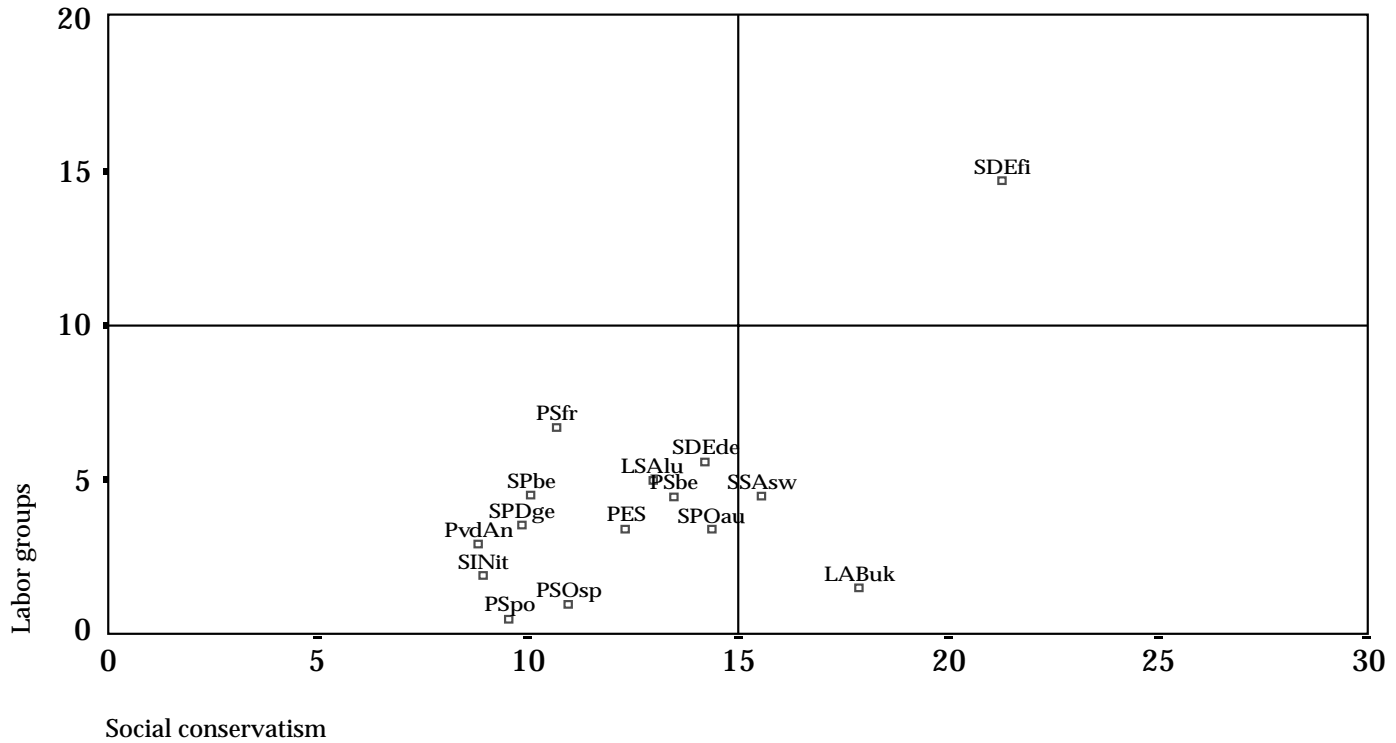


Figure 2 PES: Labor groups and social conservatism.

dimension within the PES and the EUL is comparable if we leave out the relatively extreme French (EUL) and Finnish (PES) parties. The PES is also divided by the issue of social conservatism. The Scandinavian and British labor parties in particular strongly emphasize issues related to this policy dimension.

The standard deviations indicate two conflict dimensions for the Greens: quality of life and social service expansion. The high standard deviations seem to be caused by the Swedish Greens (this party is not shown in Figure 3 because of its excessive score of 41 per cent on quality of life). Yet removal of this case does not alter the standard deviations significantly. The label 'EUGREENS' marks the position of the common program, which is neatly situated in the middle. Another conflict dimension that has been important in the past is European integration. The Scandinavian and British parties are far more skeptical on Europe than the established Green parties in Germany and Benelux (Rüdig, 1996). In 1999 this internal conflict dimension was less strong, probably because the Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam have irreversibly paved the way for a tighter Europe. In addition, it must be noted that all negative categories in the coding scheme have much lower scores than their positive poles because parties are generally less inclined to stress negative than positive statements. Finally, for a proper measurement of anti-positions the development of a more advanced coding technique is needed which takes into account the direction of issues. The technique, however, is not the main cause of the low anti-scores, because these are also found in the regular data set, which is based on human codings.

The EPP is an amalgamation of two party families: the Christian

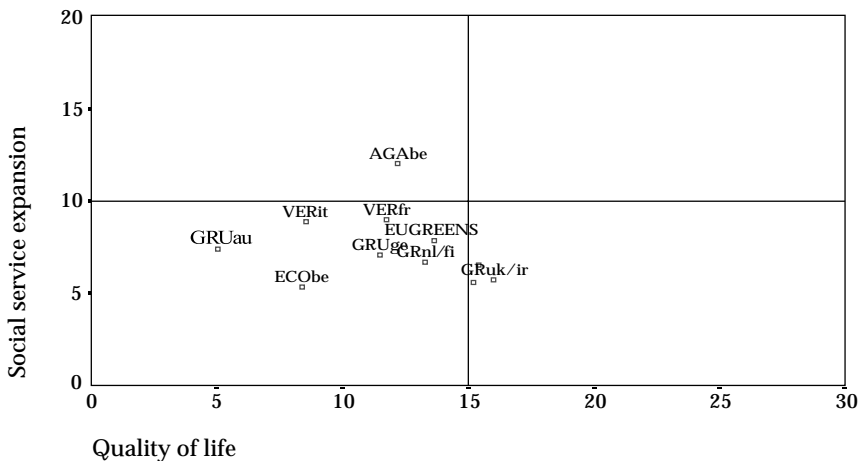


Figure 3 GREENS: Social service expansion and quality of life.

democrats and a selection of conservative parties, which have been progressively absorbed since the 1980s. Conservative parties had an incentive to join the EPP because they wanted to prevent a situation in which the PES/EPP duopoly might just hold, but with the EPP as the weaker partner (Hix and Lord, 1997: 99). The admittance of Conservative parties has led to a rightward shift and a greater internal heterogeneity of the EPP.

Figure 4 shows that the EPP is most divided on social conservatism and social service expansion. On the latter dimension we see a clear divide between the conservative parties (with low scores) and the Christian democratic parties with higher scores. This suggests that this party group may well become more divided when the European social policies are intensified. On the social conservatism dimension the positioning of both party families is more diverse.

The liberal party family is traditionally divided by the radical versus the economic liberals. But this difference is not strongly reflected in the European election manifestos of 1999. According to Table 2 the ELDR is most divided by the issues of democracy and social conservatism. The ELDR is internally far more divided on democracy than are the other party groups. The large difference between the Belgian PRL and VLD on democracy is remarkable. On the social conservatism divide we see a gap between the Dutch and Belgian parties on the one hand and the other parties. A third issue that divides the ELDR is peace and cooperation.

Several conclusions can be drawn. First, the intra-party group differences suggest that there is not a very high degree of cohesiveness. Only in the case

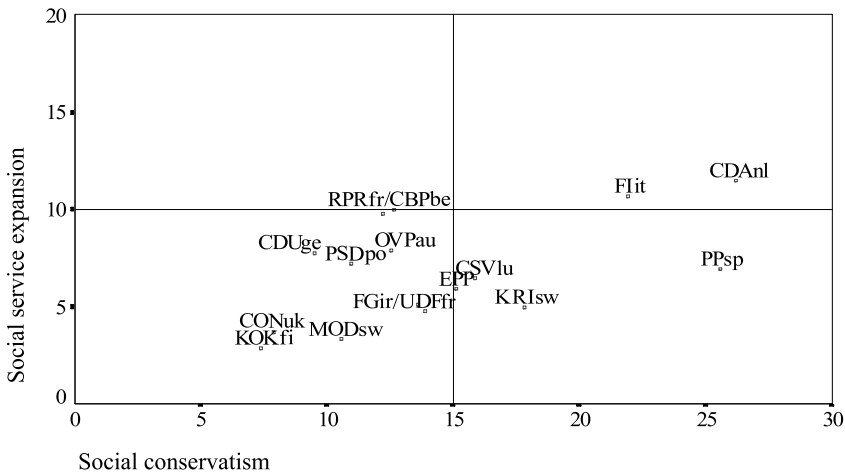


Figure 4 EPP: Social service expansion and social conservatism.



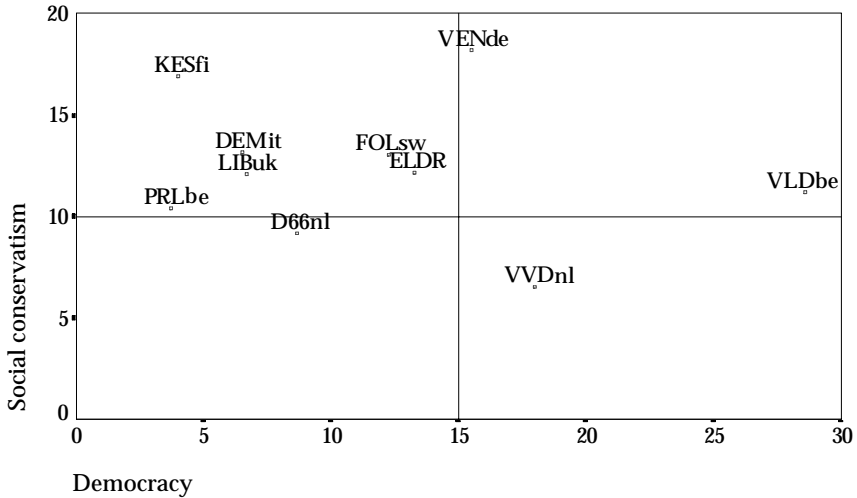


Figure 5 ELDR: Social conservatism and democracy.

of the Greens are the party policy positions concentrated within one single quadrant of the plot. As expected, the groups are internally divided over several important issues. Whether and how these internal divisions affect the functioning of party groups cannot be answered by these data. It is remarkable that the three largest party groups are divided over the same issue dimension, namely social conservatism. Within this category the emphasis is mainly on 'law and order' and on social harmony and far less on the other issues that are part of this dimension. As a result, social conservatism is mainly about security policies, the fight against crime, and the need for safety and for cooperation. Secondly, the variations within party groups are far from two-dimensional: they cover a broad range of issue dimensions that goes beyond the distinctions of Left versus Right and pro versus anti European integration. Thirdly, the hypothesis that the Left is more cohesive than the Center-Right is confirmed, but the differences between the party groups are small if we assign an equal weight to all dimensions. Finally, we can observe from the scatterplots that the common party programs of the EUL, the PES, the Greens, the EPP and the ELDR are positioned between the extremes within the party group. Clearly, they seek a middle road on salient policy dimensions.

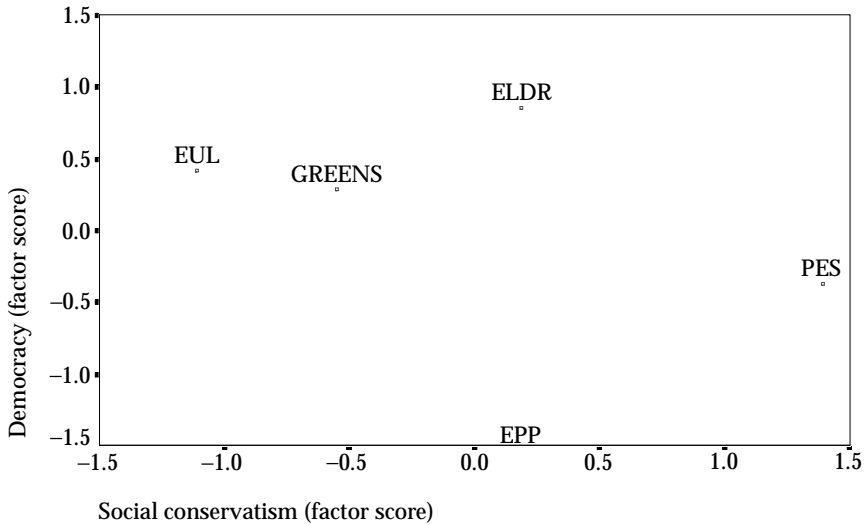
When party groups seek a middle position, this will direct them towards the center of the EU policy space so that the degree of inter-party variation cannot be expected to be very high. It has even been claimed that 'the manifestos that they issue at EP elections are very bland and completely indistinguishable from each other' (Gallagher et al., 2001: 109). If this were correct,

then the identification of intra-party policy differences would become less meaningful because these differences would have no effect on the common policy stance of a group. It would also contradict the assumption that the degree of intra-party group differences determines the ideal policy location of a party group as a whole.

The inter-party differences are determined with the help of the same coding scheme that was used before. The goal of this cross-party analysis is to learn whether Euro-party manifestos are distinguishable or not. An often used yardstick to determine inter-party differences is the socio-economic Left-Right scale. It is constructed by relating the 56 MRG categories to the expert scale of Castles and Mair (1984). When the resulting correlation is higher than .40 this issue is assigned to either the group of Left or the group of Right issues. In this way, six Left issues and seven Right issues are identified. The scale is constructed by subtracting the sum of Left scores from the sum of Right scores. Hence, a positive score indicates a Left position and a negative score a Right position (see, for a detailed explanation, Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings, 2001: 164). The theoretical range is -100 to +100 when all emphasis is either on Left issues (positive) or on Right issues (negative). The empirical range varies from -40 to +40, being the average maximum scores at the extremes of West European party systems. When this scheme is applied to the manifestos of 1999, the resulting scores are +4 for the PES, -7 for the ELDR and -9 for the EPP. On the basis of these scores, the 13 percentage points of difference between the PES and the EPP is large enough to claim that these parties are recognizable. In addition, the ordering on the Left-Right scale makes sense because the parties are positioned as expected. If the party group manifestos had been indistinguishable, we would have found identical scores. The empirical results indicate that even the three most centrist party groups show significant differences between their election manifestos.

This result is supported by a factor analysis on all variables in the 20-dimensional policy space for all national and Euro-party manifestos. Table 2 presents the factor loadings of the two dimensions that contribute most to the explained variance. The first dimension is interpreted as social conservatism (i.e. pledges in favor of issues related to social harmony and law and order) and the second dimension as democracy (i.e. pledges in favor of a democratization of EU politics). It must be noted that both dimensions are weak because they contribute only 13.1% and 12.8%, respectively, to the explained variance. These low scores confirm the earlier assertion that the EU policy space is multi-dimensional, because otherwise the factor analysis would have produced higher explained variances for the first two dimensions.

Figure 6 presents the factor scores of the five main party groups on the two most salient dimensions that are the outcome of a factor analysis on all



**Figure 6** A two-dimensional representation of cross-party family differences based on factor analysis of national and transnational European election manifestos (1999). *Note:* The five policy positions represent the transnational Euro-parties.

parties (both the national manifestos for the European elections and the Euro-party manifestos). On the dimension of social conservatism the established party groups (the ELDR, the PES and the EPP) are clearly more inclined to stress this policy domain than the opposition groups (the EUL and the Greens). It is remarkable that the PES scores considerably higher than the EPP on this dimension. On the second dimension (democracy) the smaller groups (the EUL, the Greens and the ELDR) put more emphasis on the need for democratization of EU decision-making than the two largest party groups (the PES and the EPP). Overall, the plot confirms the earlier finding that the EU party groups take distinguishable positions on salient policy dimensions.

## Conclusions

The results of the content analysis indicate that it is feasible to determine policy distances between different actors on the basis of election manifestos. Compared with alternative data sources such as RCVs and expert opinions, manifestos have the unique advantage that they can be used to compare policy positions in a way that is reliable and cost-effective. With the help of a classification scheme, a 20-dimensional mapping of the EU policy space has been established.

The content analysis brings to the fore that there is ample variation within and between transnational party groups. The degree of programmatic cohesiveness, which is measured by means of standard deviations, is slightly higher for the Left than for the Center-Right. The common programs of party groups all occupy a middle position between the extremes within their own group, but this does not mean that their policy stance is indistinguishable.

Finally, it should be noted that the existing literature presents contradictory conclusions on party group cohesiveness. In order to prevent these contradictions in future research, it is recommended to differentiate between at least three types: organizational, voting and programmatic cohesiveness. The degree of cohesiveness of one and the same party can differ, depending on the type. This means, for example, that voting discipline does not automatically imply programmatic cohesiveness. The content analysis of policy documents has shown that these are at least as relevant for cohesiveness as voting behavior and organizational features are.

## Notes

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- 1 The saliency theory assumes that issue salience implies a substantive issue position (i.e. that direction equals emphasis). Others have argued that issues may be deemed highly salient by parties with different substantive policy positions. To what extent saliency and position are different matters is an ongoing discussion whose most prominent positions have recently been brought together in an edited volume by Laver (2001).
- 2 Several programs are directly relevant for the research question in this paper:
  - *National electorates and political parties in multi-level party systems*. This program is coordinated by Professors Bartolini and Deschouwer and is focused on the extent to which the 'European issues' may be the catalyst for national electoral realignment and for parties and party system change. URL (consulted July 2001): <http://www.iue.it/RSC/EF/>.
  - *The European Election Studies Project and European Representation Study* comprise studies of the electorates of the EU and members of the EP. URL (consulted July 2001): <http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/eurodata/newsletter/no4/schmitt1.html>.
  - *The European Parliament Research Group (EPRG)* is coordinated by Simon Hix and aims to improve our understanding of all aspects of political behavior and institutions in the European Parliament, and to raise the profile and sophistication of research on the European Parliament. URL (consulted July 2001): <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/eprg/>.
  - *The Project on European Legitimacy* started under the direction of Beate Kohler-Koch at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research and was carried out by Markus Jachtenfuchs, Thomas Diez and Sabine Jung. Starting from the assumption that the EU is a novel type of political system, its aim is to study this system from one specific point of view: its legitimacy.

It does so by analyzing discourses on legitimate European governance in various countries and discursive arenas. Apart from reconstructing these discourses, it aims at achieving a better analytical understanding of the development of the Euro-polity and contributing to the normative discussion about the EU. URL (consulted July 2001): <http://www.uni-greifswald.de/~politik/mj/>.

- 3 This scheme is accessible at URL (consulted July 2001): <http://www.scw.vu.nl/~pennings/op/codscheme.doc>. The ins and outs of this scheme are discussed extensively in Budge et al. (2001). The Comparative Manifestos Project is situated at the Science Center Berlin (Director, H.-D. Klingemann) in cooperation with the Manifesto Research Group (Chairperson, I. Budge).
- 4 The five Greek party documents are missing because of insurmountable translation problems.
- 5 See, for an overview of translation tools, URL (consulted July 2001): <http://www.oingo.com/topic/20/20043.html>. The quality of the translation varies depending on the language. Spanish, for example, is translated without major mistakes and with very few untranslated words, whereas the Swedish and Danish translations are in need of manual revisions in order to fill in untranslated words.
- 6 For a recent review and comparison of text analysis software (including TEXTPACK), see Alexa and Zuell (2000).
- 7 Ambiguous words such as 'care' are rendered unambiguous by assigning different codes to them, depending on the context in which they are used, such as 'elderly care,' 'aged care,' 'child care.' The word 'care' itself is omitted from the dictionary.

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