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Outside their comfort zone?

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This chapter will deal with the transnational activities of the political parties which are discussed in Chapters 27–32. To juxtapose the words ‘party’ and ‘transnational’ might already seem paradoxical, so rooted in their own national histories are the parties which operate in Europe today. Yet for all their rooting in national soil, the main party families in Europe have been involved, for a century or more, in transnational cooperation of various sorts; put simply, national parties (NPs) have engaged in joint actions and participated in various organizations alongside parties of the same family from other states. It is probably fair to say that such collaboration has generally been reluctant, conditional and very much in reaction to pressure, rather than being seen as a positive goal to be sought actively. Parties have had to step outside their comfort zone, and the experience has seldom been enjoyable.

**Previous work on transnationalism and how this essay fits in**

Literature reviews can be endless, so what follows is kept to the essential. Historians have long been interested in transnational party (TNP) collaboration, starting with Haupt (1972) or Goldman (1983). There is also a long list of work on the European Parliament (EP), which usually mentions the groups. In recent times, the theme of Europeanization has been much in vogue among party scholars, and work under this heading usually involves some discussion of TNPs or groups (see Chapter 32). Among more specific literature one can distinguish some broad trends. Since direct elections, there has been much excellent work on the partisan aspects of the EP; Hix and his colleagues, Kreppel and Raunio all stand out here. More specifically on the TNPs, Germans such as Hrbek or Niedermayer bring a federalist-influenced angle to their analyses; Delwit and colleagues from the Université Libre de Bruxelles have excellent studies of the party families, usually with a transnational component. There are a number of studies of individual TNPs such as Lightfoot on the socialists or Johansen on the European People’s Party (EPP), which can be supplemented by in-house studies (Jansen for the EPP, Watson for the liberals, van Haelewyn for the regionalists, Cassola and Gahrton for the Greens). Future research will probably take a particular interest in tensions within TNPs and the relationship of individual NPs to them.
Hanley (2008) offered a historical analysis of the development of TNPs and this essay continues that approach. Before we reach our conclusion, there are two persistent questions that need to be dealt with.

**Parties in the modern state**

To speak of political parties is to imply national parties. It is difficult to overestimate the national roots of the modern political party; parties are always fiercely territorial, and their historic territory has been that of the nation-state. Parties and nation-states share a common genesis.

Sartori provided probably the most useful definition of a party when he saw it as an organization seeking to place candidates in office via elections (Sartori 1976: 64). Janda’s often quoted alternative to this, which essentially replaces ‘office’ with ‘government’ (Janda 1970: 83), reminds us of a crucial fact, namely the national dimension of parties as we know them; the governments of nation-states are formed by parties, and the primary task of these parties is to manage the states. The approach adopted in this chapter stresses the national dimension of party; it owes much to the model of Rokkan (Flora et al. 1999; Lipset and Rokkan 1967) and later developments of it, such as Seiler (1980, 2000, 2003).

Rokkan’s most fertile insight was that parties arose out of cleavages. The continuing relevance of his argument has been amply demonstrated in Chapter 2, so we shall simply recall here that modern European party families stem essentially from the four great cleavages which structured the economic and cultural development of modern states and societies: owners v. non-owners; Church v. state; centre v. periphery; and urban v. rural. These rather bald terms encapsulate some quite subtle variations, but their general value as an explanatory factor for the genesis of parties is widely accepted. By the time universal suffrage and parliamentary rule were established, most European states were equipped with a system of parties derived from cleavages. These have persisted till today. In short, parties have been, are and will remain for some time to come primarily national organizations, rooted in the history and culture of their nation state, and as much a part of the familiar institutions as the national museum, broadcasting service or football team.

**Parties as institutions: a logic of self-preservation**

As well as having profound national roots, parties have developed structures and needs which exist whatever their national context. These common institutional features have long been identified. Panebianco (1988) has drawn our attention to the ‘material’ basis of the party, that is, the simple fact that it is a social organization in its own right. His focus on the self-preserving, if not to say egotistical, dimension of party activity is a necessary corrective to much writing that takes party ideology or self-description at face value. We know (to use his terminology) that parties tend, if successful, to institutionalize themselves, that is, they build up an organizational infrastructure and resources of their own. This then becomes a stake in the calculations of political actors, as the party can now offer careers (both within the party bureaucracy and in the political system), honours, prestige, etc. This coexists with the elaboration of programmes, manifestos and the development of a distinct party subculture. Leaving aside the question of how adequately the party represents particular social groups, which is usually assumed to be its main raison d’être, the party now exists as an actor in its own right, with interests of its own, which it will obviously seek to enhance. In particular, as Panebianco (1988: 53) reminds us, it will seek to control its environment, that is, to remain as autonomous as possible, with regard
both to other groups with which it must interact within the political system and to sub-groups within its own walls. Pedersen puts this brutally but accurately when he says that parties are ‘organisations that try to control the relations between the citizens and the political regime’ (Pedersen 1996: 26).

One consequence of this is that a party must be constantly on the lookout for new opportunities to extend its influence, both to enhance its own base and to better satisfy its voters. The life of modern parties can therefore be understood as a continuing search for sources of influence, in the widest sense. As the field of possible influence expands, so the party must spread into it; parties follow opportunities as trade was once said to follow the flag. Every new arena which opens up within the field of politics sets a new challenge to parties: how are they to respond to it in a way that enables them to keep control of the agenda, the voters and, if possible, the decisions? Since long before the concept of ‘multi-level governance’ came into vogue, parties have been operating at many different levels, with varying degrees of investment.

Duverger (1981) traced the beginnings of modern parties to cliques of notables in parliamentary bodies, whose party organization was little more than a local committee of worthies, active long enough only to get its man elected. The field of action of such ‘cadre parties’ was therefore small. It consisted in choosing a man to represent the locality within the capital, which was at this time the only real locus of decision-making. Yet as the scope of politics expanded beyond the capital, and in particular as institutions of local government grew, a new area emerged in which the nascent parties dare not fail to get involved. It was an uneven process across Europe (Caramani 2004), but the sub-national sphere was vital in building the institutional base of those mass parties, which, beginning with the socialists, followed on the heels of the cadre parties, according to the classic views of party history (Katz and Mair 1995).

If parties, following the self-interested expansionist logic outlined above, were able to spread easily enough to sub-national levels, there is no reason why they should not also spread outwards beyond national frontiers, if the opportunity arose. Parties have their roots in their own state, but there is nothing exclusive about their link to this state. Even in the case of nationalist parties happy to describe themselves as such, one must always beware of taking rhetoric at face value. Parties are organizations devoted to preserving themselves and representing their supporters, and these two processes are intimately connected. If, therefore, it appeared to parties that their two main tasks might need to be carried out, to some extent, beyond the national territory, then they should not, as rational, self-preserving actors, have difficulty with this notion. All this very much depends, obviously, on precisely what opportunities or pressure for transnational action might arise, and to this we now turn.

**Party beyond the frontiers**

It is possible to develop an extensive argument about the prehistory of transnational collaboration between parties, going back to the nineteenth century, and especially the Socialist International (SI), and to discern long-term trends which are arguably relevant to the behaviour of today’s national parties and their transnational relationships. Bearing in mind spatial constraints, we will simply point out that it is significant that all party families felt compelled to invest in transnational structures long before the advent of a political regime such as the EU. The socialists began in the middle of the nineteenth century, to be followed by the Christian parties and the liberals in the inter-war period. The communists, with their Third International or Comintern, inaugurated in 1919, are obviously a special case, but even by then they were already following
a precedent, albeit in a manner that is very much *sui generis*. For the purposes of this chapter, however, we will restrict our remarks to the period of European integration. European integration is generally perceived by parties as both an opportunity and a threat. It certainly forces them to make choices.

Parties in government (hence involved in the European Council at supranational level) have continually to decide where and on what bases to pool decision-making power, which previously they had (at least in theory) exercised autonomously within their own state. Parties in opposition have to decide how far to oppose or agree with the governing party which currently represents national interests in the EU. Obviously this leaves much scope for irresponsibility on the part of parties which look to be facing, for whatever reasons, a longish period in opposition. There has, in fact, been a sort of instrumentalization of Europe as a political issue; parties can play short-term opportunistic games (Mair 2001). Whether ruling or opposing, then, national parties are constantly presented with a series of European choices.

Additionally, though, and for our purposes more importantly, whether in government or opposition, parties are heavily involved in the EP, which today plays a key role in the EU legislative process through the co-decision procedure. Its structures have from the beginning been transnational, starting with groups in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) Assembly organized according to classic party families (Kreppel 2002; Murray 2004). These groups have gained steadily in coherence, internal discipline and efficiency; their basic function has always been to transact parliamentary business within the tightly defined parameters of the EP. But the party families have also developed actual transnational parties, whose remit goes beyond the walls of the EP. Usually these groupings began as a confederation of like-minded parties, then often becoming a federation before ascribing to themselves the title of party – a label disputed by some scholars 1 By the 1990s there existed a whole range of TNPs alongside the EP groups which sometimes bore the same name. In 2003 the EU finally legislated to regulate the existence of the TNPs and there have been several follow-up regulations since, which have given the TNPs a formal legal and financial basis. Thus at the start of 2007 no fewer than ten TNPs were registered with the EP, the original socialists, Christian democrats and liberals having been joined by the Greens, former communists, regionalists, a second liberal TNP (the European Democrat Party of François Bayrou and Romano Prodi), the sovereigntists and two Eurosceptic TNPs. Even the nationalist far right, deemed by many to be congenitally incapable of combining its efforts beyond its frontiers, had managed to form an EP group, and the chances of a far-right TNP being formed could no longer be laughed off quite so easily. Clearly, every party family has felt impelled to move in a similar direction, and it is plain that we are witnessing a powerful process. The current situation in 2013 has 12 legally recognized and funded TNPs, some adjustments having occurred after the 2009 EP elections.2 The relationship between the longstanding groups and the much newer TNPs is, however, a complex one, and we shall revisit it shortly.

These moves towards transnational collaboration have been essentially driven from outside in the following manner. National governments signed up to integrated structures, which then developed institutional logics of their own (e.g. the Common Assembly); then, in a later stage, these structures increased their power within the decision-making triad of the EU – the Council of Ministers, the Commission and the European Parliament – thus becoming a more attractive investment proposition for national parties. At every stage of this process, national parties had to frame an institutional, transnational response to this changing landscape of governance and did so as shown above.
Understanding the national parties’ response

We have hitherto described in simple chronological terms the journey into transnationalism made by different party families. We now set out some general theories about the way in which national parties have approached the creation and development of transnational structures. The attitude of the national parties can be handily encapsulated in the phrase attributed to Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary in the 1945 Labour government, in connexion with the process of decolonization which he reluctantly found himself managing. It was all a question of ‘give and keep’.

Preserving the essentials: national parties and the relinquishing of sovereignty

It is helpful to distinguish here between the EP groups and the actual TNPs. The former have never posed major problems for NPs; they have become institutions where NPs are able, via their EP delegations, to agree on voting within the EP. It is mostly possible to agree on a common approach, and in those instances where it is not, the MEPs of the national party in question can either abstain or vote against the majority of their colleagues; to that extent, therefore, the NPs remain in control of operations within an important but limited field. The TNPs are a more difficult arena, however, at least potentially. Their predecessors, the Internationals, soon came up against the question: how far could the central organization lay down a line for its member parties to follow? The answer was: very little. This was because NPs were determined to keep control of their transnational operations as far as they could. Hence the latter tended to be reduced to the lowest common denominator; it was often a question of passing resolutions or exchanging information, rather than agreeing on action which would bind members. Certainly no NP was going to vote for the creation of a central structure which would then impose policy and discipline on members.

Some see the 2004 European Party Regulation (EPR) as consecrating the emergence of effective European super-parties, parties which, in Oskar Niedermayer’s terms, have reached the third stage of transnational collaboration, that is, integration. From mere contact, through functional cooperation, they are said to be well on the way towards a stage of integrated activity where they have made over a large part of their autonomy to a central organization which can decide policy and strategy for its members. To believe this, however, would be a grave mistake.

Despite the apparent generosity of the EPR (putting up serious finance for TNPs and putting them on a recognized legal footing), the way in which the TNPs operate is still heavily determined by national parties; in principal–agent (P/A) language, the national parties remain the multiple ‘principals’ presiding over rather weak ‘agents’ – the TNPs – to whom are devolved some useful but not front-rank tasks (Kassim and Menon 2003; Pollack 1997, 2003; Tallberg 2002). In this way, the national party hangs on to as much of its historic prerogatives as possible; to borrow the language of psychoanalysis, national parties are anally retentive. What are the principal features of their relationship with the TNPs?

This seems to vary according to party family, but the following general principles seem to hold:

1. The major locus of transnational collaboration remains the parliamentary group within the EP, rather than the TNP as such; here is where legislative bargains are struck between national parties and where conflicting interests are balanced out (Hix 2001; Hix et al. 2003, 2005). The group cannot impose discipline on any one national party; if group discipline
National parties, EP groups and TNPs

has increased over time, this is only because the NPs have agreed to discipline their MEPs. Control of individual MEPs within national delegations remains tight: it varies per family and per size of delegation, but the British Labour Party, for instance, has perfected very close mechanisms of integration/supervision (Wring et al. 2000; Messmer 2003).

2 With reference to the TNPs as such, the national parties retain control of the following areas, which are usually considered to be within the purview of any serious party:

- **Decision-making**: while most TNPs have some provision for QMV (qualified majority voting), it applies only to areas where QMV operates in the Council. It seems, moreover, to be little used, consensus being preferred.
- **The electoral process**, including the manifesto and candidate selection for the EP, remains with national parties. The role of the TNPs in this is weak, and proposals for transnational candidate lists have hitherto come to nothing. Even when a common manifesto is agreed, it is seldom used by national parties, who often fail to mention their TNP affiliation or even use its logo.
- **Membership**: most TNPs do not have individual members; their only members are actual national parties. The latter have no desire to develop a mass militant presence that might compete with their own (diminishing) membership.
- **Resources**: the first 25 per cent of European financing available under the EPR has to be earned from outside the EU budget; only then can TNPs claim access to the remaining 75 per cent. This clearly gives national parties a heavy influence, especially as donations from individuals or organizations are limited by law. Also, parliamentary groups can no longer provide TNPs with staff or premises. As a result, some TNPs are actually poorer and have lost staff (they now have to pay them better on Belgian contracts, not EP contracts, and they also have to hire premises outside the EP buildings in expensive areas of Euroland). They cannot thus compete with national parties in terms of policy input, as they simply do not have the resources. Monies are allocated to TNPs on an annual basis only, with tightly drawn budget lines; it is impossible to vire from one budget line to another or to roll over surpluses. In other words, even mid-term financial planning is rendered impossible.
- **Rewards and gratifications**, via the EP groups: chairmanships, rapporteurships, committee appointments, membership of missions or enquiries are all brokered through the group, and we know from Kreppel (2002: 187–90) that these benefits are carved up proportionally twice over; first between different groups in the EP, then between national delegations within each group. The TNPs as such are spectators of this process.

Most eloquent of all is the fact that national parties actually control the name of their TNP in some cases. Some have no problem in agreeing on a common name; the ex-communists are all happy to be in a Party of the European Left. Their social democratic brothers/rivals have huge difficulty, however; the PES (Party of European Socialists), as it known in English, becomes in various other EU languages the ‘Party of European Social Democrats’, the ‘Social Democratic Party of Europe’, the ‘Party of European Socialism’ or even the ‘European Socialist Party’. One could parse these titles ad infinitum to tease out various nuances of meaning; but what shines through is the desire of national parties to have their own description of their transnational vehicle, whatever their comrades may choose to call it. This is a small point in some ways, but it speaks volumes about the mindset of some parties.

In formal terms, the TNPs resemble superficially the NPs which gave birth to them. Each works on a classic party hierarchy, with every level being elected by the one below. Thus each
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has a delegate Congress at regular intervals, which is the supreme authority within the party. Each has a plethoric presidium, usually including a representative of all member parties. The real work in administering the party is usually done by a sub-committee of this, and the more media-visible TNPs usually have a president ready to express party views whenever possible. Ideally such figures should be experienced politicians with a good record in domestic politics but still energetic enough to embark on a new stage of their career; the evergreen Maertens of the EPP (European People’s Party) or the Socialists’ Rasmussen of Denmark are good examples. Such figures are, however, thin on the ground and many TNPs suffer from lack of a strong leader.

For all their apparent ‘partyness’, however, the TNPs are weak creatures. Clearly, there is a huge retention of political and material resources by the national parties at the expense of the TNPs. It might be asked in view of this why national parties bothered to create the TNPs in the first place. Can the groups not carry out themselves the main tasks of transnational collaboration, such as exchanging information, thus saving on transaction costs, and so serving as a place for national parties to make credible if modest commitments to certain transnational activities?

There is some merit in this argument, but no family of parties sees it this way. All have created or aspire to create some kind of TNP; even if one accepts the argument of mimesis (Radaelli 1999), whereby if one institution or practice is perceived as the norm, then political actors across the board will tend to follow it, we still have to explain why the main parties (EPP or socialists) led the way in the first place. We cannot even reduce this to financial opportunities (in accord with the logic of Panebianco or rational choice theory); the process of forming TNPs long preceded the European Party Regulation.

Some scholars see it as a by-product of a belief in integration (Hrbek 2004), thus taking at face value the wording of the Maastricht treaty that TNPs contribute to European integration. It may be true that they do, simply by their existence as players in the EU political system; but some of the TNPs are quite wary of, if not hostile to, further integration and quite explicit about their hostility (e.g. the Party of the European Left or the Eurosceptic TNPs).

So we still have to explain the creation of TNPs. The main immediate reasons are probably to be found on two levels, speaking very generally. The first is to do with the need for ongoing contact and information between national parties in the changing circumstances of governance; the second exists on a slightly deeper plane and is about more hidden feelings of solidarity and the need to mark identities.

As regards contact and information, the TNPs are useful vehicles for the sharing of information and experience, particularly governmental, among like-minded NPs. This can take place through informal contacts or more formal activities such as seminars. TNPs can be entrusted with a sort of think-tank function; they can help to elaborate broad programmatic options in a more economical way than if work were hived off to national parties. PES thinking about employment policy has happened thus (Ladrech 2000; Lightfoot 2005). But it is important to state that this delegation can only take place with the agreement of national parties; we will not witness a situation where a TNP evolves policy from above and tries to lay it on to national parties. A good example of this is the production of a common manifesto for EP elections; it has taken years for the various NPs to allow their respective TNPs to do this. Such documents tend, moreover, to be lowest common denominator and can be ignored at will by the NPs.

The TNPs are also useful as media outlets; via their websites they offer regular comment on ongoing events from the general perspective of their particular family; the EPP website, with its crisp comment, often from, the late, President Wilfried Maertens, is a good example. Another important information/contact function is leaders’ summits prior to EU summits, which have
National parties, EP groups and TNPs

become a real focal point; they enable views and tactics to be harmonized, and this has been shown to be very effective (cf. Hix and Lord [1997] on the EPP in the early 1990s). Some would say that the summits are the main *raison-d'être* of today’s TNPs.

On the level of identity and solidarity, TNPs have taken on a major role in identifying, promoting and guiding aspirant parties in EU candidate states (Pridham 1996; Delwit and De Waele 1998; Delsoldato 2002). Initial contacts with potential partners were made by the German Party Foundations, but it then needed a TNP to carry on the work of cadre training and party development, so as to raise potential partners to a level where they could participate meaningfully in the life of a transnational organization. Neither the existing Internationals nor the bi- and multilateral networks between national parties in a given family were adequate for this task. A new vehicle was necessary, and the TNPs filled the requirement. We could say that they had played a major role in constructing a political landscape in these countries that would fit into the political system of the EU when they eventually joined. This is part of the *identitaire* function of the TNPs; they award membership of a family, confer legitimacy, act as gatekeepers.

At a wider level, though, the creation of the TNPs may also be related to perceptions, especially prevalent during the 1990s, that European integration was continuing at an accelerated pace and that there was an increase in the amount of functions being devolved upwards to the EU institutions. This followed the success of the single market project and the consequent reforms of the EC Treaties at Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice. All of this led to a strengthening of the supranational aspects of European integration and of the institutions associated with these: the Commission and the Parliament. In the 1990s, ‘Europe’ was high on the political agenda and there seems little doubt that both qualitative and quantitative changes did occur at the level of European governance. Without suggesting that a kind of European nation-state, or even a European federation, was in the process of being created (far from that), political parties at all levels, both national and sub-national, reacted to these developments by creating the TNPs as a way of strengthening their presence at the supranational level. The perception was that ‘power’ was migrating away from national governments and was increasingly exercised by the European institutions in Brussels. Political parties, as argued in this chapter, are usually concerned with gaining and exercising political power, or at least with influencing such exercise, and hence sought to increase the opportunities to do so at the European level. As Magnette (2001: 58) suggests, they thought that the way to do this was to re-create the vehicle which had served well in their own countries, i.e. a party. The subsequent deflation of Euro-enthusiast expectations through events such as the failure to endorse the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005 may mean that such perceptions were flawed but, nevertheless, they did exist at the time.

**TNPs: legal and financial bases**

Before describing the TNPs and the EP groups, we shall briefly elucidate their legal and financial footing. ‘European political parties’ (what we call TNPs here) are supposed to help raise awareness of European issues with the general public. To qualify for recognition (hence finance) from the EP they must be represented in a quarter of the member states (MS); such representation can be effected by MEP or national or regional parliamentarians of the MS. Alternatively, a TNP must score 3 per cent of the vote in an EP election. These are quite generous criteria, and it is easy to see why a number of fairly flimsy organizations have taken advantage. Obviously TNPs have to respect EU values of democracy, rule of law, basic freedoms and respect for minorities, and to take part in EP elections. Their funding comes out of the general EP budget and is voted annually. It is not to be funnelled back to NPs or spent on national elections in MS and is to be used for the declared political objectives of the TNP; campaigning for EP
elections is a priority here. TNPs must publish annual accounts and must raise 15 per cent of their own money; NPs can contribute to this, as can named individual donors to a limit of 12,000 euros. When the TNP monies are paid out, the first 15 per cent is distributed across all recognized TNPs (this is how the very small ones survive), while the lion’s share of 85 per cent goes proportionally to those TNPs represented in the EP. In 2012, the scale of the funding varied from the biggest recipient, EPP (6.5 million euros), down to the ultranationalist European Alliance of Nationalist Movements (EANM) (0.3 million euros), with the other TNPs in intermediary positions according to their strength. Total funding awarded in 2012 was some 18.9 million euros (European Parliament 2013).

The groups and the TNPs today: a brief profile

The current EP (2009–14) has some 753 MEPs, who sit in seven groups (as opposed to 12 TNPs), along with some 30 non-inscrits. The latter are mainly from extreme-right parties or are individuals who have fallen out with major groups and been reduced to a place on the margins of the parliament. Table 33.1 shows MEPs’ affiliations by group and nationality.

Table 33.1 Members of the European Parliament by country and group (December 2012)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>EPP</th>
<th>Socialists</th>
<th>ALDE</th>
<th>Greens/ EFA</th>
<th>ECR</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
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<td>Finland</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During any one legislature there is a small amount of movement by individuals between groups (less and less over time), but the general partisan configuration of the chamber remains very clear.

Any consideration both of EP groups and TNPs should bear in mind that their profile is never absolutely clear cut. There will always be a few anomalous MEPs or even parties that stand out from among their colleagues and have ended up in their group or TNP for reasons that have probably more to do with career ambitions or domestic politics than any firm sense of transnational identification with a particular family. That said, the main protagonists, groups and TNPs, line up as follows (see Table 33.2).

### Table 33.2 Transnational parties in the European Union (2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of full member parties</th>
<th>Countries represented</th>
<th>Associates</th>
<th>Countries represented</th>
<th>Observers</th>
<th>Countries represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European People’s Party (EPP)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party of European Socialists (PES)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party of European Left (PEL)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Green Party (EGP)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Free Alliance (EFA)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe (ALDE)</td>
<td>37+</td>
<td>27+</td>
<td>19*</td>
<td>13*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Democratic Party (EDP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Christian Political Movement (ECPM)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement of Europe of Liberties and Democracy (MELD)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)</td>
<td>8**</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUDemocrats</td>
<td>18***</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance of European National Movements (AENM)</td>
<td>4****</td>
<td>4****</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * Non-EU. ** All MEPs. *** Groups and MEPs. **** additionally 10 MEPs from 8 states.

This table shows the difficulty of pinning down TNP membership. It ranges from the big and structured (EPP, PES), which cover the whole of Europe and have clear categories of membership (usually full status for parties from EU states, associate for candidate states and observer for more distant parties), to the very loose structures of some of the right-wing groups, who are scrabbling to fulfil the criteria (criteria for representation).

The EPP was originally a Christian democratic organization, whose member parties shared the distinct features of that movement, such as belief in a social market economy characterized by strong contractual or neo-corporatist relationships between state, labour and capital and generous welfare provision. Usually such parties were mass parties with links to Christian unions and professional organizations. Their social philosophy rested not on the competitive individualism which liberals espouse but on social personalism, which sees the person (not the individual) as a much more open and cooperative social being. Conservative on issues of public or personal morality, such parties were genuinely committed to European integration, relaxed about citizens enjoying multiple identities and opposed to nationalism. The expansion of the EU into states of a non-Catholic culture, plus the need to find allies within the EP, has, however, altered the character of the EPP, as indeed has the growth of a global economy. Under the decisive influence of the German CDU, the party and group have welcomed conservative forces like Berlusconi’s party or the Spanish PP, whose federalist beliefs are weak and social policy less generous (Jansen 2006). In today’s EPP the original Christian democratic members are outnumbered by classic conservative parties. As a result, the tone of its discourse has become more market-friendly and less socially generous; its commitment to federalism remains, but even here it is clear that some key members have considerable reservations. The European Christian Political Movement (ECPM) is mainly a Protestant variant of the Christian democrat (CD) tradition.

The PES (EP group is SandD) brings together social democrats of all shades of opinion. Supporters of a mixed economy and a strong welfare state, they must, like the CDs, contend with the increasing difficulties of sustaining a generous social model in a highly competitive global economy. Their approach ranges from the market-friendly third way of British Labour to the more statist approach of the French PS. Rhetoric apart, their practice in office is similar.

The European Liberal and Reformist Group (ELDR) liberal group and party stand for what liberalism has historically represented – belief in the free market and the free individual, a creature endowed with reason. Some of its members incline more to the more competitive version of the creed, with consequent implications for social spending; others are more ‘social liberal’ in that they favour greater state protection. All agree on the maximization of personal liberties, hence have a strong profile on gender and inequality issues. The European Democratic Party (EDP), which shares an EP group with the Liberals, is basically a home for a number of parties which have increasing difficulty with what they see as the EPP’s rightwards drift.

The Party of European Left (PEL) and United European Left/Nordic Green Left (UEL/NGL) has gathered the remains of the communist and left-socialist parties, which have become parties of protest rather than revolution. Still opposed to global capitalism and not afraid to use the word ‘socialism’, the party fights on with little hope of a socialist transformation but with the aim of protecting, so far as possible, the losers of globalization, mainly the traditional working class, with generous welfare policies. Whether this is best achieved inside the EU or outside is a question which divides its members. Certainly the PEL puts much hope in citizen mobilization outside the parliamentary arena. The party does cover a wide range of opinion, ranging from orthodox communists like the French Communist Party (Parti communiste français, PCF) or the even more rigid Czech KSCM (which will not accept more than observer status within the PEL) to Scandinavian parties which are often fusions of radical green politics and new left or neo-Marxist movements (so-called ‘red–green’ alliances). A number of such NPs have formed the Nordic Green Left Alliance (NGLA), which is where they invest most of their transnational efforts, reflecting a longstanding Nordic tradition of regional collaboration at many levels. NGLA has observer status in PEL. Not all of the MEPs elected by the member parties of the PEL sit in its EP group, moreover. This untidy landscape of the far left reflects the difficulties it encounters
in finding a place between the dying forms of classical communism and the rise of new, alternative left currents.

The Green group and party represent those parties which derive from one side of the urban/rural cleavage or, as it would be presented today, between the claims of nature and those of the market. In addition to the environmentalist concerns which gave birth to it, the movement has increasingly moved onto the classic liberal territory of personal freedoms, where it advocates going further than many traditional liberals (e.g. on issues such as drugs policy). Appealing increasingly to a younger, educated and often technically qualified voter, this movement, often described as ‘post-materialist’, has become a durable force on the centre-left, a fact reflected in its increasing tendency to figure in national governments. The Greens are no longer long-haired, badly dressed and stiffly principled; they often wear suits and are now firmly in mainstream politics across the EU. Their colleagues of the European Free Alliance (EFA) represent the regionalist parties of Europe (mainly but not exclusively ethno-regionalist) who campaign for independence from or autonomy within those nation-states in which their territory happens to be located.

The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) is a revival of what was a presence in the EP for most of its life, namely a purely conservative grouping. While it has few disagreements on the major elements of economic or social policy with the Liberals or the EPP (where many of its members were enounced for over a decade, in the group if not the party as such), it parts company with them over integration, refusing to take it any further or even wishing to reverse it – cf. the UK Tories’ current campaign to ‘repatriate’ certain powers. Built mainly around the UK Tories and the Czech ODS (a party which defends those who won out during the privatization of the Czech economy after 1991), the group includes most shades of moderate Euro-sceptic opinion and some less moderate. The Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) group brings together avowed sovereigntists, some of whom, such as UKIP, actively seek exit from the EU. The clash between sovereigntists and integrationists can be read as a renewed version of the centre–periphery cleavage, with the difference that the old centre (the nation-state and its capital), which previously embodied progress and modernity against backwardness and nostalgia, the future against the past, now feels itself being pushed to the periphery of a larger unit (the EU, incarnated in ‘Brussels’) which claims to represent those same dynamic values for which itself once stood.

Most hard-line sovereigntists are to be found, however, in the three small TNPs, some of whom cannot muster an EP group, but who qualify for funding. These groups cover a range of opinion from conservative sceptics of classic hue to various ‘new right’ or ‘populist’ forces who argue that the remedy to the economic dissatisfactions of globalization are best addressed by fairly muscular nationalist policies (Mammone et al. 2012). The far right has had difficulty organizing as a group within the EP, not least because the other parties smartly raised the threshold for forming a group in order to deny them that possibility. Despite this gatekeeping operation, the far-right parties nevertheless continue to develop their transnational collaboration.

A recent development: the foundations

Possibly in order to compensate the TNPs for the rather modest role allotted to them, the EP (that is to say, a broad coalition of the national parties within it) has recently voted legislation and funding permitting TNPs to create their own foundations. The model for this was clearly the German foundations such as the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, which play a major back-up role to their parent parties. Their remit is supposed to be confined to political education, not party politics; but on the ground there is often a fine line between
the two. Over the past 30 years the German foundations have played a huge role in restarting democratic politics in states emerging from authoritarian rule, be it in Mediterranean Europe or in Eastern Europe after 1989; in so doing their field officers acted as virtual ambassadors for the parent party, providing technical and ideological support for emergent politicians wishing to develop parties along Western lines. Such a role appears for the moment out of reach of the more modest TNP foundations, whose main task would now seem to be to act as think-tanks; some might see this as yet a further weakening of the functions of the TNP. Table 33.3 lists the foundations and their parent party.

Table 33.3 Transnational parties and their foundations (2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transnational Party</th>
<th>Ideology</th>
<th>Founding year</th>
<th>Foundation</th>
<th>Founding year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European People’s Party (EPP)</td>
<td>Christian democratic, conservative</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Center for European Studies</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party of European Left (PEL)</td>
<td>Left, socialist</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Transform Europe</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Free Alliance (EFA)</td>
<td>Regionalism</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Center Maurits Coppieters</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe (ALDE)</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>European Liberal Forum</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Democratic Party (EDP)</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Institute of European Democrats</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR)</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>New Direction, the Foundation for European Reform</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement of Europe of Liberties and Democracy (MELD)</td>
<td>Eurosceptic, nationalist</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Foundation for a Europe of Liberties and Democracy</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Alliance of Freedom (EAF)</td>
<td>Right-wing populism</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>European Foundation for Freedom</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUDemocrats</td>
<td>Eurosceptic, confederal</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Organisation for Interstate Cooperation; former Foundation for EU Democracy</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The now defunct TNP Alliance for a Europe of Nations and Alliance of Independent Democrats in Europe also briefly enjoyed their own foundations, but these were wound up along with their parent parties at the outset of the 2009 Parliament.

Funding for these foundations in 2012 ranged from around 300,000 euros for the smallest to over 4 million euros for the Center for European Studies (CES, from the European People’s Party), by far the biggest. When one considers the sums granted to the actual TNPs, the funding of the foundations appears generous. For example the EPP as a whole receives 6.5 million euros, while its foundation alone takes 4.2 million euros.

Federalism and a European party system

Two questions are often asked about the transnational cooperation of NPs beyond their frontiers. Can the TNPs be seen in a federal light and can we speak of a European party system?

German scholars or scholars with a particular interest in Germany sometimes speak as if the TNPs could be seen in the context of federalism; that is to say, they are believed to act at the federal (EU) level on a different but equal footing from their counterparts at the national level. This is what is supposed to happen in systems like the USA or Canada. Such approaches have probably been encouraged by the TNPs’ own propensity to describe themselves as federations during their previous incarnations before they took the title of party. These approaches are, however, unhelpful and misleading. Although it has federal features, the EU is not a federation but a polity that is unique; hence its party system will be similarly unique. Moreover, in the federal systems usually quoted, the party is the same at federal and state or provincial level. The Democrat party is the same organism in Arkansas and at federal level; the Nova Scotia New Democratic Party is the same organism as the one which elects representatives to Ottawa. In the EU, however, the local incarnation of the PES is the Labour Party in the UK and the Social Democrats in Denmark. These two parties have no organic connection.

At this point, we should also deal with the question of whether a ‘European party system’ exists. The answer to this clearly depends on what definition one starts from. Assuming that we defy the purists and confer on the EP groups and the TNPs the label of party, it seems clear that this is the case. Party systems are usually characterized by competition and, less visibly, collusion. The EP combines both. On issues which pit the EP as a whole against other EU deciders (Commission and Council), it will usually find unity across its main groups; institutional logic prevails here (all groups have an interest in maintaining the power of the institution in which they work). Within that parameter, however, there are clear lines of division on both a classic left–right basis and also on a sovereignist–integrationist axis. On the latter the major groups (EPP, ALDE, SandD) tend to vote in favour of integrationist measures, while the left and right oppose them. The left–right axis may be seen under two heads, socio-economic and libertarian. On the first, the Liberals will tend to side with the EPP and conservatives in favour of market-friendly measures; but on ‘permissive’ issues one may expect to find them alongside the Greens, SandD and the far left also, social democracy and the far left having long espoused this particular value-set. There seems thus to be present a clear competitive logic, much as one would find in any national parliament. To this extent we can speak of a European party system, albeit one which operates in a defined institution.

If one takes the wider EU, however, and expects the TNPs to play a similar role to what the groups do in the EP, it is much harder to answer positively. These anaemic organizations, kept on a tight leash by their ‘parents’, remain minor actors in a field where the action is essentially intergovernmental.
Groups and parties in the future

What does the future hold for the EP groups and their related TNPs? The situations of these two entities are very different. The groups have had over 50 years of existence, during which time they have developed a distinct role within their institution. They have become the place where national parties concert their action to carry out efficiently the business of groups in all parliaments, viz. to amend and approve legislation. The fact that this legislation is initiated elsewhere is irrelevant, as is the fact that the EP’s role has become steadily more important; from a purely functional point of view, the EP groups have always been there to carry out a specific task in a defined arena, and this they perform with growing efficiency in accord with the wishes of their member parties across the EU states. Theirs is a limited function in a clearly demarcated space. Their future is therefore relatively uncomplicated; they will be doing more of the same.

The TNPs, on the other hand, have neither the longevity nor the functional utility of their corresponding EP groups, and any view of their development must strive to avoid the expectations which are visited on them by their supporters, generally of federalist sympathies. So far, they have achieved a number of goals, the first of which is to have gained legal existence and guaranteed public finance. Everyone recognizes their networking function, as a place to bring together NP leaders, particularly in advance of key EU meetings. Their role in party-building after the fall of communism in Eastern and Central Europe, alongside that of the political foundations, should also be valued; it is perhaps their best achievement so far. But the list of their shortcomings remains forbiddingly long; they are characterized more by the party functions that they do not perform rather than those that they do. Some scholars deny them even the title of party. In a recent piece, an insider with unmatched knowledge of the EU’s parties and groups, Julian Priestley (former secretary-general of both the Socialist group and then the EP itself) painted a gloomy picture. While fully acknowledging the role of the groups (one of the EU’s real success stories, as he rightly says), he criticizes the weakness of the parties, stressing in particular the weakness of their decision-making structures (always the lowest common denominator because of their wish to work by consensus at all costs), the blandness of their manifestoes (which NPs usually ignore anyway) and above all their total lack of linkage to ordinary voters. It is unsurprising, then, that they were long incapable of proposing an agreed candidate for the post of Commission President. (The top EU posts are generally carved up by agreement between national leaders, usually via the European Council; the only modest input that the TNPs could have into such a process is to organize a few pre-meetings for the leaders of their family of parties.) Priestley suggests a number of reforms to remedy this situation of impotence; most of them involve trying to democratize the TNPs further. He thus recommends mass individual membership for all of them (maybe allowing existing NP members to opt in); much greater involvement in decision-making by such members, with a say in electing congress delegates, approving manifestoes and above all selecting, via that favourite new toy of some European parties, the primary, a candidate for the post of Commission President. To facilitate this, he recommends a 15 per cent increase in TNP funding, a figure which will raise the hackles of more than mere Eurosceptics. In his view the TNPs should move towards more majority voting, even on areas taboo under current EU rules. He finally recommends that the TNPs further sharpen their ideological differences – a difficult undertaking in an era of globalization where all parties see their room for manoeuvre curtailed and are fearful of departing too far from market orthodoxy.

The real problem with all these changes (and Priestley could have added hotter issues, such as the right to select candidates for MEP) is not so much their cost as the fact that they all
depend for their enactment on the good will of NPs. The prevailing argument of this chapter has been that NPs do not like conceding power, legitimacy and resources to any organism above (or indeed below) them. When they do so, they try to do it on an ad hoc basis and on conditions which they have set (and can, they hope, recall if need be); such is the logic of P/A theory, which we suggest can usefully be applied here. From the point of view of most NPs, then, looking at the present arrangements there seems little incentive to help develop TNPs which might become a serious rival. The EP groups do a perfectly adequate job in their restricted domain; if the NPs want a think-tank beyond their own national resources, then the foundations can be called on. The remaining networking and information-sharing functions are not that numerous and can be carried on via the TNPs much as at present. This will probably be true even with the new closer financial arrangements that will henceforth govern the Eurozone. Apart from the most ideological federalists (as opposed to the pragmatists who run most of those NPs which pass for federalist), it is hard to imagine any party operative seeing much benefit in the further development of TNPs. There will be much discussion, as ever, but little movement in this direction.

Notes

1 Some scholars, such as Seiler or French neo-Weberians like Offerlé (1997), would dispute whether such organizations really deserved to be called parties. We disagree with this view, because it usually involves setting some test of ‘partyness’ (ability to form an executive or to represent citizens directly), which the TNP are never going to be allowed to pass. The fact is that the EU has a unique triangular system of decision-making, in which the EP plays a distinct role; within the EP, the TNP and their groups can act to shape outcomes. They can be policy-seeking, if not directly office-seeking. As Offerlé likes to remind us, the label of party is always awarded by someone (often the original party leadership); in this case it seems to be accepted by all the TNP, their national member parties, most EU officials and the community of academics who work on the TNP. In the face of such acceptance across the political class, it seems pointless to refuse the attribution of a label which no one owns in any case.

2 Left-wing MEPs are trying to have the EP refuse funding to the two far-right TNP on the grounds that they do not share core Union values, such as respect for minorities.

3 For an excellent discussion of the genesis of the EPR, see Kulahci (2005).

4 Following campaigns by MEPs Jo Leinen (socialist) and Maria Giannakou (conservative), the Commission is working on a modification of the current Regulation. This would ease considerably TNP control over their resources, by giving them power to build reserves and plan spending over longer periods.

5 Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for the Christian democrats, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung for the socialists and Friedrich Naumann Stiftung for the liberals.

6 For instance, the strong contacts between German, Austrian and Czech parties within the Green and socialist families.

Bibliography


David Hanley

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