POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE PROBLEM OF LEGITIMACY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union's 'legitimacy crisis' and the possible undermining of the classic functions of political parties are bound up in a symbiotic manner. More precisely, the fortunes of political parties, that is, their continuing relevance as organisations promising purposive action in national government, and the legitimacy of the EU as the provider of certain collective goods, have become intertwined. A resolution of this two-level legitimation predicament is thus a prime motivation for party elites to comes to terms with the EU, and in the process, perhaps confer at least some form of enhanced acceptance of EU policies among their electorates. Thus, in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Milward (1992), the need to strengthen domestic positions, in this case the national 'party' interest, may be brought about through strengthening, or legitimising, the EU. A by-product of this process may also be the organisational development of European-level partisan organisations,[1] for they are best placed to serve as intermediaries between actors in the EU Commission and Parliament and national party elites.

To suggest that the relationship between political parties and the problem of EU legitimacy is interdependent in nature, in fact, symbiotic, requires some clarification. First of all, the situation mainstream political parties find themselves within their national contexts, one in which questions of their own popular legitimacy are raised (Mair, 1995), precedes or rather has origins apart from the issue of European integration. Popular disenchantment with political parties, perhaps even their (alleged) decline, has several causes, but it is the contention of this paper that increased policy competence by the EU *aggravates* this situation. By the same token, the problems encountered in building EU legitimacy, especially performace-based, can not necessarily all be laid at the doorstep of EU institutions; some are unjustifiably attributed in the sense that the EU does not have a leading role or full competence in the area in question. It is the thesis of this paper that on certain

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high visibility issues party elites have begun to make a case for their involvement, though indirect, in EU agenda-setting to the extent it serves explicit national interests. This is very different from early neo-functionalist predictions of a 'shift of loyalties, expectations and political activities' (Haas, 1958) toward a new centre, and the type of involvement may be said to better reflect a two-level strategy. As for there being a 'legitimising spin-off' for the EU, the demonstration of a supranational 'will' to support national actors, that is, a tangible linkage between parties and the EU issue agenda, legitimizes the EU as a framework for political contestation.

The paper begins with a presentation of the EU's legitimacy problem in terms of the attitudes of European citizens toward European integration and the expectation of material gain. This section will further develop the point noted above about public expectations unjustifiably attributed to the EU, thus adding to legitimacy problems. The second section will introduce the theme of national party difficulties, especially the potential for growing *irrelevance* as a consequence of increasing EU policy competence. The third section will then document activities to date concerning attempts by national party elites to influence the policy agenda of the EU. Here special focus is given to the manner in which transnational and supranational partisan organisations have been mobilised to achieve national goals in the context of the 1996/97 Inter-governmental Conference (IGC). Finally, the conclusion will address the implications of a more partisan EU, that is, the consequences that could result from the introduction of a Left-Right axis into EU politics.

THE EU AND THE PROBLEM OF LEGITIMACY AS ORIENTATION

Investigating the legitimacy problem of the EU leads us first to develop a precise definition of the phenomenon. For purposes of this paper I have chosen to adopt a working definition of

legitimacy as 'support for, and identification with, European institutions and policies', which I believe is both flexible and accommodating. In particular, this definition, especially support for European policies, is most relevant for my discussion because party elites[2] are most likely to be able to refer to specific national or EU policies as part of their political discourse. Although symbols and certain narratives may support such articulation, connecting their partisan or ideological position with material interests will be the most familiar manner in which to present their own goals.

The European Union's apparent growing intrusion into the lives of citizens via its policies, but more importantly, the cost entailed by those policies, e.g., the Single Market project's 'rationalising' of industrial sectors and subsequent unemployment, lays the basis of the current legitimacy problem. If the 'permissive consensus' has indeed shattered, since the early 1990's we might say that it is 'plausible that European publics approach the integration process with somewhat of a cost-benefit calculus in mind' (Anderson & Kaltenthaler, 1996, p. 193). If this is so, performance criteria now becomes a key focus for the issue of EU legitimacy, hence the linkage of support for European integration and the expectation of material gain suggested above. The more visibly intrusive the EU's policies have become, the more ambivalent are the publics attitudes.[3] Further, as the effects of these policies begin to generate *political* opposition, as was seen in the referendums on the Maastricht Treaty and anti-EU party formation during the 1994 European Parliament elections, such developments raise the question - 'what right does the Union have to make such momentous decisions about individual life-chances and the distribution of key values, imposing sacrifices on some and opening opportunities to others?' (Beetham & Lord, 1996, p. 16). It is precisely at this moment in time that the EU requires new forms of legitimacy to be constructed, for it has itself entered a new phase of its existence.

The term 'permissive consensus' was used to describe public opinion support for the EC: support was widespread but not necessarily deeply rooted. European integration was left to political elites[4] (see Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970). In the post-Maastricht referendum period, one with an awakened and volatile public opinion, the technocratic aspect of EU decision-making has become accentuated thus altering the bases of public support. Together with the higher and more visible costs of present EU policies, a type of legitimation that was heretofore absent is required, at the very least because the EU itself has moved far from its early mission of negative economic integration and more into positive integration (Scharpf, 1995). Put another way, 'as the visibility of European politics increased, the question of the Union's legitimacy became more acute' (Dehousse, 1995, p. 121). Addressing the 'internal legitimacy crisis' of the EU, Shackleton (1994) succinctly summarises the situation as follows, defining the problem as a:

> product of the realisation that we do not yet have the means to move from a system
> essentially concerned with the *administration of things* to one concerned with the
> *governance of people*. Administration can have consequences, often important ones,
> for individuals . . . . Nevertheless, it is a process that is essentially justified by
> reference to criteria of effectiveness, efficiency or fairness. Governance, on the
> other hand, needs broader support within society, a support that can only be acquired
> through some form of democratic legitimation (p. 5).

Beetham & Lord have suggested that the 'criteria of normative justifiability (authorization and performance standards) . . . provide the key site for the analyses of legitimacy, since it is problems in this domain that typically find expression in breaches of legality or acts of delegitimation'. Authorization relates to representativeness and accountability, while performance criteria incorporate popular expectations along with mechanisms for the 'removal of those who have 'failed'' (p. 2). A much broader range of groups and individuals now 'feel' the impact of the EU on their affairs, and whereas before the Single Market project the 'permissive consensus' allowed the *'administration of things'*, performance criteria and mechanisms of democratic legitimation, that is, normative justifiability, are now necessary. The performance of EU policies,

both in their desired result as well as appropriateness of responsibility, now engage more explicitly the interests, and thus expectations of material gain, of EU citizens. It is precisely the lack of means to legitimise this shift, as Shackleton notes, that contributes to the problem of EU legitimacy.

Legitimacy and the Attribution of Issues

Before turning to the situation of national political parties and their relationship with the European Union, there is an additional dimension to the problem of EU legitimacy. This is again linked with the legitimacy of policy, but more specifically with citizens' perceptions and *incorrectly* attributed policy area competences to the EU. Sinnott (1995) labels as *attributed internationalization* the process by which public opinion attributes policy-making or problem-solving to an international agency. More precisely, what matters is 'how the public thinks problems ought to be tackled rather than how it perceives the actual competences of various levels of governance, perceptions which may be more or less in accord with reality' (p. 247). The potential for public perceptions to not be in accordance with reality is very real, and in fact Sinnott terms this situation delegitimizing demand, for it has a 'particular bearing on legitimacy because it contains explicit demands for internationalized action which are neither rooted in the nature of the issues involved nor in competences claimed by the agency of internationalized governance' (p. 253). In the case of the EU, an added dimension of its legitimacy problem relates directly to public expectations for action on issues to which it does not command competence. This state of affairs complicates the analysis of performance and legitimacy because it unfairly punishes the EU for policy failures not of its doing. According to Sinnott, the 'potential de-legitimizing consequences are underlined by the fact that these issues, especially unemployment, are highly salient' (p. 271).

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Because the EU does not possess clear institutional and/or procedural means for sanctioning failure, that is, an effective European Parliament or elections removing from 'office' the perpetrators of policy failure, the legitimacy of EU action itself is called into question. Policy is seen to be developed in a 'popular vacuum', i.e., by technocrats enjoying immunity from accountability. To whom and to what ends do they serve? Political opposition, manifested by new party creation or tensions within mainstream parties grows apace as a result. Anti-EU parties and tendencies are therefore in a position to reasonably invoke protection of national identity as well as a policy or programmatic orientation, e.g., a left-wing economic agenda.

Let me summarize so far. Apart from legitimacy problems resulting from citizens (lack of) identification with the institutions of the EU, whether it be based upon symbols and narratives or other factors, the EU has increasingly developed a high visibility profile in policy areas affecting ever broader numbers of organised groups and individuals. The intrusion of the EU into the lives of citizens elicits an attitudinal orientation in response to the policies themselves, as well as, wrongly or rightly, expectations of action upon which judgement will be pronounced using criteria of efficiency and fairness and increasingly criteria derived from norms of democratic accountability. The failure of the EU to demonstrate positive change poses the danger of de-legitimation, depending especially upon the salience of the issue(s). The EU's weakness in terms of representation and accountability, the so-called *democratic deficit*, further exacerabtes the situation. This is the EU's legitimacy problem.

PARTY RELEVANCE AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

What is the connection between citizens attitudes toward the EU and the alleged 'decline of party'? As I stated at the outset, both academic and journalistic accounts of public disenchantment

with political parties precedes the politicisation of European integration. The most often cited causes of this 'decline' include changes in the social structure of European countries; patterns of individual behaviour; and the behaviour of political parties together with the issues that concern them (Gallagher, Laver & Mair, 1995). In addition, some analyses point to anti-party sentiment mobilised by political elites 'who genuinely and fundamentally challenge party government or even democracy'[5] (Poguntke, 1996, p. 340). Katz & Mair (1995) have also advanced the thesis of an emergence of a new model of party organisation and party democracy, the *cartel party*. Some of the chief characteristics of this party model, as compared to the previous mass and catch-all party models, is its position between civil society and the state - 'Party becomes part of state' - and its representative style - 'Agent of state' (p. 18). The cartel party model is primarily characterised by the 'interpenetration of party and state, and also by a pattern of inter-party collusion' (p. 17). It is worth quoting at some length the implications of this party model.

> As a result, there is an increased sense in which electoral democracy may be seen as a means by which the rulers control the ruled, rather than the other way around. As party programmes become more similar, and as campaigns are in any case oriented more towards agreed goals rather than contentious means, there is a shrinkage in the degree to which electoral outcomes can determine government actions. Moreover, as the distinction between parties in office and those out of office becomes more blurred, the degree to which voters can punish parties even on the basis of generalized dissatisfaction is reduced. (p. 22)

The significance of this perspective on the relationship between parties and citizens for this paper is the emphasis on the growing lack of *choice*. Mair has elsewhere elaborated upon the impact of parties' remoteness from civil society in terms of their legitimacy. Although drawing a distinction between party *change* and party *decline*, he nevertheless suggests the possibility of this state of affairs 'undermin[ing] the legitimacy of party government itself' (1995, p. 54). The apparent paradox is that in some ways parties have not declined, rather they have strengthened certain functions, e.g. the recruitment of political leaders and the organisation of government. However, at the same time, other classic functions such as the articulation of interests and the

aggregation of demands, and, to a certain extent, the formulation of public policy have eroded. It is in this sense that Mair raises the issue of parties becoming 'less relevant'.

When speaking of the danger of eroding party relevance, Mair points to the representative aspect of parties. More precisely, one of the chief characteristics of parties as representative agencies is their 'relevance in purposive terms' (p. 46). The capacity of parties in government to guide and control domestic policy-making has been affected by forces such as globalisation. This in turn, according to Mair, impacts parties' capacity in government in two ways. First, the scale of penetration of domestic economies by transnational actors and financial flows means that 'they cannot always respond to domestic demands in a way which fully satisfies the local interests on which they depend for their legitimacy and authority'. Second, the sheer 'complexity of the global economy leads to severe problems for the monitoring and control of the policy-making process, and hence undermines the capacity for effective and authoritative action' (p. 47). The result of these trends is twofold: parties are seemingly less able to convince voters of their partisan intent and at the same time the efficacy of party government is also questioned.

This brings us to the relationship between party relevance and European integration. Before leaving the analysis of parties as purposive actors in government, we can add one more specific environment in which parties' relevance is eroded, the EU. The scope of EU policy-making, in terms of the transfer of national policy competences to EU institutions, results in much less maneuverability for governments in selected areas. Because the EU is more readily identifiable to citizens than the impersonal forces of globalisation, etc., the lack of partisan influence in EU decision-making is made all the more apparent. Indeed, 'precisely because decision-making within Europe itself is not seen to be mediated by party . . . this is likely to undermine even further the relevance of party in representative terms' (Mair, 1995, pp. 47-48).

National political parties are thus subject to multiple pressures on their capacity to 'deliver

the goods' once in government. The Europeanising of policy-making (Andersen & Eliassen, 1993),

the growing complexity of issues, and the enhancement of executive and bureaucratic power over

parliamentary authority all combine to undermine the role of party in democratic society. Jacques

Delors commented recently on the 'weakening of democracy':

> It is impossible to speak of citizenship in Europe without posing the question of the
> current weakening of democracy within each of our countries. This weakening is
> worsened by the widening distance between the governed and their governments. Par-
> liaments are weaker. Meanwhile, because decisions become more and more complex,
> this favours the emergence of experts, bureaucrats and technocrats. This weakening
> causes the dangerous emergence of new extremist parties'.
> *(The European, 24/10/96)*

Although it has been advanced that the development of the EU has in fact strengthened national

member states by transferring certain problematic policy responsibilities to the EU (Milward,

1992), another version of this phenomenon suggests that enhanced power has accrued more

precisely to national executives (Moravcsik, 1994). Regarding the issue of the *democratic deficit*

and implications for EU legitimacy, Moravcsik has asserted that the efficiency of EU policy-

making over the past three decades is positively attributable to the fact that 'insulated executives

can resist from particularistic groups, pursuing policies in the interest of a broader spectrum of

society. . . . Hence, while democratization may create greater legitimacy in the short term (though

this remains to be seen), a possible, but paradoxical consequence in the long-term may be a further

erosion of precisely the popular support that democratization seeks to restore' (pp. 56-57). The

validity of Moravcsik's thesis is related, I believe, to historical stages in the development of the

EC/EU, that is, it may have been operable during the period of generally quiescent public opinion

on Europe, again, the period of the permissive consensus. The Maastricht referendum and the very

high profile government actions to achieve EMU membership on schedule mark a watershed in

public attitudes toward the EU. The very efficiency of the EU's ability to launch policies of an historic nature in fact draws attention to its weak democratic basis.

To summarise, as EU visibility grew, parties' ability to influence the increasingly pervasive effects of EU legislation in any appreciably partisan direction diminished. Even worse, once in power, governments disingenuously *blamed* the EU for the resulting hardships. This was a tactic presumably to deflect attention away from the fact that the policy(ies) were desirable in the first place by the member states executives. My argument again is that in the short term this may indeed seem a rational policy, but the accumulation of 'don't blame me, blame Brussels' defenses serves only to highlight national impotence, a state of affairs contributing to the legitimacy problem of party government.

The following problem has been sketched out. The EU has reached a point in its development where, in Shackleton's words, it is moving away from the 'administration of things' and towards a form of 'governance'. Because of the EU's increasingly intrusive impact on daily lives a different form of legitimacy is required. My use of the term legitimacy-as-orientation thus links citizen attitudes and support for European integration to perceptions of the policy impact and expectations for action by the EU. While this development has unfolded, the role of political parties has come under substantial pressure in the areas that most precisely affect their basis of popular legitimacy, i.e. performance. Is there a solution to this double legitimacy bind? The rest of this paper concentrates on evidence on the part of national parties to *adapt* to the wider political environment of the EU in order to try and bring a partisan influence to EU policy-making, and thus refurbish their waning relevance. In this fashion, though it may be strictly speaking a by-product of this involvement, the European level may develop clearer linkages with national actors. Mutual

legitimation may *evolve*, and in the long run this may lay the foundation for any future constitutional 'fix' to the problem .

PARTY NETWORKS AND THE EU POLICY AGENDA

Normal channels of party activity are impeded at the EU level, primarily due to the non-parliamentary composition of the EU 'polity'. Nevertheless, party adaptation means adapting precisely to given institutional dynamics. In this regard, the EP may be seen as a nexus or site for a network of partisan organisations which exist within the EP - party groups - and outside of it - national parties and transnational party federations. Their contribution to EU policy-making or governance is less significant in terms of the details of EP legislative work, rather to issues of a broader nature affecting the EU medium-to-long term issue agenda, what Peterson (1995) characterises as 'policy-setting'. The nature of their activities, with regard to issues of political-institutional development as well as public policy, their dissemination and mobilisation among potential audiences at the national and European levels, marks out a role somewhat different from our traditional understanding of the functions of parties (Hix, 1995). Indeed, Abélès (1995) remarks that the European level of political activity 'implies a profound transformation in traditional conceptions of politics, such as it is practiced at the national level' (p. 75).

The 'European arena constitutes points of intense interface and competition between levels of government and between public and private actors' (Wallace, 1996, p. 12). Let me be clear about the nature of the activities I will describe. It is not a form of 'Europeanising' domestic political actors in the neo-functionalist sense articulated by Haas. Rather, I am describing an indirect 'Europeanisation' in which various actors are routinely exposed to and increasingly participate in transnational and supranational *partisan* forums. In certain respects then, the

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European-level is introduced as a legitimate environment in practical problem-solving by national actors. Confronted with challenges to their relevance, the 'Euro-option' is approached for precisely national benefits (Ladrech, 1994). The partisan dimension of the problem-solving process may have, as a consequence, an effect upon the nature and style of EU policy-making, that is, raise it from a publically perceived technocratic domination viewed by some as in competition with the domestic arena, and instead translated into a left-right framework, something much more familiar and thus identifiable to voters. Issues considered pertinent to this argument are then, to be clear, those of a broad programmatic nature, for example the role for the EU in employment , the role of public services, the management of monetary union, the desired outcome of the IGC on institutional matters, etc.

How might national parties go about the task of influencing EU policy-making? As the European Parliament is but one institution in the EU set-up, and at that not the most significant, it would be understandable that the other institutions critical in the process be 'penetrated'. However, neither the Council of Ministers nor the Commission are amenable to the exertions of party actors. Indeed, Hix (1995) states that with regard to transnational parties, 'the institutional system determines that without real decision-making power in the European Parliament, and with a fusion of executive and legislative functions in the European Council, parties at the European level must change their strategy to be able to have an impact on the EU policy agenda' (p. 546). We then return to the question how might national parties influence policies at the European level? Hix has suggested that 'the increasing organisation of the party federation leaders' summits immediately before or after . . . each European Council meeting' (p. 547) is empirical evidence of such a new strategy. I would accept his point but vastly expand the scope of partisan activity within the interstices of the EU. More than simply organising party leaders' summits, the activities of transnational parties, EP party groups and national parties together constitute networks of partisan

activity building points of contact bringing national parties into co-operation with European actors on issues that are important to each side. The EP, one of the key sites for this activity, is then much more important for its 'system-transformative role in the EC' (Lodge, 1993) than as a legislature.

Transnational parties as national instruments

National parties in this analysis stand alongside two other partisan organisations, transnational party federations and EP party groups. Transnational parties are particularly significant in this analysis because although they transcend any one national party, their activities and organisational structure are dependent upon national party agreement. Transnational parties stand at the intersection of national parties and EP party groups, allowing a form of communication not mediated by the institutional dynamics between national parties and the parliamentary agenda of the EP groups. Before proceeding with the presentation of party network activities, let me briefly describe the two most relevant transnational parties, the Party of European Socialists (PES) and the Christian Democrat European People's Party (EPP), both of which have strengthened their internal organisations since 1992, that is, in the wake of the Maastricht Treaty.

The PES

The PES, along with the EPP and Liberal party federations, was created in the late 1970's in anticipation of the 1979 direct elections to the European Parliament. Named (in English) the Confederation of Socialist Parties of the EC (CSPEC), its secretariat was small and its ability to influence the programme for the 1979, 1984 and 1989 EP elections was negligible (as witnessed by the number of national party opt-outs or exemptions in the manifesto). For the Socialist federation in particular, this reflected at the time the great variance among the member parties on *ideological* grounds, in particular the hostility of the British Labour and Danish Social Democrat parties to deeper EC integration. Unanimity was required for decision-making in the CSPEC bureau, and so

this divergence of party views essentially prevented it from expanding its operation or developing a well defined role.

By 1989 matters had begun to change such that a process of organisational enhancement was set into play, and with it, a new sense of mission for the party federation and also for all the relevant Socialist actors in the EU system. Two developments combined to revive interest in the transnational organisation. First, changes within member parties opened up possibilities for organisational transformation. Here we mean primarily the British and Danish parties' turn from hostility to at least a qualified embrace of the EC (Haahr, 1993). Second, there appears to have been a growing realisation among party leaders themselves that the EC was now of greater importance than had been the case when only party 'Euro-experts' would pay much attention to issues of integration, especially political. This recognition was made explicit at a party leaders' summit in Madrid 1990 when their unanimously approved declaration opened with the statement:

> The ever increasing internationalisation of the economy and interdependence of
> our societies at every level means that it is increasingly difficult to respond on a
> national level to the new challenges which arise. Democratic control of the future
> remains possible, provided that those elements of sovereignty which can no longer
> be exercised in a purely national framework are pooled. (PES Leaders Declaration).

This summit was scheduled before the opening of the 1991 IGC, thus allowing a higher than usual profile for a party leaders' summit of this kind (Ladrech, 1993). In November 1992, CSPEC was transformed into the Party of European Socialists, and majority voting was introduced on those issues upon which the Council of Ministers also employs qmv. Additionally, national party opt-outs on the EP election manifesto were prohibited, as exemplified in the 1994 manifesto.

The EPP

The EPP incorporated the word 'party' into its title at the outset. To a greater degree than the Socialists, Christian Democratic parties had as part of their national programmatic identity a commitment to a unified Europe, and together with a generally more pro-business attitude, were in

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far greater agreement over the course of European integration (Hanley, 1994). Despite the fact that many of these parties were in government throughout the 1980's thereby allowing party leaders to interact at a government-to-government level, an emphasis on organisational enhancement did not occur until the post-Maastricht period (EPP officials make references to 'catching-up' with the PES on organisational grounds). By the mid-1990's Christian Democratic national governmental presence had been reduced (Netherlands and Italy), and with anti-Maastricht sentiment in many countries growing, party leaders called for a revival of the pro-integration movement (the German CDU being particularly crucial in this regard). Consequently, in 1995, the EPP adopted a revised organisational format. Among changes to its statutes and reasons given are:

> the number of vice-presidents has now been reduced to four, and in the future it
> will meet more frequently - at least eight times a year. This means that the EPP
> can react a great deal more flexibly to topical European issues. At the same
> time the close link to member parties will be guaranteed, since the presidium
> will meet annually between four and six times with chairmen of member parties
> as the EPP Council, which will be able to take politically binding decisions. To
> be a truly effective European party, the EPP needs direct contact with the
> leadership of member parties. The EPP has no desire to be an umbrella organ-
> isation, but rather a political force. (EPP News, no. 36, 1995)

Between 1992 and 1995 the political organisations at a European level that had remained essentially dormant throughout the 1980's were upgraded both organisationally and in terms of activities deemed necessary to promote member parties' interests. Organisational enhancement included an emphasis on more effective decision-making, and this resulted in the adoption of majority voting at the bureau level. As the EPP quote makes clear, the mandate that has developed for both the PES and EPP is to be more a political force rather than simply an organisational shell for limited 'get-togethers' of national party leaders for publicity purposes twice a year. With this brief background we turn to the manner in which national parties have, in an instrumental fashion, used these transnational parties to 'network' with other actors in the EP and elsewhere. The

1996/1997 IGC is the focus of these activities because of its singular potential to alter the institutional and policy landscape of the EU.

Networking and political mobilisation

A central assumption in this analysis is party leaders' motivation to benefit their domestic situation – acknowledged to be aggravated by EU dynamics – by influencing the EU's issue agenda in such a way as to link theirs and their voters interests with the direction of EU policy, or at least being seen trying to do so. Naturally, in light of the direction of economic liberalisation, de-regulation and privatisation, parties on the Left may have a greater incentive to influence such programs, including the application of a future monetary union, than conservative parties. Thus we see more of an effort on the part of the PES to 'relate their policy proposals on the socio-economic issues to their historically defined ideological positions [which] may create a legitimising link between public value orientations and EU policy-making' (Hix, 1995). The policy issues that have been promoted by the PES and EPP are then items which reflect a consensus among party leaders, and their respective networks are employed to promote these issues in the national-transnational-supranational matrix. Apart from the organisational changes to the transnational parties over the past few years, substantive policy propositions have been linked to the upcoming present IGC. In other words, the potential that the IGC represents for producing a qualitative leap in their respective issue agendas has seemingly acted as a catalyst for party network activity.

The PES network and issue agenda

EMU and the convergence criteria

The public perception that the convergence criteria for monetary union contained in the Maastricht Treaty is aggravating already high rates of unemployment (and thus undermining EU legitimacy) affects PES party leaders directly because they are on record supporting monetary

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union. Their quandary is obvious: they are seen as supporting the very policies injuring their core

constituencies. The response has been to develop a common position on how to manipulate

monetary union so as to derive benefit from it while at the same time embedding it into a wider

economic logic. The first significant effort in this direction reflecting use of the Socialist network

was the Larsson Report, adopted at the PES Leaders' Summit of December 1993 as the PES

'European Employment Initiative'. The initiative behind the Report emanated from a PES party

leaders' conclave in September 1993, when the Swedish Social Democratic Party offered the

services of former finance minister Allan Larsson to chair a working group charged with drafting a

common programme for generating employment integrating a European with national strategies.

The subsequent report was a product of consultation at the highest levels of party and government.

The ad hoc group was composed of the main economic policy advisors in the PES member parties,

representatives of Commission President Delors and the EP Socialist Group, and a guest from the

European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). Due to the involvement of the Delors cabinet,

which itself was drafting the future White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment,

one can presume a cross-flow of ideas and information.

The next example relates more specifically to the future EMU. During the period leading

up to the launch of the 1996 IGC, the Socialist network sought to influence the multiple points at

which the IGC agenda was being developed. The participation of French Socialist MEP Guigou on

the Reflection Group which composed the formal agenda, together with Socialist party government

representatives from ten other member states, ensured that Socialist concerns were introduced, even

though the manner in which the Final Report was written excluded detailed positions and numbers

backing them. Nevertheless, a majority of the Reflection Group did call for a strengthening of the

legal basis for employment policies, with the Swedish Social Democrat-led government proposing

the inclusion of a specific chapter on employment in the Treaty.[6] The EP Socialist Group stated

more precisely in a document adopted just before the Reflection Group began its work in June 1995, that

> the indispensable balance between the economic and monetary sides of EMU, and of the convergence criteria, must be ensured by more clearly linking the EMU provisions of the Treaty to Article 2 thereof which specifies that the Community (and therefore all its institutions and organs) must promote 'a harmonious and balanced development of economic activities, sustainable and non-inflationary growth respecting the environment, a high degree of convergence of economic performance, a high level of employment and of social protection, a raising of the standards of living and quality of life, and economic and social cohesion and solidarity among the Member States.
> (PES Group, 'An initial approach to the 1996 Treaty Review Conference')

Similar language was approved and adopted unanimously by PES party leaders at their Party Leaders' Summit December 1995 (this included prime ministers from Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, Portugal, Finland, Sweden, Spain and Greece): the Leaders

> reaffirmed their commitment to Monetary Union as an important complement to the single market, as well as to ensuring that those countries proceeding to the single currency meet the agreed EMU convergence criteria and timetable. It is necessary to ensure that the third phase of EMU begins with the highest number of Member States. The implementation of Monetary Union should be accompanied by increased coordination of economic, budgetary, fiscal, employment and social policies to ensure that the convergence criteria for sound economic performance are sustainable.
> (PES Leaders' Conference, 'Bringing the European Union Into Balance')

The EP's Martin-Bourlanges Report preceding the official launch of the IGC also states, concerning EMU and the convergence criteria that it 'should not be modified but the monetary policy provisions should have their counterweight in reinfrced economic policy coordination and a clear link to Article 2 of the Treaty.' The similarity in language suggests that overlapping membership allowed all points in the network to agree on a generally similar approach and promote these positions to their target audience: for the EP, to give direction to its members on the IGC Reflection Group as well as to position the EP itself vis-à-vis the other European institutions; for the Socialist Group in the EP, to influence the overall EP position as well as to strengthen this position with member parties as MEP's explain the Group's position at national party meetings;

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and for the Party Leaders themselves, especially those wielding national governmental authority, to begin preparing their government's position for the IGC negotiations.

Although these examples involve national party actors interacting with supranational institutional actors on the issue of employment and monetary union, party-to-party, or transnational networking, has also been employed, usually originating as an initiative in a Party Leaders conclave or summit. For example, at the June 1995 Party Leaders' Summit, Austrian Chancellor Vranitzky agreed to prepare a report under the title 'the social compatibility of EMU' for discussion by party leaders at a conclave scheduled immediately prior to the opening of the 1996 IGC. The meeting was attended by Socialist party leaders of nine EU member states, and in press reports Vranitzky stated that he and his colleagues would, during the negotiations of the IGC, try to obtain the inclusion of full employment among the objectives of the EU. 'This is not a question of transferring to Brussels the tasks of national governments, but of using the 'European dimension' in the matter' (*Agence-Europe*, 29/30 January, 1996).

Other issues upon which European Socialist parties through their EP Group and the PES have adopted positions in light of the IGC include the role of public services, the powers of the European Parliament, enlargement, and justivce and home affairs. Nevertheless, in terms of those issues that a significant effort has been made in terms of mobilisation, as well as the very nature of the issues which are historically connected to a Socialist political identity and legitimacy, the emphasis on employment has been central. Indeed, these initiatives reflect that in 'an effort to improve on existing measures, a new cross-national dialogue has emerged between the member states on employment topics. Fresh ideas and proposals are likely to come out of this pan-European exchange of information and experience' (Teague, 1994, p. 343).

<u>The EPP network and issue agenda</u>

As mentioned above, the priorities for the EPP figure less prominently in terms of introducing new items onto the IGC agenda because the general economic orientation of the EU satisfies the domestic agendas of the member parties. Nevertheless, two items can be singled out as issues the EPP network has highlighted, and in so doing, distinguishes their position from that of the PES. The issues are generally speaking of an institutional nature, that is, they concern the proper structure for decision-making in certain policy areas. The issues are the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and justice and home affairs, in particular questions related to EUROPOL and asylum. One might notice the domestic priorities of the German government reflected in the choice of issues given emphasis, and indeed, the EPP's basic document spelling out their positions was the product of a working group chaired by MEP H.-G. Pöttering (CDU).

<u>CFSP</u>

In all policy documents produced by the PES and EPP respectively for the IGC, a more detailed and ambitious position has been taken by the EPP. Whereas the PES Party Leaders state that the EU's 'capacity to take action at international levels needs to be strengthened considerably', and that the question of the role to be played by the Western European Union (WEU) 'will have to be decided in the context of the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference', the EPP has a much more specific position. For example:

> The European Union must be enabled to take joint action in the field of foreign, security and defense policy, as elsewhere. This can be done only if the principle of unanimity in the Council is abandoned. It should be possible to decide on 'joint action' in the form of diplomatic, humanitarian or military measures by a qualified or reinforced majority . . .' (EPP, p. 10)

Further, regarding the WEU, 'The [WEU] should be integrated into the European Union. All EU Members should accept an assistance and solidarity clause or Article 5 of the WEU Treaty' (EPP, p. 11). These two positions, in addition to other EPP member parties, is certainly the German

government's position on these matters, made all the more explicit by a foreign policy pact with France announced on 27 February 1996 in preparation for the IGC (*Financial Times*, 28-2-1996).

Justice and home affairs

The EPP has developed specific proposals in these areas, whereas the PES position does appear to reflect a lack of consensus among party leaders (less so in the EP group). The EPP states categorically:

> Starting with asylum policy, visa and emigration policy, border controls, judicial and internal affairs necessitating the harmonisation of policy must be progressively absorbed into Community procedure (Article 100c of the Treaty) and placed under the political control of the European Parliament, and judicial control of the European Court of Justice, without prejudice to the adoption by Member States of the necessary means to guarantee the exercise of sovereignty . . . In this spirit, in the fields of serious international criminality, Europol will be transformed into a European police authority and afforded operational powers. (EPP, p. 9)

Further, EUROPOL 'must be subject to the authority of the Commission and of parliamentary control through the European Parliament' (EPP, p. 10). These positions appear very detailed compared to the PES Leaders' declaration, which after acknowledging that the EU has followed through very few initiatives with regard to 'crucial issues like police co-operation, combatting fraud, terrorism and drugs trafficking', states simply that it is 'necessary to activate appropriate instruments such as EUROPOL. It is also necessary to develop a European strategy for immigration and asylum. These policy areas generally require decision-making by unanimity.' (PES, p. 5). EPP party leaders appear to have reached consensus on these issues, and are then better able as a bloc to push these positions at the IGC, while the Socialists have been unable to find this level of transnational policy suitable for all concerned.

The potential effect of this type of co-ordination among Socialists and Christian Democrats in the European Parliament and in national governments and oppositions is to enhance the input of those that will be participating in the IGC. The development of common positions

beforehand raises the possibility of being able to influence the overall agenda. Party networks are thus increasingly turned to by the instigators of policy change, national party leaders. The post-IGC political situation, coinciding with historic EMU membership decisions, will certainly politicise EU-national relationships to the degree that parties will take positions that may be the product of European level consultation, for example a French PS-German SPD manifesto.

What might the attainment of some of their goals in the IGC mean for the transformation of governance in the EU (i.e., the introduction of party-political activity at an agenda-setting stage)? Three consequences may follow. The first is that success may breed continued and deepened 'networking'. The organisational changes adopted by the EPP in December 1995, the creation of a high-level 'Council' of party leaders, is one of the means by which it seeks to ensure a permanent political presence. Similarly, the next PES congress in June 1997 intends to review the efficacy and impact of its 1992 rules changes as 'there is a widespread feeling that European integration has become such a dominant phenomena and important political feature that there is an urgent need for a [PES] which is active on a much larger scale than we have achieved so far with the political, organisational and financial means available at the moment' (PES Bureau document, 1996).

Second, success in affecting the EU policy environment, whether institutionally, i.e., increased powers for the European Parliament thus making it a more significant target for lobbying, and/or in terms of specific policy areas, may introduce a socio-economic dimension at the European level resembling the traditional political cleavage found in national systems. Further, 'if the EU socio-economic policy agenda can reflect a majority of party family opinion, a connection may be made between enduring political attitudes and EU decisions' (Hix, p. 547). One can

appreciate how such a development would contribute towards introducing a 'more coherent pattern of agenda-setting' in the EU (Peters, 1994, p. 16).

Lastly, evidence of change derived from the application of party networks as problem-solving activities benefitting national party agendas furthers a type of *Europeanisation* which makes the professional intermingling of national, transnational and supranational actors all the more routine. This process may alter the popular perception of 'Brussels' as a foreign and external competitor to domestic interests, and instead, at least in the minds of national party elites and mid-level activists, make it simply another playing field for partisan forces to reach consensus and co-ordinate mobilised action at the pressure points of the EU system.

CONCLUSION

This paper began by arguing that the legitimacy problem of the EU and that of national parties in EU member states was, in a complex fashion, somehow linked. As the institutions of the EU are at best semi-autonomous, initiatives aimed at resolving legitimacy problems must emanate from national actors. In this regard, the activities documented in this paper on the part of the two major party families - Socialists and Christian Democrats - to construct a presence at the EU level so as to influence the general direction of EU policies, may be seen as evidence of 'legitimacy building strategies' on the part of elites. The motivation to enhance the instruments of collective partisan action on a European level is self-interest on the part of party leaders. More to the point, as argued in the beginning of this paper, the realisation that high profile EU policy-making contributes to the image of partisan *irrelevance* and reduced manueverability in government is a stimuli to reassert some form of control over the wider environment. Another way of putting this is to say that the activities of Social Democratic and Christian Democratic parties represent an innovative (transnational) organisational response to new environmental (European Union) inputs.

If we assume organisations seek to control their environment, and this goes for political parties as well as other organisational types (Panebianco, 1988), then the reasons explaining enhanced party networking are made clearer. However, in the context of *legitimacy-building* on behalf of the EU itself, one can only speculate on the consequences of the actions described. I shall conclude by addressing two possible scenarios related to EU legitimacy, one negative, the other positive.

Let us begin with possible negative consequences from increased partisan influence in EU policy-making. Moravcsik has interpreted national executives' 'insulation from particularistic interests . . . [as] . . . a major comparative advantage of the EC as a policy forum' (p. 56), and consequently the introduction of more actors would lead to sub-optimal decision-making as well as eventual de-legitimation. Focusing on the potential introduction of a more parliamentary institutional logic resulting from a boost in the powers of the European Parliament[7], Dehousse (1995) believes this would itself lead to legitimacy problems. Very simply put, to the extent the European Commission is closer to member states given its selection process, it has a form of legitimacy that rests upon a national foundation. The development of a more parliamentary institutional logic would shift the legitimate basis of Commission endeavours (e.g., the Work Programme) closer to the European Parliament, as it would need the support of a parliamentary majority. The 'resulting politicisation in both membership and programme will perhaps make things clearer to the European voter, thereby reducing the 'political deficit'. However, this may well be at the expense of good relations with national government' (p. 128). The majoritarian logic introduced by a more partisan and parliamentary EU could, according to Dehousse, put in jeopardy relations between the Commission and national governments because it would no longer be seen as an 'honest broker', a mediator among national interests. Thus the strengthening in horizontal institutional ties - Commission-Parliament - threatens to cause tensions for the supranational-national relationship.

Dehousse notes that the type of parliamentary system that could evolve at the European level 'will ultimately depend on variables that still remain indeterminate, such as the cohesiveness of political parties or the type of coalition that will be formed' (p. 129-130). Nevertheless, if party-political activity is directed toward influencing the EU policy agenda along partisan lines, and majoritarian support is a necessary ingredient, the framework most identifiable for voters at a national level paradoxically could undermine the legitimacy of the supranational level of decision-making.

The other possible scenario is one in which party-political activity as described in this paper not only brings more 'clarity' to the European voter concerning the political basis of EU policies, but in fact contributes towards the legitimation of the process itself. Beyond introducing the familiar Left-Right dichotomy onto EU issues, the success of parties and their leaders to demonstrate that organised partisan pressure is at least partly responsible for policy 'success' (again, defined more in terms of shifts in direction of primarily economic issues), this could *link* the EU level with familiar national political actors. Wessels has commented upon the two-way relationship between citizens and the political class: 'Thus a major factor for the evolution of the EU is how far existing 'elites' involved in national and European policy making are 'real representative'. The degree of trust between citizens and the political class . . . is again determined by several factors partly dependent on each other. Image (e.g. reputation) and success, especially in economic terms, will certainly be crucial elements for this fundamental support' (Wessels, 1996, p. 64). A more politicised rather than technocratic arena does not inevitably lead to confrontational, majoritarian parliamentary dynamics. Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of EU decision-making is its complexity, and 'the absence of a separation of powers within the 'triangle of institutions' ensures more room . . . for the search for compromise over the exercise of powers of arbitration' (Mény et al., 1996, p. 16). Thus collective transnational partisan efforts to influence

the EU policy agenda is not governance in the 'national' sense of the word, and compromise among political forces may result in shifting coalitions depending on the policies debated, thereby resembling multi-party coalitions rather than Westminster-type politics. In this fashion then, the role and aim of parties in EU politics is less to 'occupy the state', and instead to impart a more open and competitive partisan logic to its socio-economic agenda.

The legitimacy problem of the EU is multi-dimensional in the sense that the key actors involved are arrayed at different levels of perception of their relative positions. In the absence of a 'European public sphere' for the articulation of organised interests, political parties - the accepted organisational vehicle for the aggregation and articulation of interests - are forced to adapt to the non-national institutional terrain of the EU, and in so doing their activites take on a logic different from their national responsibilities - running campaigns and organising the parliamentary process. The ability to convince voters there is, however, a means by which to bring a partisan logic to the EU may very well validate both parties and the EU process, pending any leaps in constitutional re-design emerging from the present or future IGC's.

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[1] On 30 October 1996 the European Parliament's Committee on Institutional Affairs adopted a report on the constitutional statutes of European political parties, calling among other things for a framework regulation on the legal status of these parties and a regulation on their financial situation. See EP Report A4-0342/96, D. Tsatsos, rapporteur.

[2] The set of parties that I am incorporating into this analysis excludes those self-declared as anti-EU.

[3] It has been suggested elsewhere that support for the EU is correlated with economic prosperity. Good times equal (roughly) support for European integration. See Eichenberg & Dalton, (1993). I argue that the more politicised the EU has become, more complex will be the relationship between support and economic development.

[4] Though the EC was essentially 'built' by Social Democrats and Christian Democrat politicians, the motivation for European construction, at least in its formative years, had more to do with perceived 'national interests' than partisan motivation, especially for social democrats.

[5] Although this paper is not concerned directly with anti-EU party formation, there is an overlap between these and protest parties. See, inter alia, Betz (1994).

[6] The idea of an Employment chapter or Charter has subsequently become a fixed item on the on-going negotiations.

[7] On the table at the IGC are various recommendations for strengthening the powers of the EP, particularly in terms of expanding the areas under co-decision.