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National Parties, Political Processes and the EU
democratic deficit: The Problem of Europarties
Institutionalization

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Abstract

In classical party democracy, elections serve as an “instrument of democracy” (Powell 2000): they are the mechanism to connect policy preferences of the electors (within the electoral arena) to the political production (within the legislative arena). At the European level the linkage seems to be lost because the political actors performing in the two arena are not the same and the logics of behaviour are quite different. The EU calls for truly “Europarties” to become more democratic in its procedural and substantive prerequisites and this entails not only a progressive emancipation of party structures at European level but also an integration between them. In fact, we will have full Europarties only when the two party structures at EU level are either independent from national parties and linked to each other: if intra- and extra- parliamentary faces become really European and connected entities, legislators will be accountable to voters and, consequently, democratic deficit will decline.

The main aims of this paper are, firstly, to investigate if and to what extent political parties at European level are able to perform the electoral and legislative functions in the two separated arena and, secondly, if intra- and extra- parliamentary faces of the Europarties are still separated or, rather, have become integrated. In other words, I will delineate the process of institutionalization of the Europarties looking at their progressive autonomy from national parties and systemness/integration at European level (Panbianco 1988).

Keywords

Europarties; institutionalization; democratic deficit; political parties

1. Political parties, political process and democratic deficit in the European Union

The so called “*Standard Version*” of the European Union (EU) democratic deficit (Weiler et al. 1995; Follesdal and Hix 2006) claims that the legitimacy of the EU is questionable (at least) because, on one hand, the European Parliament (EP) is not able to control the EU executive and, on the other hand, political parties do not represent the European citizens will¹ (Mair and Thomassen 2010). But if the latter can be accepted as effective problem of the EU institutional architecture, the lack of the EP to control the EU executive is a “false problem” because the EU is a political system where the executive and legislative powers are independent, hence as such the parliament has no role in scrutinizing and controlling the executive. It is like saying that because the Congress in USA is not able to dismiss the President, the United States suffers of a democratic deficit. Of course, it is questionable whether, to what extent and to whom the European Commission is accountable (Hix 2008) but this kind of investigation is not the focal point of this paper. Here I focus on the lack of political representation and in particular on the role of Europarties² in this mechanism.

The EU has gradually acquired the features of a “compound polity” (Fabbrini 2007)³ with a multiple separation of powers, both vertical (that is between the European institutions and member states) and horizontal (among the European Council, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice). Certainly, there are other “federal states” such as Germany, Austria, Canada or Australia with a vertical division of powers but what makes different the EU from these political systems is the simultaneous presence of the two lines of power separation: both horizontal and vertical. In the federal Germany, for example, the executive and legislative functions are fused together by the “vote of confidence” mechanism and consequently the executive must resign if it loses the majority support of the legislature⁴. Conversely, in compound democracy the executive and legislative are separated, the Cabinet is not able to disband the parliament and, in the same way, the government cannot be dismissed by the parliament. In a similar institutional architecture the political production is not tied to a government (like in parliamentary/fused system) but rather it is dispersed among different institutions sharing decision-making power. As a result, both in the EU and USA there is *no government* as such but rather a *governance* system where the political power is fragmented and dispersed among different institutions. In a compound democracy different institutions gain legitimacy by different electoral processes, on the basis of different timetable and by different constituencies. In other words, authoritative institutions are accountable to different principals and are constrained by different institutional arrangements but political parties are the main actors in all electoral processes.

According to all these reasons, the democratic deficit in the EU is not to be found in the executive/legislative relation but rather in the absence of battle for controlling political power as well as the policy agenda at the EU level (Hix 2008). In classical party democracy, elections serve as an

¹ An upgraded “standard version” of the democratic deficit involves also three other claims: the first one is the absence of truly “European election”; the second one is the “too distance” of the European institutions from the citizens; the third one, finally, is the “policy drift” from voters’ ideal points. For a more accurate analysis of these points see Follesdal and Hix (2006).

² The concept of “Europarty” is often used in literature as synonymous of transnational federations that is they are considered as “Political Parties at European Level” following the definition of the “Party Statute”. In this paper, however, I used the term Europarty to indicate both the transnational federations and the European Parliamentary Groups.

³ To date the EU has been defined in several way: i.e. Hix (2005) defined the EU as a “political system without a State”, while Sbragia (2005) talked about a “reversed federal state”. The difficulties to define the EU reflects the difficulties in capturing its real political and institutional nature.

⁴ Besides the EU we have only two other examples of “compound democracy” in the world: the United States of America (USA) and Switzerland. But since “size matters” (Dahl and Tufte 1973) it is much better to compare the EU with the USA rather than with Switzerland (Fabbrini 2007).

“instrument of democracy” (Powell 2000): they are the mechanism to connect policy preferences of the electors (within the electoral arena) to the political production (within the legislative arena). At the European level the linkage seems to be lost because the political actors performing in the two arena are not the same and the logics of behaviour are quite different. While at election time *national* parties offer alternative programmes based on national issues to electors (and electors chose the party representing better their (national) policy preference⁵), during the legislative process the EPGs are involved in policy-making and their behavioural logic is (essentially) based on transnational and European issues (Hix et al. 2007, 2009). The separation between the two political processes at EU level creates a short-circuit in the “integrated electoral-parliamentary complex” (Cotta 1979) failing to represent the political will of the European citizens. If the EU wants this gap to be plugged it needs that truly Europarties act in the two political arena and coordinate their actions and strategies.

The main aims of this paper are, firstly, to investigate if and to what extent political parties at European level are able to perform the electoral and legislative functions in the two separated arena and, secondly, if intra- and extra- parliamentary faces of the Europarties are still separated or, rather, have become integrated. In other words, I will delineate the process of institutionalization of the Europarties looking at their progressive *autonomy* and *systemness* (Panebianco 1988). The question of the emergence of fully-fledged and institutionalized Europarties, as we will see below, is a fundamental element to the development of an European representative democracy (Beetham and Lord 1998)⁶.

The paper will be organized in three parts. In the first one I develop a theoretical framework in order to understand the origin and the evolution of party politics at European level. Section two investigates empirically if and how the European party structures developed as organizations and if they are now autonomous from their counter-parts at national level. Besides, in this section I investigate if and to what extent the two faces of Europarties (the party in the public office – the EPG – and the party in the central office – the transnational party federations) are integrated and show some forms of coordination and cooperation. Finally, in the third part, I summarize the results and draw some conclusions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2. *Why do parties change? Adaptation and innovation of national parties*

Parties are “first of all organizations” (Panebianco 1988) and, consequently, the environment where they operate is one of the major source of uncertainty and pressure for changes. Namely, changes in the environment induce parties to modify both their organizational structures and strategies in order to maximize their votes, public offices and control over policies (Strom 1990) or, in more general terms, their power (Stoppino 2001). Parties in political science are generally considered as unitary actors with multi-goals and, in order to achieve these objectives, they organize themselves adapting to environmental “incentives structure” (Cox and McCubbins 2005; Panebianco 1988). So the logic behind this perspective is the next:

$$\text{parties} \rightarrow \text{objectives} \rightarrow \text{organization}$$

or following Chandler (1962): “*structures follow strategy*”. It is clear, from this point of view, that the party organization depends on institutional framework which it is located in and, consequently, on the available “structure of political opportunities” (Schlesinger 1965). In more general terms, political

⁵ Moreover, the electors very often vote on the basis of a judgment about their national governments.

⁶ In democratization literature is quite proved that party institutionalization is a vital factor in the process of democratic consolidation (Randall and Svasand 2002; Mainwaring and Scully 1995).

institutions affect parties by constraining their range of strategic options. Institutions rule out some types of behaviour and make others more or less likely by influencing the costs and benefits that a party can expect when following a certain course of action (Muller 2002). Since parties are offices-, votes- and policy- seeking organizations and because formal and informal distribution of power within them shapes how these goals are prioritized and pursued (Panebianco 1988; Strom 1990), political opportunity structure provides incentives for parties to organize in order to maximize their utility (that is their power). Therefore, if institutional environment shifts, political parties must adapt themselves to survive⁷.

Appleton and Ward (1997) distinguished among different models of change and focused their attention on a particular type of adaptation: *innovation*. According to the authors this kind of change can be seen as an attempt by parties to introduce, within the existing organization, structures and processes radically new. Unlike adaptation, then, organizational innovation is a *proactive* process and, in this sense, organizational change is not a simply (*passive*) reaction to external events but it implies an *active* role of national parties. It should be noted that innovation does not necessarily entail replacing old forms and practices, in some cases it supplements what already exists.

In my view, the concept of organizational innovation provides a useful analytical tool throughout we can understand origin as well as evolution of political parties at European level. In fact, we can consider both foundation and subsequent developments of parliamentary groups in the European Parliament (EPGs) as well as of transnational federations as an example of organizational innovation experimented by national parties in order to control resources and constrains produced by the EU.

Moreover, this concept allows us to make a distinction between two different types of party response to the process of European integration: the first one is the "*adaptation*" to pressures that comes from the external environment and manifests itself (mostly) through organizational, ideological, programmatic and strategic changes of parties at national level; the second one concerns the organizational '*innovation*' experienced by national parties at supranational level. Both the dynamics ('adaptation' and 'innovation') are the two sides of the same coin: the '*Europeanization*'.

Put in another way, we can distinguish between europeanization *of* and *by* national parties: in the first case we have an *adaptive* response *of* national parties to the European integration process; in the second case, conversely, we have an organizational *innovation* experimented *by* national parties.

2.1. Defining europeanization

The concept of Europeanization has a contested meaning in literature and it has been used to describe different processes and dynamics. Olsen (2002) identified at least five different meanings of the term Europeanization:

1. *changes in external boundaries*: this engages, for example, the process of EU enlargement to new territories and geographic areas;
2. *developing institutions at the European level*: this signifies centre-building with "political production" capacity;
3. *central penetration of national systems of governance*: europeanization implies adapting national and sub-national systems of governance to European political centre and European-wide norms;

⁷ I am conscious that parties answers to environment pressures are a product of an internal "power struggle" that involves different factions within it but, in this paper, it is my objective to place both origin and development of parties at European level within a general (macro) framework and to trace their evolution. It shall be a purpose of future researches to understand the differences in the level of institutionalization achieved by parties through an analysis of intra-party politics both within parties (at national level) and among parties (at European level).

4. *exporting forms of political organization*: Europeanization as exporting forms of political organization and governance beyond European territories;
5. *political unification project*: the degree to which Europe is becoming a more unified and stronger political entity.

Mair (2004; 2007) argued that each of these (potential) definitions of Europeanization focuses only on one side of the story while we might consider Europeanization as a *two-way process*, being both a *source* of change and an *effect*⁸. The first one describes the impact of the European Union on polity, politics and policies at national level and it can be considered as a *top-down* process, whereas the second one considers Europeanization as “the emergence and the development at European level of distinct structures of governance” (Risse *et al.* 2001, p.2) and it entails a *bottom-up* approach.

This perspective of analysis therefore considers Europeanization not only as a passive response of Member State structures and processes to the European integration, but also as an attempt to model European procedures, institutions and policies. Thus, bottom-up concept of Europeanization is not alternative to the first dimension but, rather, complementary to it.

In other words, “Europeanization” is a process consisting of two phases: the first one implies the *institutionalization* of a distinct European political system and institutions; the second one regards the *penetration* of European rules, directives and norms into national political systems (Mair 2007). But, if Europeanization might have two faces, these should not be seen as alternatives: each requires and is dependent upon other. Without the institutionalization of the EU there would be no impact on domestic structures because the EU would not have the strength and ability to penetrate national borders. By contrast, in the absence of any penetration into domestic sphere, the process of European integration might be simply considered irrelevant (Mair 2004, pp.342-343).

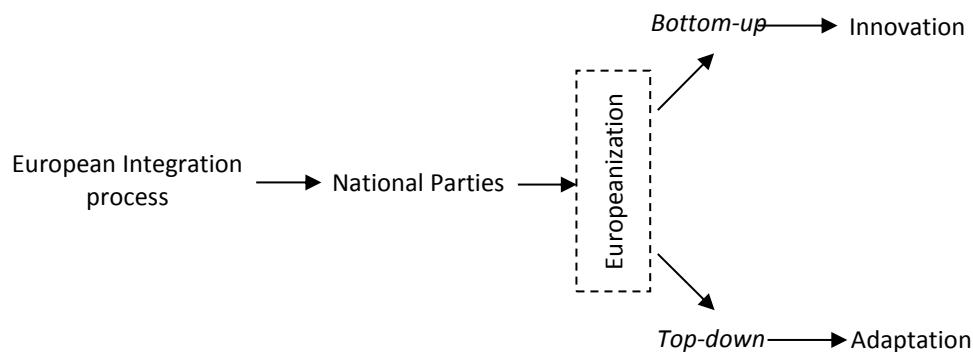
2.2. Bottom-up Europeanization as organizational innovation

Past researches analyzed if and to what extent national political parties adapted their organizational structure, political strategies and ideologies to the process of European integration. These studies, in particular, emphasized the limited impact of the EU on parties and party systems at national level (Mair 2000; Ladrech 2002; Raunio 2002, Pennings 2006; Poguntke *et al.* 2007). In our view, however, the evolution of the EU forced national political parties to adapt themselves not only through structural change at national level but also - and above all - through creation and development of party structures at European level. The EU integration process forced national parties to organize themselves at supranational level in order to control (relatively) new resources and to limit constraints created by the EU. So, if we want to speak about Europeanization we must talk about the bottom-up dimension of Europeanization.

Figure 1 helps us to summarize our topic. The process of European integration changed the institutional environment where political parties operate, providing new incentives and constraints to achieve parties primary goals: offices, votes and policies. National parties in order to react to environmental changes implement both an adaptive and innovative organizational response. The first one concerns the structural, ideological and systemic changes of political parties at national level and, in literature, has been defined as '*top-down europeanization*'. The second one, conversely, concerns the construction of organizational structures at European level by national parties. If parties at European level, both in their parliamentary (groups) and extra-parliamentary (transnational federations) dimensions, have been widely studied, their birth and evolution has never been considered in terms of '*bottom-up europeanization*'.

⁸ For a similar definition of Europeanization see Bomber and Patterson (2000) and Hix and Goetz (2000).

Figure 1. Models of national parties europeanization



In sum, political parties, one of the main channel of representation at national level, experimented new organizational forms in order to control as efficiently and effectively as possible new resources created by the EU integration process. Both the institutionalization of decision-making arenas and the delegation of decision-making powers, in a growing number of policy matters at supranational level (Franchino 2007), changed the environment where political parties and, more in general, national political systems act (Hix and Goetz 2000). This is particularly true for political parties, whose organizational structures, functions and strategies are strongly linked to different political institutions in which they are located and act (Panebianco 1988; Hix 1998). Therefore, the origin and evolution of political parties at European level are a consequence of the EU institutionalization.

It is my belief, in particular, that origin and development of political parties at European level should be considered as the organizational response provided by the national parties to the process of European integration, which has produced a "restructuring of the main channels and forms of representation" (Bartolini 2005) and provides new resources and opportunities that parties should be able to exploit in the best way to maximize its usefulness.

MEASURING THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION

3. *The institutionalization of the Europarties: variables and indicators*

In previous section I focused on why parties could innovate themselves as response to environmental change caused by European integration process. In this paragraph I turn my attention on development of party structures built at European level. In fact, innovation is not a choice once and for all but new party structures must solidify and adapt to environmental development during the time. This is particularly true for parties at European level since they operate within a "developing institutions" like the European Union and, because, as Bartolini (2005) wrote, "Europarties are the product of the institutional environment of the EU and have no hope of survival outside it. Their future development will be shaped by the EU institutional development".

In literature, organizational development has been defined "*institutionalization*" and it describes "the process by which organizations [...] acquire value and stability" (Huntington 1968). A definition of party institutionalization at European level must consider not only what makes an Europarty a more "valued and stable" institution, but also what makes it more specifically "European". In other words, as pointed out by Bardi (2002) "not only must Europarties develop and consolidate their party character and attributes, but also do so by separating themselves from their national counterparts". In other words, they have to become autonomous from national parties. In addition, a truly institutionalization of Europarties means also a progressive interdependence among party structures at European level: in particular, using the analytical tool proposed by Katz and Mair (1993), we can

consider as dimension of Europarty institutionalization the progressive integration between the “party in the public offices” (that is European parliamentary groups) and the “party in the central offices” (that is transnational federations)⁹. In other words, Europarties have to establish some forms of relationship among them in order to consolidate their party character.

Consequently, and according to Panebianco (1988), we can identify two different dimensions of Europarty institutionalization: *autonomy* and *integration*. He defined autonomy as "the ability [of an organization] to control directly the processes of exchange with the environment" but, his definition refers exclusively to an organizational dimension of the process, while Randall and Svasand (2002, p. 14) preferred to speak about "decision-making autonomy" defined as "freedom from [external] interference in determining their choices and strategies". In this way parties at EU level became structures free from interference in determining their own policies and strategies. Therefore Europarty autonomy reflects the degree of freedom from national parties from both an organizational and decisional point of view. More autonomous Europarty structures means more *European* parties, because the power within the organization shifts from national parties (unit-level) to European organs (central-level). In particular, autonomy means to parliamentary groups an independent decision-making, without (or with limited) intrusion by national parties, while it refers to transnational federations not only to decisional autonomy but also to an organizational and financial independence¹⁰.

The second dimension is based on the concept of *systemness* that Panebianco (1988) defines as "the degree of interdependence of internal sectors" and it has been designed to measure integration among various functional components of parties. Randall and Svasand (2002), in turn, described systemness as the “increasing scope, density and regularity of the interactions that constitute the party as a structure”, which in the case of political parties at European level are parliamentary groups and transnational associations.

Therefore, what is important in Europarty institutionalization is, on one side, the growing autonomy of parliamentary groups and transnational federations from national parties and, on the other, their integration¹¹.

According to the particular nature of the EU system, the classic indicators applied to study political party institutionalization at national level (i.e. members, electoral volatility, stability) can not be used to analyze party organizational evolution at European level (Bardi 2002). Since EPGs and transnational federations are present in different institutional environment and they have different organizational models, it is necessary to identify *ad hoc* empirical tools for each of the two party structures at European level.

3.1. The parliamentary groups

Within the EPGs, decision-making is (predominantly) based on majority rule (Hix and Lord 2007; Corbett et al. 2007) even if during groups meeting MEPs and their national delegations try to achieve a

⁹ In a similar vein, Duverger (1963), when outlined his models of party development (externally versus internally generated parties), argued that the final step in the process of party consolidation is, in both models, some kind of connection between intra and extra parliamentary faces of parties.

¹⁰ From the organizational point of view EPGs are already independent from national parties because European Parliament guarantee rooms, staff and others organizational tools to EPGs in proportion to their seats size.

¹¹ Analytical focus in this paper will be placed on “structural dimension” of party institutionalization, that is on the process through parties consolidate as organization. Randall and Svasand (2002) suggested a second dimension through we can measure party institutionalization: the attitudinal one. For the two authors a party in order to consolidate itself must create – internally – its own distinctive culture and value-system and – externally – it has to be reified in the public imagination so that party exist as a social organization apart from its momentary leaders. This process of consolidation means that party is no longer only a tool in order to realize specific goals but that it becomes valuable in itself.

consensus as large as possible without the need to vote openly. The shared interest in taking decision without votes makes vague the identity of winners and losers reducing the problem of free-riding. In such an organizational setting it becomes really important the distribution of seats in order to control the decision-making process within the EPGs: if one (or two) national delegation(s) has (have) the majority of seats in group meeting the EPG is not truly “European” rather its decision making reflects the will and needs of the largest national delegation(s). Hence, the degree of decisional autonomy achieved by a parliamentary group may be measured by indicators able to quantify how much the most large national delegations within each EPGs are able to dominate decision-making. The reason to include in our analysis these kinds of indicators is suggested by Hix and Lord (1997) when they pointed out that EPP and PES include national delegations that individually account for about 30% of respective total group membership. Such strong delegations potentially have a high degree of national autonomy, making the EPGs less “transnational”. For this purpose I use two indicators: *concentration* and *fragmentation*.

Concentration is considered as the proportion of seats held by the two major parties within a group. As it can be seen from table 1, the control exercised by the two major parties has declined over time even though there are still some groups where this condition persists, in particular the G/EFA (44.19%) and IND/DEM (45.45%). The three main groups (EPP, PES and ALDE) present a very low level of national party concentration if compared with the levels reported by other groups (respectively 22.92%, 23.96% and 19%) describing them, from this point of view, as transnational groups.

Table 1. European Parliamentary Groups *concentration* (1979- 2009)

	1979		1984		1989		1994		1999		2004		2009	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
<i>Epp- De</i>	39,3	67,3	37,3	61,8	26,4	48,8	29,9	49	22,8	38,3	14,3	24,01	13,89	22,92
<i>Pes</i>	31	50,4	25,4	50,8	25,5	42,8	31,8	52	19,3	35,9	36,06	23,61	13,36	23,96
<i>Alde</i>	42,5	55	38,7	54,8	26,5	44,9	23,3	41,9	21,2	34,6	17,91	28,35	10	19
<i>Uen</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	33,3	59,25	18,18	36,36
<i>G/Efa</i>	-	-	-	-	26,7	53,3	52,1	69,6	19,6	34,8	32,5	47,5	30,23	44,19
<i>Gue/Ngl</i>	-	-	-	-	50	71,4	32,1	57,1	26,2	42,9	17,91	33,3	17,07	29,27
<i>Ind/Dem</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	80	93,3	36,36	45,45

Note: A = % largest party; B = % two largest parties

Source: adapted from Bardi (2002) until 1999; author elaboration based on official EP data for years 2004 and 2009.

In order to measure *fragmentation* it can be used Laakso and Taagepera’s index (1979)¹² that counts parties weighting their relative powers throughout their number (percentage) of seats (of votes). In this case (and contrary to the classical interpretation of the index) the more effective number of parties within the EPGs increases the more the decision-making process is free from national influence since the relative power (in terms of seats) of each national delegation decrease. The index of fragmentation (IF) has been calculated as follow:

$$IF = 1 / \sum_{i=1}^n S_i^2$$

where S_i represents the seats shared of parties i within the EPG. As it can be seen from table 2, the index increased over time – with the exception of UEN – describing a general rises in the level of *transnationality* of the EPGs. Even from the fragmentation point of view EPP, PES and ALDE emerge as the most «European» groups (with respectively 14.95, 13.62 and 14.45 effective number of parties).

¹² It can be useful to bear in mind that Laakso and Taagepera’s index has been used to measure the effective number of legislative (electoral) parties in a party system.

Table 2. European Parliament Groups fragmentation (1979- 2009)

	<i>1979- 1984</i>	<i>1984- 1989</i>	<i>1989- 1994</i>	<i>1994- 1999</i>	<i>1999- 2004</i>	<i>2004- 2009</i>
<i>Alde</i>	3,59	4,66	6,65	7,3	7,62	14,45
<i>Gue/Ngl</i>	2,41	2,55	1,56	5,95	6,43	9,08
<i>Epp- De</i>	4,38	5,27	6,2	7,8	7,77	14,95
<i>Ind/Dem</i>			2,1	2,1	3,57	5,14
<i>Ni</i>	2,61	2,79	3,57	3,3	3,38	6,42
<i>Pes</i>	6,13	7,13	6,92	6,58	8,69	13,62
<i>Uen</i>				2,8	3,3	3,19
<i>G/Efa</i>			3,98	2,1	8,92	7,42

Source: official EP sources.

Another way to test the transnationality of the EPGs is to measure how many member states are represented in each group. *Inclusiveness* portrays the “*Europeanness*” showed by the EPGs: the more national delegations are included in the EPGs, the more they can differentiate themselves from national party interests diluting national identities and fostering the development of European party identities¹³. As table 3 shows, EPP, PES and ALDE are, once again, the groups where the greater number of countries is represented. Even if we take a diachronic perspective, it is easy to verify that these three groups have always been able to attract parties from most part of Europe. However, since 1979 also the other groups, with the exception of UEN, have been aggregating parties from an increasing number of countries.

Table 3. European Parliamentary Groups inclusiveness (1979- 2009)

	<i>1979</i>	<i>1984</i>	<i>1989</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2009</i>
<i>Epp- De</i>	7/9	9/10	12/12	12/12	15/15	25/25	26/27
<i>Pes</i>	9/9	9/10	12/12	12/12	15/15	23/25	25/27
<i>Alde</i>	8/9	7/10	10/12	10/12	10/15	17/25	22/27
<i>Uen</i>	-	-	-	-	6/15	6/25	6/27
<i>G/Efa</i>	-	-	7/12	7/12	12/15	12/25	14/27
<i>Gue/Ngl</i>	-	-	4/12	5/12	10/15	12/25	14/27
<i>Ind/Dem</i>	-	-	-	-	4/15	3/25	9/27

Source: author’s elaboration based on EP official data.

Overall, the three indicators suggest a development of the parliamentary groups and a gradual emancipation from national parties becoming more and more true European entities separated from their national sub-units. In addition, decision-making within them appears to be no longer an expression of the major parties will but it has become a bargaining process involving all of them. Obviously it doesn’t mean that no national delegation can carry out a leading role within the EPGs but if they do this it is for political reasons. For example, English Labour Party or German SPD have a leading role within the PES but their pivotal position is related to their political and social resources both at national and international level.

In summary, the more an EPG a) is fragmented; b) includes an increasing number of nationalities; and the less c) has a concentration of power in one or two national parties, the more decisional autonomy it has and, consequently, the more it is institutionalized. However, an EPG with a high degree of decisional autonomy (in accordance to the suggested indicators) can meet heavy problems in acting as unitary actor. In fact, if the numbers of national delegations increase and if the EPG has weak party leadership without discipline tools, it will become tricky for it achieving shared decision and voting as a block. Moreover, the EPGs try to increase their size in terms of seats as much as possible in order to obtain greater economic resources, staff and offices (Corbett *et al.* 2007; Hix *et al.* 2007).

¹³ This indicator is similar to the concept of “*value infusion*” described by Randall and Svasand (2002) in their model of party institutionalization.

This strategy, however, risks to undermine the ideological cohesion of groups and their ability to vote as a block and, therefore, their capacity to influence decision-making process at EU level. Probably a trade-off exists between the process of trans-nationalization of groups and their ability to maintain internal coherence and cohesion, especially during parliamentary votes. For these reasons it is important to investigate whether the EPGs act as unitary actors (expressing a transnational and autonomous identity) or whether their behaviour follows a national strategy.

The *cohesion* in voting behaviour, that is how much each national delegations within each group vote in the same way, is a useful indicator to measure how much EPGs are able to operate as unitary actors within the EP. Cohesion makes independence of parties at European level “truth in its consequences” (Thomas 1928) or, in other words, using this indicator we can see if national delegations are either agent of national parties or EPGs.

As I argued before, growing decisional-autonomy of the EPGs can have «negative externalities» on the ability of groups to act as a block especially in voting behaviour. In literature several indexes have been used to measure the degree of party unity during the votes in parliamentary assemblies in general and within the EP in particular¹⁴. In this paper I will use the «*Agreement Index*»¹⁵ elaborated by Hix *et al.* (2007) as follow:

$$AI = \frac{\max \{Y_i; N_i; A_i\} - \frac{1}{2} [(Y_i + N_i + A_i) - \max \{Y_i; N_i; A_i\}]}{(Y_i + N_i + A_i)}$$

where Y_i denotes the number of YES votes expressed by group i on a given vote, N_i the number of No votes and A_i the number of Abstain votes. The AI will be equal to 1 when all members of an EPG vote in the same way, on the contrary it will be equal to 0 when the MEPs of a party are equally divided among all three voting options. In this way we can measure if EPGs work (vote) as autonomous and independent actors (high level of voting cohesion) or if national delegations within EPGs act independently from each other.

As it can be seen from table 4, EPGs unity, despite several institutional obstacles (i.e. the lack of vote of confidence or the selection of candidates for the European elections¹⁶), has increased over time making EPGs stronger and more cohesive than their counterparts present, for example, in the U.S. Congress (Martinelli 2006). The data show clearly that all groups increased their cohesion during various legislatures, reaching in the case of PES a cohesion of 0.91. The only exceptions to this positive trend are UEN, which saw its level of internal cohesion decreasing from 0.85 in 1994 to 0.76 in 2005, and IND/DEM, whose index has declined during the last three terms from 0.67 to 0.47. On the whole, figures in table 4 show a high level of cohesion (about 0.81) especially if we take into consideration institutional and organizational obstacles that groups meet in fulfilling its functions and successive waves of enlargement producing, at least in the short term, difficulties in the adaptation process of parties from new member countries. However, also declining ideological homogeneity inside the groups (as a result of expanding group membership) this does not seem to have a negative effect on voting cohesion (Hix *et al.* 2007).

¹⁴ For a review of this kind of literature see, *inter alia*, Bowler *et al.* (1999) and Kam (2009).

¹⁵ See Carrubba *et al.* (2006) and Hug (2010) for theoretical and methodological critics to the employment of indexes of cohesion within the EP.

¹⁶ For a detailed analysis of factors that obstacle EPGs cohesion see Hix *et al.* (2007).

Table 4. European Parliamentary Groups cohesion (1979- 2009)

	1979- 1984	1984- 1989	1989- 1994	1994- 1999	1999- 2004	2004- 2009
<i>Pse</i>	0,76	0,87	0,90	0,90	0,90	0,91
<i>Epp- De</i>	0,90	0,93	0,91	0,90	0,87	0,88
<i>Alde</i>	0,85	0,85	0,85	0,86	0,88	0,89
<i>Gue/Ngl</i>	0,81	0,87	0,86	0,80	0,80	0,85
<i>Uen</i>	0,80	0,84	0,85	0,79	0,75	0,76
<i>G/Efa</i>	-	0,81	0,85	0,91	0,92	0,91
<i>Ind/Dem</i>	-	-	0,83	0,67	0,50	0,47
<i>Ni</i>	0,74	0,79	0,81	0,63	0,44	0,44

Source: author's elaboration on data from Hix *et al.* (2009).

A possible explanation of this growing cohesion lies in the resources controlled by the EP parties, which encourage MEPs to toe the party line. The EP parties control the nominations for the key offices of the EP, the appointment of Committee chairpersons, offices within groups, *rapporteurships* on EU legislation and the agenda of the parliament as the whole. MEPs have learned that the likelihood of their playing an influential role in the EP is dependent upon the EP parties and hence they join a political group that broadly shares their policy preferences. The result is that «national parties might be forced to vote against their policy preferences on some issues, but on average will vote according to their policy preferences in the knowledge that they are more likely to achieve these preferences as their colleagues in the group will be voting the same way» (Hix *et al.* 2009). Therefore, parliamentary groups have been able to maintain and even increase over time its cohesion in voting behaviour despite growing number of national parties inside them. In other words, EPGs became somewhat different from national parties both from an organizational and behavioural point of view.

3.2. Political Parties at European Level

The origin of the Political Parties at European Level (PPEL) can be traced at the 1969 European Community Summit in The Hague when member states leaders decided to hold direct elections to the EP¹⁷. PPEL were launched just before the first EP elections in 1979 and their primary goals were the coordination of the European election campaigns and the adoption of a common electoral programs. Moreover, the founding fathers of the PPEL sought (and hoped) that they would have operated as the “extra-parliamentary arm of the EP groups in terms of support, control and influence” (Pridham and Pridham 1981). But, as this and the next sections will show, Europarties were (and they are still) too weak and loosely organized to successfully achieve the goals outlined above.

Once again, we have to identify some useful indicators in order to measure the degree of organizational and decisional autonomy achieved by Europarties since their foundation. From political parties literature and organizational theory we can pinpoint (at least) the following indicators: *inclusiveness*, *staff* and *financial* development and *majority rule* within the main party leadership bodies. Inclusiveness allows us to highlight the more or less European character of federation or, in other words, it makes possible to investigate whether parties at European level differentiated themselves from national party values and preferences: the more nationalities are in Europarties, the more they are transnational, and consequently the less they are bound to specific national interests. Staff and financial development, conversely, describe the structural independence from national parties and, in particular, they affect the power-balance among parties at European level and national parties and they show to what extent the original predominance of national parties has been reduced in favour of the European parties. Finally, decisional autonomy can help us to understand whether national parties are still able to control decision-making process within Europarties. In particular, if Europarties preserve unanimity as the main voting rule in key decisional bodies then each national

¹⁷ Pridham and Pridham (1981) argued that without the immediate stimulus and practical pressures resulting from the decision to hold direct elections, such party organization would not have been formed.

party maintains a pivotal role within them; otherwise, using majority rule national parties lose their control over Europarty decisions.

From data in table 5 we can identify three types of Europarties. The first one consists of those associations as EPP-ED, PES, ELDR and EGP, that have been able to embrace a growing numbers of parties and nationalities. The second type includes those federations such as the EDP, EUD and AIDE with a very limited ability to include new member parties (less than 8 countries are represented within them). Finally, we find between them the EFA, AEN and EL gathering parties from (around) 12 countries. An interesting feature is the total number of countries, including external states to the EU: the ELDR and EGP are composed by parties from European as well as non-EU countries, while the other federations seem to stop at the borders of Europe. While, at first glance, the ability of federations to attract non-EU countries may appear a positive factor, actually it risks to become an obstacle in the integration process between the two party structures at European level. The presence of non-EU parties within federations, especially if these parties have the right to vote in decision-making bodies, avoids the faculty of federations to interact with EPGs since parties outside the EU (obviously) are not represented within the EP and consequently the EPGs consider federations as organizations with any legitimacy. Why an EP groups composed by (exclusively) European parties should accept decision from an organization composed (also) by non-European parties? In such a condition intervention from outside is more likely to be regarded as interference than as assistance or positive factor.

Table 5. Parties at European Level *inclusiveness* (2009)

<i>Federation</i>	<i>N. parties</i>	<i>EU parties</i>	<i>EU countries</i>	<i>Total countries</i>
<i>Epp</i>	39	39 (100%)	24/27	24
<i>Pse</i>	33	32 (96,96%)	26/27	27
<i>Edp</i>	7	7 (100%)	7/27	7
<i>Eldr</i>	45	34 (75,55%)	20/27	29
<i>Efa</i>	30	30 (100%)	12/27	12
<i>Aen</i>	16	14 (87,5%)	13/27	15
<i>El</i>	17	15 (88,23%)	13/27	15
<i>Egp</i>	33	28 (84,84%)	25/27	30
<i>Eud^a</i>	6	6 (100%)	6/27	6
<i>Aide^b</i>	6	6 (100%)	6/27	6

Notes: ^a EUD has representatives in two different groups: ALDE and Non Attached.

^b Aide disbanded at 30 December 2008 then data refer to 2008.

Source: official data from European Parliament and Europarty Statutes; figures concern only *full member parties*.

From the *financial* point of view the turning point is the adoption of the “Party Statute” in 2003. The main aim of the Statute (and its later amendments) was to improve, throughout a “direct public funding”, the organizational autonomy of parties operating at EU level, creating the legal and financial basis for Europarties to become really «important factors [...] to forming an European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union» (TEU, art.191). Since then, parties at European level have been receiving growing subventions from the EP – they have more than doubled their total grants in the last four years (see table 6) (total grant increased from 4.647.157€ in 2004 to 10.339.866€ in 2008) – favouring a deeper independence from national parties. In particular, if we think that Europarties, in their early phase, relied on resources of their respective EP party groups and national members to carry out their day- by- day tasks, the public founding – even if insufficient to guarantee a truly independence from national parties – makes possible for them building their own political structures. To EPP president Wilfried Martens the Regulation meant that the “EPP can function as it was intended to when it was founded 25 years ago, as a genuine transnational party” (quoted in Johansson 2009, p. 167). In other words, although we are still far from having effective and autonomous political parties at European level, the foundations have been laid with Party Statute. However, the quite positive picture provided by table 6 is counter-balanced by two provisions

subordinating Europarties to national parties and parliamentary groups¹⁸. The first one, contained in the Party Statute, binds Europarties to co-financing at 25% the subventions from the EP making national parties the most relevant and indispensable source to obtain the remaining 75% because national parties are the only actors able to found a similar amount of economic resources. Hanley (2007) went so far as to argue that Europarties are currently poorer and worse equipped than before as a result of the Regulation and this forced Europarties to enlarge their membership fees (Day and Shaw 2006) increasing Europarties' financial dependence on national parties. In more general term, this provision in the Party Statute tied Europarties to political parties at national level hindering their process of independence: Europarties alone are not able to raise the enough amount of funds required by the rule and, as a consequence, national parties become the *conditio sine qua non* Europarties can use and spend their money. The second one, provided in the implementation rules, subordinates Europarties to the EPGs because funds for parties at European level are taken from EP's budget.

Moreover, from table 6 a clear disparity emerges in the distribution among political parties: in fact, over 70% of grants is allocated to the three major parties (EPP, PES and ELDR). At the same time (and in consequence of), growing financing creates the opportunity for parties at European level to maintain a growing staff- structure (see table 7) that allows day-by-day administrative and political activities of federations. Table 7 shows that especially EPP and PES developed substantially in their workforces: they increased permanent staff from 5 units in 1979 to (respectively) 19 and 18 units in 2009. The Liberals, in contrast, enlarged of only 3 units their administrative staff in thirty years. EGP and EL show a very low level of administrative autonomy with just 2 and 3 employees.

In general, the figures in table 6 and 7 give back a condition in which Europarties have little chances to increase their organizational and financial autonomy from national parties in particular if we compare their conditions with those of political parties at national level. However, if we take into account a diachronic perspective we can find a (modest) evolutionary trend that describes parties at European level as “developing organizations”: they moved from a situation of “embarrassingly low” (Bardi 1994) numbers of paid staff to a condition of “just low” organizational structure.

¹⁸ See Bardi *et al.* (2010).

Table 6. Grants from EP to Parties at European Level

	2004	%	2005	%	var. %	2006	%	var. %	2007	%	var. %	2008	%	var. %
<i>Aen</i>	161.250	3,47	450.000	5,42	+179.06	450.000	4,88	0	300.000	2,94	33,33	300.000	2,90	0
<i>Efa</i>	165.724	3,57	217.906	2,62	+31.48	222.627	2,41	2,16	222.541	2,18	-0,04	226.600	2,19	1,82
<i>Egp</i>	306.000	6,58	568.261	6,84	+85.70	581.000	6,3	2,24	631.750	6,2	8,73	641.534	6,20	1,55
<i>El</i>	210.275	4,52	365.868	4,4	+73.99	518.626	5,62	41,75	526.148	5,16	1,45	536.685	5,19	2,00
<i>Edp</i>	340.425	7,33	459.530	5,53	+34.98	514.797	5,58	12,02	526.148	5,16	2,2	496.291	4,80	-5,67
<i>Eldr</i>	618.896	13,32	894.454	10,77	+44.52	883.500	9,57	-1,22	1.133.362	11,12	28,28	1.115.665	10,79	-1,56
<i>Epp</i>	1.587.587	34,16	2.863.693	34,47	+80.38	2.929.841	31,75	2,3	3.271.810	32,09	11,67	3.354.754	32,44	2,54
<i>Pes</i>	1.257.000	27,05	2.489.175	29,96	+98.02	2.580.000	27,96	3,64	2.994.603	29,37	16,07	3.027.647	29,28	1,10
<i>Aide</i>	/	/	/	/	/	328.125	3,56	/	356.250	3,49	8,57	413.990	4,00	16,21
<i>Eud</i>	/	/	/	/	/	219.825	2,38	/	234.000	2,29	6,45	226.700	2,19	-3,12
Totale	4.647.157	100	8.308.887	100	78,80	9.228.341	100	11,07	10.196.612	100	10,49	10.339.866	100	1,40

Note: var.% represents the percentage variation in the EPGs grants from the previous year.

Source: official data from European Parliament.

Table 7. Parties at European level's full- time staff

ANNO	Epp	Pes	Eldr	Efa	El	Aen	Aide	Eud	Edp	Egp
1979- 1984	5	5	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1985- 1989	7	7	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1990- 1994	10	13	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1994- 1999	10	12	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2009	19	18	7	8	3	N.D.	1	6	6	2

Fonte: 1979- 1999 Hix (2002b); 1999- 2009 official Europarties data.

Autonomy from national parties at European level is a game that has to do with both structural and decisional dimension of party organization. In fact, without an independence in terms of structure it is impossible for a federation to take decisions with no intrusion by national parties. Therefore, as a consequence of low level of organizational and financial autonomy of the PPEL, we expect that also decisional autonomy will be low. A possible way to understand the extent of Europarties decisional autonomy could be to investigate: a) if majority rule is applied in the key decision-making bodies, b) if their decisions are compulsory for member parties and c) if Europarties allow individual membership (with voting right). It is probably that the introduction of these rules within PPEL reduces, on one side, capability of national parties to control decision-making and, on the other side, it makes decisions taken at European level much more “European”.

Although, on the one hand, table 8 displays that only the EL maintains unanimity as decision-making rule, while within the EPP, EGP and PES decisions are taken with an absolute (or qualified) majority and, the EFA, ELDR, EUD and EDP are based on simple majority; on the other hands, only three PPEL (EFA, ELDR and EDP) produce decisions that are binding for member parties. Hence, if we look at the level of decisional autonomy the picture is not so comfortable: Europarties are still organizations where sub-unities exercise a predominant role, but if we look at a diachronic perspective (see table A in appendix for a historical comparison) we can see that during the '90 all PPEL adopted decisions by unanimity and they were able to make only non-binding recommendations. Therefore, once again, the figures displayed in table 8 describe PPEL as “developing organizations”.

With regard to individual membership it is presently allowed in all PPEL but, first of all, individual members compose a mere “marginal minority”¹⁹ and, secondly, they lack voting rights in the main decisional bodies. As a consequences, national political parties maintains a leading role within the Europarties: they influenced the decision-making process, they are not obliged to follow decisions taken by Europarties and individual membership is still a national matter. In sum, national parties remain the only practicable route of political participation within the EU.

¹⁹ The ELDR still does not have any registered individual members, while EPP has only 120 members and EGP has 1300 supporters. PES in 2006 introduced the figure of “PES activist” permitting to individual member of national member parties to participate in PES activities (i.e. to participate at PES Congress, to take part in drafting PES manifesto). “PES activists” are primarily internet-based and its main goal is to linked PES with national parties on the ground. Currently there are 1200 activists registered.

Table 8. Decisional autonomy of parties at European level

<i>PPEL</i>	<i>bodies</i>	<i>autonomy</i>		
		<i>decision-making rule</i>	<i>binding</i>	<i>membership</i>
EFA	General Assembly	simple majority ^b	YES	YES ^a
	Bureau	simple majority ^b		
ELDR	Congress	simple majority ^d	YES	YES ^c
	Council	simple majority ^d		
	Bureau	simple majority ^e		
EL	Congress	unanimity	NO	YES
	Council of Chairpersons	unanimity		
	Executive Board	unanimity		
EPP	Presidency	absolute majority ^e	NO	YES
	Political Assembly	absolute majority ^e		
	Congress	absolute majority ^e		
EGP	Congress	absolute majority ^e	NO	YES ^f
	Council	2/3 majority ^g		
	Committee	2/3 majority		
PES	Congress	qualified majority ^h in political matters; simple majority in administrative and organizational matters	NO	YES ^f
	Council			
EUD	Presidency			
	Congress	simple majority	NO	YES ^c
Board	simple majority			
EDP	Congress	simple majority ⁱ	YES	YES
	Council	simple majority ⁱ		
	Presidency	simple majority		

Notes: a) individual may be exceptionally accepted by the General Assembly (art. 5c) and they shall have only a consultative vote.

b) simple majority of votes express .

c) without voting right.

d) whether at least one third of the full members are present.

e) whether at least half of the members are present.

f) all MEPs of the EPP Group elected in a party member list are also *ex officio* members of the Party.

g) votes are valid only if (at least) half of the votes are in favour.

h) qualified majority requires 75% of the votes cast and votes are done only if at least 2/3 of the full member parties are present.

i) at least 1/3 of the members must be present.

Source: official Statutes of Parties at European level.

4. Integration between groups and federations

Before starting the empirical analysis of the integration between EPGs and Europarties is necessary to spend some words in order to better specify what I mean with the concept of integration and why it can be considered a (possible and partial) solution to the lack of electoral connection at European level. First of all, integration does not mean dependence or subordination of one structure to the other, that is EPGs and transnational federations must be considered as a functional separation of only one thing: Europarties. This idea is based on conviction that parliamentary groups (at national level as well as at European level) guarantee the necessary continuity of two distinct political processes within legislatures: the first one is the “power struggle” having as the main goal the achievement of “*political authority*”; the second one is the process that leads to the political production of “*guaranteed conformity*” (i.e. public policies, civil rights, national security etc..) ²⁰. In the former, the key actor is the extra-parliamentary face of parties which competes for authority offices (i.e. parliamentary seats, government and so on...) while, in the later, parliamentary groups (especially in parliamentary systems) fulfil primary role in the political production. Therefore, the more the two faces of political parties are integrated the more are the two processes and consequently citizens have much more possibilities to sanction (reward) bad (good) legislators ²¹. At the same time, however, the two structures (at least) have to “work in tandem” in order to make possible the “integrated electoral-parliamentary complex” (Cotta 1979): parliamentary groups must be the political weapon of parties in the central-office.

It is possible to isolate some specific indicators that can help us to understand the level of *systemness*. The first one concerns *de jure* attendance of the EPGs in central party bodies or, conversely, of federations representatives in group meetings. The second one is the formal recognition by each PPEL of a specific EPG as its official representative within the EP. Finally, another way to look at party integration can be to explore how much parties belong, at the same time, to EPG and to the associated PPEL. This indicator seems to be useful to measure the degree of integration between the two key European party structures because, as we have argued above, one of the main problems that federations meet in their integration process with parliamentary groups lies on non-coincidence of member parties: EPGs very often consider transnational federations as “foreign bodies” since the latter are composed by parties that have little or nothing to do with the national parties within the EPGs.

As table 9 shows, Europarties and EPGs are still separated tables: only four Europarties (the EPP, EDP, AEN and EFA) impose to its members (parties or MEPs) to belong to the same parliamentary group, all the others allow to join different EPGs, making much more intricate the cooperation with parliamentary structures. Moreover, the EL and EUD don't have in their Statute any link with a specific EPG. For example EL Statute states that “[EL] cooperates closely with parliamentary groups of the Left in other EU bodies”. In addition, PPEL have no representatives in group meetings, while groups agents can belong to the key decision-making bodies even if (very often) without voting rights. In fact, some PPEL such as the EPP, PES, EGP, EDP and ELDR guarantee to EPGs representatives to take part in Congress with voting right but, at the same time, their statutes don't include EPGs delegates in restricted bodies (i.e. in Political Bureau or Presidency) or, if they, delegates cannot vote. Obviously, attending in Congress has a symbolic mean but at the same time, since they convene every four years and elaborate political programs that are ideological platforms based on general principles, it is not able to influence the PPEL day-by-day activities and political strategies. In fact, it is in

²⁰ The discussion that follow is strongly influenced by political theory elaborated by Stoppino. See Stoppino (1994, 2001) and for a partial application of his theory to the European Union case see Bartolini (2005).

²¹ Autonomy and independence of parliamentary groups represents also a shield against institutional overflow of extra-parliamentary power struggle guaranteeing more stability to the government. For example, the high government instability in Italy can be considered as a (partial) consequence of the low level of parliamentary groups' autonomy from “parties in the central offices” (Gatti 1984, Fedel 2010).

restricted political bodies where significant political decisions are taken and within them EPGs representatives do not attend in any case with voting right.

The position of Europarties is still further complicated if we look at parties belonging, at the same time, both to the EPGs and federations. From figures in the third column of table 9 we can see that EPP, PSE and EDP are federations overlapping their own EPG. In this way, they seem to be high integrated party structures. Otherwise, the ELDR and EGP present a very low level of integration reaching respectively only 57,77% and 42,42% of party coincidence²².

²² A similar picture emerges if we take into account what Calossi (2011) called “*europartitization*” that is the number of MEPs belonging to the same Europarty.

Table 9. Europarties integration

<i>PPEL</i>	<i>bodies</i>	<i>integration</i>		
		<i>representation</i>	<i>collaboration</i>	<i>parties in EP</i>
EFA	General Assembly	- MEPs submit a report on their activities	same group or sub-group	4/30 (13,33%)
	Bureau	- MEPs without right to vote		
ELDR	Congress	- MEPs without right to vote	ELDR's group in the EP	26/45 (57,77%)
	Council	- 1 delegate from EPG		
	Bureau	- President and Secretary-General of EPG		
EL	Congress	- MEPs without right to vote	cooperating closely with parliamentary groups of the Left in other EU bodies	7/17 (41,17%)
	Council of Chairpersons	-		
	Executive Board	-		
EPP	Presidency	- President of the EP and Chairman of EPP Group in the EP with right to vote - Secretary-General of the EPP Group in the EP - Members of the Presidency of EPG; members of the Presidency of the EP; Presidents of national delegations of member parties of EPG with right to vote	EPP's group in the EP	34/39 (87,17%)
	Political Assembly	- Secretary-General of EPG without right to vote		
	Congress	- MEPs who are "Individual Members" with right to vote		
		- MEPs who are not "Individual Members" without right to vote		
EGP	Congress	- MEPs who are "Individual Members" with right to vote - Members of the Bureau of the EPG without right to vote	close cooperation with Green Group in the EP	14/33 (42,42%)
	Council	- 4 delegates of the EPG with right to vote		
		- Members of the Bureau of the EPG without right to vote		
	Committee			
PES	Congress	- representative from national delegation of EPG with right to vote - MEPs from EPG without right to vote	PES' group in the EP	25/33 (75,75%)
	Council	- representative of EPG equal to 25% of the national delegations with right to vote		
		- delegation of EPG equal to 25% of its total members		
	Presidency	- President of EPG with right to vote - President of EP without right to vote		
EUD	Congress Board	- -	any mention	1 + 1/6 (16,6%)
EDP	Congress	- MEPs members of EDP with right to vote	cooperation with EPG	5/7 (71,42%)
	Council	-		
	Presidency	- 1 delegate for each national delegation in EPG		

Source: Europarty Statute.

CONCLUSION

5. Still separated tables still democratic deficit: the failure of political parties at European level.

Modern democracy requires representation and parties become the only feasible instrument to realize democratic requirements. Schattschneider (1942) was really clear and unequivocal when stated that “modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties”. In the same way the EU calls for truly “Europarties” to become more democratic in its procedural and substantive prerequisites and this entails not only a progressive emancipation of party structures at European level but also an integration between them. In fact, we will have full Europarties only when the two party structures at EU level are either independent from national parties and linked to each other: if intra- and extra-parliamentary faces become really European and connected entities, legislators will be accountable to voters²³ and, consequently, democratic deficit will decline.

In this paper I argued that one dimension of democratic deficit affecting the European Union can be found in the lack of ability of Europarties to discharge the representative function at the European level. Put in another way, the democratic deficit is (principally) linked to the weakness of political parties at the EU level and in particular to their ability to connect the electoral and legislative arena. The empirical analysis showed how the EPGs have become much more “European” entities different from national parties. Now the EPGs are able to take their decision without a systematic intrusion of national parties and, more important, they operate as cohesive actors during the legislative process. This positive picture is counter balanced by the narrow development manifested by transnational federations: from all points of view (here discussed) the federations are still weak organizations controlled by national parties and, moreover, the integration between the two faces of the Europarties are really limited. The EPGs and federations are still two “separate tables” failing to connect the two political processes at European level. In other words, Europarties are now much more *autonomous* organization than in the past (especially the EPGs) but we cannot speak yet of truly and completely institutionalized Europarties because they don’t still achieve a condition of *systemness*. Certainly, this condition is strictly connect to the fact that the EP elections have in this moment very little do to with “Europe”. National elections are about *national* executive, fought by *national* parties and over *national* issues. What is necessary at this point is not another institutional change but rather, as Hix clearly argued in his work (2008), *ad hoc* changes in “informal practices and formal rules of procedure that govern the way the EU institutions works” in order to “inject more political competition into EU political process”. The possibility for the EU to become a “democratic” political system and to decrease its lack of legitimacy is strictly related to political party institutionalization at European level: only when Europarties (became able to) manage the political competition in the both political arena (electoral and legislative) the problem of political representation will be resolved and consequently democratic deficit too.

²³ Several researches showed a reasonable congruence in policy- positions between the European electorates and the EPGs especially in left- right dimension (Schmitt and Thomassen 2009; McElroy and Benoit 2010). This means that the aggregation process at EU level of 27 national electoral process produce an acceptable outcome in terms of political representation but, as Mair and Thomassen (2010) argued, this relatively positive conclusion refers to “the outcome of the process rather than to the process as such, and in this sense a full-fledged system of political representation at the European level would still require European political parties to compete for votes”.

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APPENDIX A. Political Parties at European Level decision-making and autonomy during 1990s

	PES	EPP	ELDR	EFGP
Congress	Unanimity	Absolute Majority but in practice unanimity	Absolute Majority but in practice unanimity	Qualified Majority but in practice unanimity
Bureau/ Executive Committee	Absolute Majority for administrative issues; Unanimity for political issues	Absolute Majority for administrative issues; Unanimity for political issues	Absolute Majority but in practice unanimity	Qualified Majority but in practice unanimity
Binding Decision	No	No	No	No
Individual Membership	No	No	No	No

Source: Political Parties at European Level statuses.

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