

Constructing a European party system:
congruence and linkage in the national and EP party systems

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Constructing a European party system: congruence and linkage in the national and European party systems¹

How has a supranational party system been constructed in the European Union and particularly, how has enlargement affected party system linkage? Linkage is a characteristic of a multi-level party system. In federations or other multi-level settings, parties often build organizations that span levels of government and develop ideologies that are identifiable across territorial jurisdictions. The strategies that parties choose and the cognitive assessments that voters make may be affected by competition at another level of government. Accounts in the literature suggest that there is a high degree of linkage in the EU party system. The parties that campaign in EP elections maintain their primary organization roots at the national level. As a 'second order' context, voter behaviour is derivative of national-level party identifications and assessments (Reif and Schmidt, 1980; van der Eijk, Franklin and Marsh 1996; Marsh, 1998). The European integration issue dimension is generally accommodated within the cleavage structure of national party systems (Marks, Wilson, Ray, 2002). However, using data from the 2004 European Parliamentary elections and results from the latest legislative elections in the 25 member states, I find evidence low levels of linkage in two situations: in the high incongruence of party systems in the new member states of East and Central Europe and in the case of mobilized Euroscepticism that has been marginalized from national party systems. In the absence of European party organizations with societal roots, this may have negative implications for the ability of the European party system to effectively incorporate and channel party competition in these two situations.

I. Introduction and background

Successful representative democracy at the Union level requires the development of a party system capable of expressing conflict and structuring meaningful and effective choice for its citizens. A party system that does not effectively channel conflict, but instead suppresses it may, in the long term, undermine system legitimacy (Lipset, 1984). As a multi-level system, the ability of the party system to structure meaningful choices depends upon the extent to which the national and European arenas are linked through voter behaviour, party organizations, and the structure of the party systems.

How to build a supranational party system is an important, but neglected, question in the European Union's political development. We don't normally question whether a party system has been 'successfully' constructed. Through an institutional lens, a party system is simply the end product of the vote of the electorate, constrained by the effects of the ballot structure and electoral system. Through a sociological lens, it reflects the underlying social cleavages that divide societies, mediated by the relative capacity of parties or other groups to politicise and institutionalise these divisions (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Bartolini and Mair, 1990). But the construction of the party system becomes important when the political system is undergoing evolution through successive territorial expansion and step-wise democratisation.

The development of nation-wide parties, and, by corollary, a nationalised party system, is an important stage in the political development of most Western democracies (Caramani, 2004; Cox, 1997) allowing parties to coordinate in pursuit of executive office and policy goals. Alongside processes of modernisation it is part product of and part contributor to the creation of nationalized politics. The development of national parties and a nationalized party system is of particular importance in federal or multi-level systems (Chhibber and Kollman, 2004; Thorlakson, 2002). Not all parties become nation-wide parties and not all party systems in established democracies become nationalized. Regionalist parties often maintain a territorially-concentrated support base by their own strategy. Other parties that arise from a regional base try build a national support base but cannot (such as the Reform

¹ Part III and portions of part II of this paper are taken from previously published work (Thorlakson, 2005a).

party in the early 1990s). Still others choose to maintain a territorially-concentrated support base, but forge stable legislative coalitions that give them the autonomy they need on the ground, coupled with the strength they need in the legislature (such as the CSU in Germany). Multi-level systems often have greater potential for territorial concentration in their 'national' (or in this case, supranational) party systems. Sub-national (or national, in the case of the EU) jurisdictions provide the organizational and electoral basis for parties. In the EU, the polity is created through successive territorial expansion. While the addition of new jurisdictions, and the election of representatives from these territories, contributes to the structure and content of the new European-level party system, these new entries are also joining a party system in which the structures of the old party system are institutionalised in the form of a party group structure within the parliament.

Research on structuring of competition in the European party system supports the notion that the aggregation of national party systems has been successful; it is generally optimistic about the ability of the European party system to structure coherent competition at the European level. Data from party manifestos reveals that party families at the European level differentiate themselves in two-dimensional issue space, both left-right and pro-anti integration, but most clearly on the left-right dimension (Hix; 1999). The manifesto commitments in the three core parties (PES, EPP and ELDR) produce distinguishable policy positions that place the parties in moderate positions within their party families (Pennings, 2002:74-5). Hix, Kreppel and Noury conclude that '[w]ith more at stake and more to do, the EP party system is more, not less, able to structure transnational ideological positions and to translate these positions into competition over policy outcomes.' (Hix, Kreppel, Noury, 2003:328). Transnational party family is more important than national grouping in determining voting outcomes in the parliament (Hix, 2001). Analysis of policy positions taken from national party manifestos tells us that national parties within each family are relatively heterogeneous (Pennings, 2002:73). European election manifestos adopt moderate policy positions within this range (Pennings, 2002:74).

The European party system more effectively (and coherently) structures left-right competition than it structures competition on a pro and anti-integration sentiment. This could have implications for the effectiveness of 'non-core' groups in the parliament, such as the UEN and I/D groups. Marks and Wilson argue that party positions on European integration are absorbed within the pre-existing cleavage structure in national parties in the EU15. They argue that party families arise out of similar responses to sets of cleavages, and these shape the contours of their ideological positions that influence their response to new issues such as European integration. A European party system structured on these party families should be well suited to channel preferences on Europe. However, the coherence of party families on European integration declines over time, and party family serves as a stronger predictor of position on European integration when they exclude those countries that joined the EU after 1984 (Marks and Wilson, 2000:441). It is reasonable to expect that with the latest enlargement of the EU, the predictive power of party families is reduced even further among the new member states where party systems were shaped by different forces, such as the dual transition to democracy and to a market economy.²

Research has attempted to describe the common structure of the European party system by examining the absorption of the European integration issue into the cleavage basis of national politics, the programmatic coherence of national parties within European parliamentary party groups and the structure of legislative competition within the parliament.

² The parliamentary parties (in contrast to the extra-parliamentary European party federations) can accommodate heterogeneity. They generally form loose coalitions to accommodate parties with a broader ideological range. This allows party group membership by those national parties that either unwilling to join the extra-parliamentary party (such as the UK Conservative party, which is not a member of the EPP, but belongs to the EPP-ED) or those whose membership to the extra-parliamentary party has not yet been accepted (example). Only in the PES do we find the requirement for parties to belong to the extra-parliamentary organisation.

This paper addresses a slightly different question. I examine to what extent a common party system structure fits the European party system, and how well both national parties, and national MEP delegations fit within the 'core' of the EP party group. How congruent are the national party systems of the EU25, enabling their aggregation into a European party system? I pay particular attention to the extent to which the power in the national party systems is concentrated among the 'core' parties of the European party system.

For the EU, this is a particular concern. The EP party system depends upon nationally based party organizations. The EP party system has not developed alongside the creation of a pan-European electorate or pan-European parties, but rather by building durable and working coalitions under the umbrella of party groupings within the European parliament. European party organizations attempt to coordinate national parties. Coordination amongst parties (horizontal linkages) among parties outside of parliament, through the European party federations, is at an early stage.³

The consequences of 'low fit' of the national and European party systems may be fractionalization within the parliament, diminished policy-seeking power and exclusion from the resources derived from group membership. High party system fractionalization makes it less likely that system-wide parties thrive, serving as vehicles for system-wide integration. If there is a high degree of non-core power among a country's delegation to the European Parliament, this may mean that some member states are excluded from membership in the 'core power' groups to a greater degree than others. High incongruence in the national party systems could also hamper the ability of party to serve as a horizontal channel of coordination and integration.

The argument and plan of this paper

The question I examine in this paper is whether the party system in the European parliament is linked to party systems that we find at the national level, and what degree of incongruence exists. A high degree of incongruence, measured by the extent of non-core power found among national party systems and in their MEP delegations may signify a European party system in which some national parties—the organizational basis of the European parties—are not integrated as effectively as others.

I first offer a review of forms of individual-level and party organizational linkage that we find between the national and European levels. I then focus on the congruence of the EP and EU25 national party systems. It is an empirically neglected aspect of linkage in the European Union. Drawing on aggregate electoral data from the EP and national parliamentary elections in the EU 25, this paper measures the congruence between the European and national level party systems. The data on national and European party system congruence is then used to assess the degree to which the European party system is able to accommodate territorial enlargement of the Union and the rise of new issue dimensions, such as euroscepticism.

II. Linkage in the EU

Party competition in a multi-level jurisdiction introduces the possibility that competition is organizationally, strategically, structurally and cognitively linked across jurisdictions. . Linkage can occur at the level of individual voter, at the level of the party system and the level of the party organization. Party organizational linkage can occur when parties build vertically integrated organizations that span levels of government and develop programs within an ideological framework that is identifiable across territorial jurisdictions. These integrative linkages can be built through formal organizational structure (a common membership and governing structure) or through informal cooperative relationships (Dyck, 1991; Thorlakson, 2002; Filippov, Ordeshook and Shvetsova, 2004:192). These linkages can be a source of strength to parties, channelling resources and expertise across levels of

³ In 2004 the regulation on European political parties provided for EP funding of European party federations. The EU budget allocated 8.4 million euros for the European party federations (EP, 2004).

government (Huckshorn, Gibson, Cotter and Bibby, 1986). The vertical integration of party organization can allow for cross-level influence and control over candidate and leader selection and can influence party strategy across levels of government—affecting choices of coalition partners or the content of policy programmes. Integrated party organizations can serve an integrating function—helping parties to coordinate political demands and pursue interests more effectively. As the EP becomes a site for policy-seeking, this will be more important.

Party organizational linkages in the EU

The parties that campaign in EP elections maintain their primary organization roots at the national level. National parties select candidates and direct the campaigns. The European parties serve as umbrella organizations. Most importantly, the parliamentary party groups internally organize the national parties in the EP, providing them with access to EP resources. The extra-parliamentary parties coordinate the parties outside the EP, a less important function. The extra-parliamentary parties are correspondingly less well developed. Linkage between national parties and European parliamentary parties can occur through the representation of MEPs on the governing bodies of national parties, and on the European Affairs committees of national parliaments, providing expertise on European issues. This is a form of linkage—between parties and parliaments—that we do not see in other multi-level systems. An increase in the importance of the role of MEPs in national parties has corresponded with an increase in the powers of the EP and the EU. In some parties MEPs may serve as policy advisors on European affairs, serving on European affairs committees (Raunio, 2000:220).

Linkage can also occur at the level of individual voter behaviour, through the cognitive orientations that voters hold. This is the logic that Reif and Schmidt's second order election thesis rests upon. They argue that such cognitive linkages occurs in elections in multi-level contexts, where the 'first order' election, more important because it determines executive office of the level of government in which most is 'at stake'—usually the national level. Voting in second order elections, where less is at stake, such as state, local or European elections, is cognitively dependent upon first-order elections. Linkage can occur when voters rely on partisanship, developed in the more important national level of competition as an informational shortcut to guide their vote choice in a 'second order' election. Cognitive linkage also occurs when voters use evaluations of the party or candidate at one level of government to aid or influence their vote choice at another level of government—a so-called 'coat-tails effect' whereby a presidential candidate can sweep along other candidates on the same ticket (Calvert and Ferejohn, 1983).

Voter behaviour in elections for the European Parliament, a 'second order' election, dwarfed in importance by national elections, is cognitively dependent on national-level party identifications and assessments (Reif and Schmidt, 1980; van der Eijk, Franklin and Marsh 1996; Marsh, 1998).⁴ Depending on the national context, voters may use European elections to lodge protest votes against national governments, vote 'with the heart' for a party unlikely to win mandates nationally, support a newly installed government, or abstain altogether due to a lack of interest (van der Eijk, Franklin and Marsh, 1996). Subsequent tests of European elections results confirm these predictions (Marsh, 1998) and confront us with normative concerns such as the sincerity of vote choice for EP elections and the potential for EP elections to provide meaningful representation. Votes in EP elections do serve as very efficient indicators of policy preferences relevant to the European Parliament's powers. Evidence from the voting in the 1989 elections indicates that European issues had low salience for voters; few respondents could offer a prospective evaluation of parties' performance (Kuechler 1991).

Finally, at the party system level, linkage can occur when the same parties compete within similar party system structures and patterns of aggregate voter behaviour are similar.

⁴ Van der Eijk and Franklin (1996) and van der Eijk, Franklin and Marsh (1996) provide a thorough overview of this literature.

Party system incongruence can result from dissimilar underlying social cleavage structures that shape competition at different levels of government, or from differences in the mobilization of conflict across jurisdictions, which occurs in decentralized systems (Thorlakson, nd). Accounts in the literature, discussed above, suggest that there is a high degree of linkage in the EU party system, and suggest a process by which a supranational party system has been constructed through ‘patching together’ national party systems.

The concept of ‘core structure’

To measure the congruence of the EP and the 25 national party systems, I use the concept of ‘non-core power’ to measure the extent to which both the national MEP delegations and the composition of national parliaments belong to, or associate with, the three ‘core’ party groups in the EP or fall outside them. Three party groups—the EPP-ED, the PES and the ELDR—form the core of this party system as the strongest, most enduring and most effective parliamentary party groups.⁵ The European People’s Party and European Democrats (EPP-ED) includes parties from the traditional party families of Christian Democrats and conservatives, the Group of the Party of European Socialists (PES) contains parties from the social democratic party family and the Group of the Liberal, Democratic and Reform Party includes parties from the liberal party family.

Analysis of party manifesto data reveals that party competition at the European level is principally structured along a left-right dimension (Gabel and Hix, 2002:953), with pro and anti-integration positions providing only a secondary axis of competition. This leaves a triangular party system in the European Parliament, where party competition occurs between the two blocs of the EPP-ED on the center-right, and the PES on the left. Together with the often-pivotal ELDR, these parties serve as the ‘core’ of the EP party system, and are able to form stable and winning coalitions that effectively shut out the smaller party groupings in the parliament (Hix, 1999:91). The degree of competitiveness of the European party system depends upon both the issue area and the stage of the legislative process. ‘Grand coalitions’ between the PES, EPP and ELDR tend to form on external relations and foreign and security policy, ELDR-PES coalitions on environmental issues and ELDR-EPP coalitions on social policy (Hix, 2001:680). Competition between party groups has increased in the parliament over time on legislative amendments and internal matters. On whole legislative proposals, however, cooperation between the PES and EPP has increased over time (Hix, Kreppel and Noury, 2003:92). This collusive behaviour of the core parties, along with the low cohesion of the UEN or EDD (Hix and Lord, 1997:150) reduces the chances of these smaller parties to gain power as a pivotal actor.

Four EP party groups sit outside of these three core party groupings. On the far left of the European party system, the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (EUL/NGL) includes parties from the communist and socialist party families. The Group of the Greens and the European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA), includes parties from two families, greens and regional/ethnic parties. The nationalist grouping Union for a Europe of the Nations Group (UEN) contains conservative nationalist and populist parties, and the Group for a Europe of Democracies and Diversities (EDD), now named the Independence/Democracy group (I/D), contains Euro-sceptic parties. In addition, there are a number of non-aligned parties. [*This is not to say that the non-core parties are never pivotal: evidence here*].

Table 2 presents each party grouping’s share of seats in the parliament from 1994 to 2004. Over time, the share of mandates for the major party groupings (EPP-ED, PES and ELDR) has remained relatively stable. The combined seat share of the three parties has increased slightly over time, from 73 per cent to over 74 per cent (column 11), and despite the entry of parties from ten new member states, overall, the effective number of party groupings has

⁵ This is similar to Smith’s ‘system core’ concept (Smith, 1990:161), which refers to the most enduring structural features of the party system. The system core concept is useful for measuring party system change, as well as measuring party system congruence.

decreased slightly from 4.23 in 1994 to 4.13 in 2004. Over the past decade, the composition of all party groups with the exception of the Independence/Democracy group have become increasingly transnational.⁶

In a national context, non-core power refers to the percentage of seats won by parties that are not members of the EPP-ED, EDLR or PES party groupings in the European Parliament, or are not members of the EPP EDLR or PES European party organizations. The measure of non-core power that I use here is only a measure of the party system core *relative to that which we find in the European Parliamentary party system*.⁷ In this usage, 'non-core' national parties are those national parties that are not associated with the core parties of the EP party system, even though they may be a core party in the national party system. This paper investigates two forms of congruence of 'non-core power'. The first is incongruence of national party systems due to a high incidence of non-core power in the national party systems. This can signal a party system in which the cleavage basis, or at least the form in which cleavages have been mobilized and institutionalized, differs markedly from that in the European party system. This form of congruence can suggest the extent to which the European party system shares a common cleavage basis and a common political community.

The second form of incongruence I investigate is that among the national delegations of MEPs to the European parliament (regardless of the congruence of national party systems). This form of incongruence, in which there is a relatively high degree of non-core power among MEPs in a member state can have several consequences. A limited membership in the 'core' party groupings of the EP could minimize the influence of a member state's MEPs (the core parties usually control a large share of key parliamentary resources such as committee allocations and rapporteurships). When it occurs alongside a relatively congruent national party system, it can be the result of the rise of split parties--parties that form to compete at the European level on European issues. Split parties may be weaker than their counterparts which can draw upon the resources of an organizational base rooted in national politics.

III. Measuring congruence in the EU party system

TABLE 2 HERE:

A. Results

Does this three-party concentration in the EP party system reflect a similar pattern in the national party systems?

TABLE 3 HERE:

Table 3 presents an indicator of the congruence of the EP party system and the EU 25 national party systems. It is standardized measure of the variance in the effective number of parliamentary parties (n) across party systems, calculated using the percentage of seats won by each party in the last national legislative elections, and each party group in the last EP elections. Comparing seats provides a measure of governmental power.

⁶ This is based upon Raunio's index of transnationality (Thomassen, Noury and Voeten, 2004:145), a fractionalization index that ranges from 0 (when party group composition is maximally concentrated in a single country) to 1 (party group composition is maximally dispersed across member states). In the 1994-1999 parliament, the values for the EPP, PES and ELDR were 0.87, 0.85 and 0.86 respectively. In the 2004 parliament, these values increased to 0.92 for all parties. Calculated by author with data from Cracknell and Morgan (1999) and the European Parliament website, 2004.

⁷ A party that forms the 'core' of a national party system in Gordon Smith's definition of a system core (Smith, 1996), one that is enduring and structurally central could be designated as a source of 'non-core power' under my definition that measures the system core relative to that of the EP.

With a standard deviation of the effective number of parties of 1.57, the structural incongruence of the European party system is markedly higher than the other federations measured here. This is not surprising. First, because we are comparing the proportion of parliamentary mandates won by parties, the outcomes will be affected by the differences in the proportionality of national electoral systems across the EU 25. The 'mechanical effect' of a high electoral threshold will tend to reduce the number of parties in the party system, contributing to a high structural incongruence. The least proportional electoral systems, found in Malta, the UK, France, Greece, Hungary and Spain, produce party systems with fewer than 2.5 effective parties.

High variation in the effective number of parties across the EU 25 party systems is also due to the tendency of parties to fragment into separate parties or loose coalitions. Belgium is the most extreme outlier. Its federal party system has 9.05 effective parties due to the split of party organization along linguistic lines. When the Belgian parties are grouped into party families, the score remains a relatively high 5.23 due to the populist mobilization of ethnic and linguistic cleavages. France and Lithuania also stand out for their national party organizations characterized by fluid and shifting party organizations and party coalitions.

A more meaningful way to assess congruence across national and EP systems is to compare the number of party families in party systems, to assess the similarity of the ideological cleavages that structure party systems across the EU25. This can give us better insight into how national party competition can be aggregated into a European party system. When structural congruence is measured by the party families in the system, the result for the EU25 party systems is a high degree of incongruence, equal to that found in Switzerland, with a value of 0.84. Incongruence of party family strength across national party systems and the EP suggests a high variation in the number of relevant cleavages expressed in national party systems.

Party family incongruence across national party systems can affect the effectiveness of the aggregation of national party systems into a European party system in the parliament. Recent research has demonstrated the ability of national political cleavage structures to absorb the European integration conflict and the general coherence of party families across the EU 15 on the right-left issue dimension and pro and anti-integration stances (Marks and Wilson, 2000; Marks, Wilson and Ray, 2002; Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, 2002). However, this does not tell us the extent to which we find a congruence of core party families—the extent to which the triangular core structure of the EP party system, consisting of parties in the EPP, PES and the ELDR party groups, is replicated in the party systems of the EU 25. If the core cleavages of national party systems are not reflected in the main dimensions of EP party competition, then this could limit the effectiveness of the EP party system for providing a meaningful structure for party competition for some Member States.

TABLE 4 HERE:

In the 2004 European Parliament, 24 per cent of parliamentary seats are held by MEPs from what is here termed 'non-core' party groups—MEPs outside of the EPP-ED, PES and ELDR party groups, the three most powerful party groupings in the parliament. The non-core party groupings are marginalized in the European Parliament and are a less significant group for the purposes of predicting legislative outcomes. However, they constitute a sizeable minority of what we may consider to be ineffectively channelled mandates. It can tell us whether some national party systems emerge at a greater disadvantage than others.

Table 4 presents measures of non-core party strength in the European Parliament, as well as in the national legislatures of the Member States. In twelve Member States, voters are sending MEPs to the European Parliament representing non-core parties in a greater proportion than the EP average—more than 24 per cent of MEPs are from parties outside of the PES, ELDR and EPP-ED party groups. There are two different reasons for this. The first reason is a high incidence of 'non-core power' in national party systems. In national party systems, non-core power is defined in reference to the European Parliament—as the

percentage of mandates held by parties who are not members of the EPP-ED, PES and ELDR party groups.

For Poland, Latvia, Ireland and Cyprus, non-core party strength in the European Parliament reflects a correspondingly high level of populist, communist and conservative nationalist political forces in the national legislatures.⁸ Ireland tops the scale, with 64.2 per cent of mandates in the 2002 elections to the Dail drawn from parties outside these party family groups. Fianna Fail, which sits with the nationalist UEN party grouping in the European Parliament, accounts for 49 per cent of these mandates. Green party seats and independents (8 per cent of seats) make up the difference. Non-core party strength is due to the national power of populist or ethnic nationalist parties in Slovakia, Poland, Belgium, communist and radical left parties in Cyprus and Slovakia, Greens and civil rights parties in Latvia and Belgium and conservative nationalists in Ireland. This means that political forces that are significant at the national level in these states may remain ineffectively represented in the European Parliament. While non-aligned parties and non-core parties may be a marginal political force in the EP party system, they are of central importance in certain Member State party systems. In these systems, the structures of national party competition are not easily aggregated into the triangular structure of the European party system.

Split parties

The second explanation for high non-core party strength in national mandates to the European Parliament is the rise of split parties—when new parties form to contest elections to the European Parliament. We find this in Sweden (Junilisten), the Netherlands (EuropaTransparant), Denmark (Junibeveagelsen and Folkebeveagelsen Med), Austria (Martin List), France (Mouvement Pour La France) and (again) Cyprus (Rally for Europe).⁹ These parties emerge primarily to compete in the European arena on a European integration issue dimension, challenging the main national parties on the issue of European integration, the dimension along which the main party families do not starkly differentiate themselves. The split parties are either absent or unsuccessful at national political competition. They differ from split parties that we find in multi-level systems because their organizational base remains at the national level, even if their activity is directed at the European arena. New parties are making a strategic decision to target the European, and not the domestic arena. This signals politicization of the EU arena, albeit by a legislatively marginal group of parties.

IV. Discussion: a breakdown of linkage?

When parties are classified according to their ideological party family, the European and national party systems are as structurally congruent as the party system of the Swiss confederation and its constituent cantons. (The structural congruence refers to variation in the number of parties, or, in the case of the EU, the variation in the number of parties, classified by party system). From a comparative perspective, this degree of heterogeneity is compatible with a stable democratic party system constructed from vertically integrated parties.¹⁰ Also, across the EP party system as a whole, 74.3 per cent of EP seats are held by members of the PES, EPP and ELDR. Despite the inclusion of 10 new member states—with relatively new party systems themselves—this figure represents increasing system concentration from 1994 (73 per cent) and 1999 (71.4 per cent). From this we can conclude that at a system level, the

⁸ Slovakia and Belgium also have national party systems with a higher proportion of mandates from parties that fall outside of the liberal, social democratic and Christian Democratic party families than the EU25 average. However, fewer than 25 per cent of their mandates in the European Parliament are from non-core parties and so are not included here.

⁹ In the UK, the UK Independence Party and the Greens have been successful in EP elections, although they seek election at the national level.

¹⁰ While Swiss parties are only weakly organizationally integrated between the cantonal and federal level (compared to German parties), they stand apart from federations such as Canada, where separate parties and party organizations contest elections at the provincial and federal levels.

European party system successfully structures party competition for the EP across the EU25. Though the national parties may have a high degree of internal heterogeneity, they have nevertheless coordinated to form European-wide legislative coalitions. At a national level, however, we may find variations in the effectiveness of European representation and the ‘fit’ of the European party system.

Twelve countries have non-core power in their national EP mandates that is higher than the EP average. Only four of these 12—Latvia, Poland, Cyprus and the Czech Republic—are from the new member states. However, we can identify a difference in the roots of non-core power in the new and old member states. In the new member states, non-core power generally reflects a high degree of non-core power in the national party systems. These national party organizations compete and gain seats in the European Parliament.

In many of the countries with a high degree of domestic non-core power, and particularly among the new member states in this group, we also find a high incidence of non-core power in the European Parliament. This may indicate linkage between national and European party competition. Parties are able to build on their electoral and organizational strength at the national level to aid their electoral success in the European Parliament. In Ireland, the high incidence of national non-core power is due to the strength of the governing party, Fianna Fail, which sits with the UEN in the EP. In the EP delegation, 6 of 13 seats are held by parties outside the EP core. These include 4 seats held by Fianna Fail, 1 by Sinn Fein and 1 by an Independent who sits with Ind/Dem. Non core power is higher in the national party system than in the Irish delegation to the EP because of the role of independents. While they contribute 8 per cent of the non-core power in the Irish Dáil, one of the two independents in the Irish delegation to the EP sits with the ELDR. In Cyprus, the strength of the communist party AKEL, which sits with the GUE/NGL is reflected in both the national and European parliamentary elections.

The cognitive linkage of the national and European elections in voters’ minds may lead to voters using EP elections to punish incumbent governing parties. This can elevate the non-core power in the MEP delegation above that of the national party system. In Latvia, non-core power in the EP is slightly higher than in the national party system. The incumbent national government, New Era (Jaunais Laiks), which led the governing coalition after the 2002 national parliamentary election with 26 per cent of national parliamentary seats, found its support limited to 2 of 9 EP seats, outstripped by the populist/nationalist For Fatherland and Freedom Party (LNNK), which won 4 of 9 Latvian MEP seats and was a junior partner in the domestic coalition.¹¹ The poor performance of New Era in the 2004 EP elections relative to the LNNK can be seen as a punishment of the incumbent government. In Poland, the SLD and UP, which together sent 216 deputies to the Sejm in the national elections of 2001 (46.9 per cent of Sejm), won only 5 of Poland’s 54 seats in the EP (the SDPL, which sit with the SLD/UP in the PSE, won a further three). The populist party League of Polish Families, which sits in the Eurosceptic group IND-DEM improved on their performance in the 2001 national elections, pushing Poland’s non-core power in the EP. In the Czech Republic, non-core power in the EP is higher than in the national party system.

Among the EU15 we find non-core power resulting from split parties—Eurosceptic parties emerging to compete primarily at the European level. This occurs in Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Austria, UK and France.¹² The emergence of split parties that compete on European issues may have some benefits in the development of a multi-level party system—they allow for the expression of a conflict over European integration that is not easily expressed within the national party system. For these party organizations and their

¹¹ Source: Latvian government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 25 November 2002. www.am.gov.lv/en/news/Newsletters/Theme-In-Focus/4168.

¹² In Cyprus, the Rally for Europe, competing at the EP level, represents 16.7 per cent of national EP mandates. While competing in the EP, it can be viewed as a splinter party of the national party DISY party. It was formed by Matsis Yiannakis, the former chairman of DISY (www.ep-ed.org/Members/en/show).

voters, the European level of competition is weakly linked to national competition, but is used to express political preferences that are highly relevant in that arena.

V. Conclusions: consequences of incongruence

One form of incongruence arises when non-core power amongst the national MEP delegation reflects high non-core power in the domestic party system. In this case, the national parties in the EP remain organizationally grounded in the national parties. Where this occurs, there are two potential consequences.

The first is *persistent exclusion from influence*. While all party systems have minor parties that seldom take part in governing coalitions or possess pivotal power, it becomes a concern in a confederally constructed party system when these minor parties are concentrated within states of the federation or Member States of the Union. Effectiveness in the European Parliament requires building cross-national coalitions in order to build a legislative coalition, and a shared ideological framework facilitates this. The often collusive behaviour of the three core party groups limits the legislative power of the non-core groups. MEPs who sit outside of party groups are denied access to EP resources (Poland has six non-aligned MEPs). However, as a group, the new member states have secured influence in the European Parliament. Transnationality of the party groups has not decreased, and Daunis Auers notes that the new member states are represented in all the party groupings of the EP, and in all 23 parliamentary committees, including chairmanship of two influential committees—the Budget and Budgetary Control committees (Auers, 2005:7-8). The former is held by a Polish MEP—Poland has one of the largest incidences of non-core power among its MEPs.

A closely related consequence of incongruent politicized cleavages in some member states is that ineffectively channelled dimensions of conflict can create pressure on the political system. Party systems that do not allow conflict to be effectively channelled can put pressure on the system. This can occur if the party system suppresses dimensions of conflict, or if parties in the party system are permanently weak.

Another consequence of incongruence due to high non-core power in national party systems and national MEP delegations is a possible *decline in the integrative capacity of the party system*. The organization of national parties into European parliamentary party groupings and extra-parliamentary party federations, their coordination within these structures and the convergence of their policy programs all contribute to the development of a European issue space. It can be an important integrative force through which local, territorial political forces are supplanted by system-wide political forces organized on a partisan basis. The ideological basis of partisan competition can serve as a unifying framework across territorial units. This can facilitate coordination among parties, allowing them to pursue and attain broader policy goals within the EP, aiding to the institutionalization and stability of parties and the party system. Vertically, the party system is integrating because the extra-parliamentary party federations and their party leader meetings provide one forum at which party leaders can meet to coordinate and discuss common strategies.

Linkage can produce consistency and coherence in party programmes, facilitating the maintenance of stable party attachments. For parties, building and maintaining organizational linkages across the state and federal level can be a source of strength, allowing the party to share resources, including members, personnel, money, policy, and expertise. For parties in government, multi-level linkage through an integrated party organization can provide an extra-parliamentary channel for mediating intergovernmental disputes, reducing the degree of conflict in the legislative arena.

If non-core power in the national MEP delegations coincides with membership in party groups with a low degree of transnationality, this can impede the development of integrative linkages between national parties in the EP. Generally, the European Parliamentary party groups have a high degree of transnationality. However, conservative-nationalist and eurosceptic party groups (the UEN and the I/D) have lower transnationality scores than other parties. This affects some countries more than others. Poland's membership in the eurosceptic Independence/Democracy group, at 10 members, is the country's second

largest representation in a party group after the European People's Party. Other party groups have a high degree of transnationality coupled with a strategy of organizational integration at the European level. The Greens (also a 'non-core' group in the EP) have used their organizational power to exert an integrating influence on their member parties, choosing to campaign with a common European party manifesto in the 2004 EP elections.

When non-core power arises from split parties, it can signal an alternative path of development in the European party system. On one hand, because split parties are not organizationally grounded in established national parties, this situation produces weaker linkages between the national and European level of competition. The absence of a strong national organizational base can limit the strength and resources of the split party. On the other hand, however, the emergence of split parties can be regarded as a party system response to the national party system's inability to adequately channel conflict over European integration.

This paper has argued that while the national party systems and the European party system is generally congruent, indicating a good 'fit' between the politicized cleavage basis of competition, some member states stand out, with a higher degree of incongruence. There are two main sources of party system incongruence among the national and EP party systems. One is high non-core power resulting from domestic party systems in which the electoral strength of the three 'core' party families of the EP party system, the social democrats, liberals and Christian democrats, is low. The second source of incongruence is the rise of split parties, mostly eurosceptic, that have emerged to contest EP elections. I have argued that incongruence could impede the parliamentary influence of some member states, and hamper the integrative capacity of the party system. Split parties, meanwhile, may suffer from organizational weakness. These predictions can be investigated further by pairing research on party system congruence with data on the organizational development of parties.

Finally, understanding party system development requires a longer term perspective. This research is based on a single cross-sectional analysis, national election results from the legislative elections preceeding the 2004 EP elections. This snapshot in time may capture temporary distortions due to the volatility in central and eastern European party systems. By concentrating on only one EP election we are unable to distinguish temporary features of the European party system from enduring structures. An intertemporal comparison can help trace the trajectory of non-core power--their relative electoral success over time and the stability of their party group membership. This can, in turn, help us to understand the consequences of party system incongruence.

Table 2: Core structure measures of the European Party System, 1994-2004

Seat share in the EP, in %										
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	EPP- ED	PES	ELDR	EUL/ NGL	Greens/ EFA	UEN	EDD	Others	N	Three party concentration
1994	0.321	0.342	0.067	0.054	0.043	0.054	0.024	0.061	4.23	73.0%
1999	0.358	0.288	0.069	0.056	0.061	0.027	0.034	0.088	4.31	71.4%
2004a	0.374	0.295	0.085	0.070	0.060	0.038	0.022	0.056	4.04	75.4%
2004b	0.380	0.272	0.092	0.053	0.056	0.037	0.020	0.090	4.13	74.3%

Source: European Parliament website, http://www.elections2004.eu.int/results/en/ep_parties.html accessed 25/06/04; Cracknell and Morgan, 1999; European Parliament, 1999.

2004a refers to the composition of the European Parliament after enlargement on May 1, 2004. 2004b refers to the composition of the European Parliament after the elections of June 2004.

Three party concentration measures the combined seat share of the EPP-ED, PES and ELDR.

PSE	Group of the Party of the European Socialists.
EPP-D	Group of the European People's Party and European Democrats.
ELDR	Group of the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party.
EUL/NGL	Confederal Group of the European United Left / Nordic Green Left.
Green/ EFA	Greens/ European Free Alliance
UEN	Union for a Europe of the Nations Group
EDD	Group for a Europe of Democracies and Diversities

Table 3: structural congruence in the European party system and selected federations

Country	Standard deviation of the effective number of parties (n)
EU 25, all parties	1.57
EU 25, grouped by party family	0.84
Switzerland	0.84
Germany	0.48
Australia	0.43
Canada	0.40
Austria	0.26

Sources: calculated by author, based upon author's data. EU party system measures based upon the EP composition after the 2004 elections; national party system measures based upon most recent legislative election. Party system measures in the five federations based upon the parliamentary composition in 2000.

Table 4: Non-core party strength and split parties in the European party system, 2004.

Country	Non-core power		Code	Split parties	
	% of national EP mandates	% of domestic mandates		% of national EP mandates	Party name
Latvia	55.5	*53.0			
Ireland	46.2	*64.2			
Poland	42.6	*29.8			
Cyprus	33.3	*42.9	2	16.7	Rally for Europe
Italy	33.3	5.7			
Czech	33.3	20.5			
Sweden	31.6	13.5	2	15.8	Junilisten
Netherlands	29.6	20.0	2	7.4	EuropaTransparant
Denmark	28.6	21.7	2	14.3	Junibevaegelsen, Folkebevaegelsen Mod
Austria	27.8	19.1	2	11.1	Martin List
UK	24.4	4.4	1	17.9	UKIP, Green Party
France	24.4	9.0	2	3.8	Mouvement Pour La France
EU	24.0				
Slovakia	21.4	*31.5			
Greece	20.8	6.0			
Belgium	20.8	*29.3			
Germany	20.2	9.5			
Luxembourg	16.7	20.0			
Lithuania	15.4	11.3			
Finland	14.3	18.5			
Portugal	12.5	12.8			
Spain	7.4	6.0			
Estonia	0.0	12.9			
Slovenia	0.0	11.1			
Hungary	0.0	0			
Malta	0.0	0			

Notes: * indicates that domestic non-core party strength is higher than the EP average. Split parties are coded as 1 or 2. 1 = nationally insignificant parties (won no seats in the last national elections) that compete and win mandates in EP elections. 2 = system contains parties that compete only at the European level. Domestic mandates are those from the last national elections to the lower house preceding the 2004 EP election.

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