

European Parties and Political Groups in a Comparative Context

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Transnational parties in the European Union offer opportunities for studying parties because of the distinctive setting and form of organization that they have. The role of parties within the Union is evolving but has been limited both because of constraints to political authority in the European Union and because of the established national political parties. National governments and national parties compete with transnational parties for influence and control in every setting in which transnational parties participate. Transnational parties do not select the Commission (the permanent executive body), nor do they play a role in the Council of Ministers, where national governments are represented. The activity of transnational parties has mostly centered around the European Parliament. These limitations on transnational parties, and the unusual setting in which those parties participate has led commentators to emphasize their uniqueness, and to emphasize the differences between transnational and national parties. Pridham and Pridham, for instance, claim that "in so far as European integration is accepted as a process which is *sui generis*, then it becomes difficult to measure transnational party co-operation by the traditional yardsticks applied to the evaluation of national party systems" ¹

Nonetheless, the very distinctiveness of the parties in the European Union allows examination of these institutional differences. The effects of those institutional differences--how they influence, constrain and facilitate partisan behavior--are important. An emerging body of work in comparative politics examines the effects of institutional differences on political actions and behavior in domestic politics, and suggests that the institutional setting affects political actions. This "new institutional" literature emphasizes that institutional forms are "neither neutral reflections of exogenous environmental forces nor neutral arenas for the performances of individuals driven by exogenous preferences and expectations" ². Consequently, the unique setting of transnational parties provides an opportunity for

¹Geoffrey and Pippa Pridham, "Transnational Parties in the European Community II: The Development of European Party Federations," in Stanley Henig (ed.), Political Parties in the European Community (London: George Allen & Unwin Policy Studies Institute, 1979), p. 296.

²James C. March and Johan P. Olsen, "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life," American Political Science Review 78 (Sept. 1984), p. 734.

understanding the effects of institutional context rather than a limitation on the study of parties

Parties in the European Union represent functional and ideological ties in the European Union, rather than interests based on nationality. Political leaders themselves have emphasized the importance of developing, supporting and emphasizing extra-national ties in the European Union. This goal was expressed in the Maastricht Treaty.

Political parties at the European level are important as a factor for integration within the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union.³

Tracking how, why, and to what extent these interests are expressed aids understanding the evolution of the European Union, and of European politics.

This paper looks at the role of parties in the European Union in two parts. First, it examines the overall role of parties in the Union, and traces the similarities to and differences from various national party systems. The first section defines how the institutional setting for transnational parties differs from that of national parties in Europe and in the United States. In the second section, the paper looks at the effects of these institutional peculiarities within the European Parliament. In that section, partisan cohesion and partisan conflict in the Parliament are examined to illustrate the effects of the institutional context.

Transnational and National Parties

Richard Katz and Peter Mair, in their recent book on party organization, noted that parties can be thought to have three distinct parts: the party in the electorate, the party in government, and the central party office. It is important to keep these distinct elements in mind when discussing parties because the development, growth and decline of these parts are independent of one another.⁴

³Article 138A, Treaty on European Union, December 1991

⁴Richard Katz and Peter Mair, How Parties Organize: Change and Adaptation in Party Organizations in Western Democracies (London: Sage, 1994)

European transnational parties exist in two forms – as political groups within the European Parliament and as European parties outside of the Parliament.⁵ (see Tables 1 and 2) Within the European Parliament, parliamentary factions or political groups play a dominant role in parliamentary activities. In the current Parliament, elected in June 1994, there are nine political groups, with only 27 members out of 540 total members of Parliament who have no group affiliation. Parliamentary groups constitute the only parties in government as neither the Commission nor the Council of Ministers is organized around transnational parties. Extraparliamentary partisan organizations (organized as European political parties since Maastricht and party federations before) include fewer groups (currently 4) and have a less clear role in the Union. These parties are the equivalent of the central party office, but have little power, no clearly defined roles and few resources. National parties rather than transnational parties play the dominant role in European elections and among the electorate.

Transnational parties in Europe are distinctive because the relationship between party elements is quite different from national European parties. In their organization and institutional position, parties in the European Union resemble parties in the United States more than the national parties of their member states. This section looks at each of these elements of transnational parties and their similarities and differences from national party organization.

The Party in the Electorate The party in the electorate refers to grassroots support and partisans in the electorate. Elections are the crucial period when voters express their partisan preferences. The electoral role of parties is used by many as a defining attribute of political parties. Kay Lawson notes that "Although the various definitions of party split every hair on Samson's head, nearly all contain some reference to participation in elections."⁶ Elections are generally used to distinguish political parties because other

⁵Through the paper, parliamentary factions are referred to as political groups, and the extraparliamentary organizations are referred to as European parties.

⁶Kay Lawson, "Renewing Party Scholarship: Lessons from Abroad," *The American Review of Politics* Vol. 14, Winter 1993, in a footnote, p. 592.

political organizations resemble parties in other ways, especially interest organizations. Interest organizations have ideological positions and policy preferences, as do parties, but do not seek public support for those positions in elections. The possibility of losing elections is a motivating factor for parties and for the partisan politicians. The literature on partisan decline emphasizes decline in the party in the electorate, in party membership, in partisanship, and an increase in voting volatility. This focus on this aspect of partisanship reflects the importance given to the party in the electorate in studies of parties.

A major distinction between transnational European transnational parties and national political parties is the former's minimal role in elections. European elections for the Parliament are held every five years, most recently in June 1994. National parties dominate these campaigns. National parties, rather than European parties, determine party lists and candidates. National parties run the actual electoral campaigns, and develop campaign strategy. European parties play primarily a supportive role. In the 1994 election campaigns, the four European political parties had manifestoes, but the use of those manifestoes in the campaign was dependent on national party decisions. In addition, European parties offer member parties access to speakers, information, and other forms of support during the campaign, but again, use of those resources depended on national party needs. The European People's Party found that few national parties availed themselves of the party's international list of speakers during the recent elections, for instance.⁷

Parties in the European Union do not have a base in the electorate. They rely on national parties to run in elections, to choose candidates and to develop voter loyalties. Though transnational parties have taken a larger role in recent elections (for instance, agreeing on a common party manifesto), that role is clearly subordinate to the national parties. The absence of a base in the electorate makes transnational parties distinct from most European parties. Transnational parties represent parties of political elites (elected and appointed party officials) and coalitions of national parties.

⁷In interviews with the author in June 1994.

Party in Government The party in government refers to elected officials. Most European states have parliamentary governments. Coalition formation and maintenance have been the main area where partisanship is evident among parties in government. A substantial literature on coalition formation and government/party interaction exists in the comparative literature on parties. Both the electoral and governmental arenas are generally seen as sites for partisan participation. Parties are key actors in coalition bargaining⁸, and seek to achieve policy goals set by the party⁹. Coalition formation and government support are key and accepted roles for parties in the comparative literature. In the most literature on coalition formation, parties have been considered unified and independent actors¹⁰. Party strength in parliament and ideological relationships between parties largely determine the nature of the government that emerges from the parliamentary selection process.

National parties in Europe also play a major role in selecting and supporting governments, a role transnational parties do not have. In the European Union, national parties and national governments replace European parties. The president of the Commission and members of the Commission are selected by national government leaders rather than through partisan support in the Parliament. Though the Parliament has the right to refuse to accept the government proposed, they have never done so.

While transnational parties do not play typical roles in elections nor in formation and support of governments, in the European Parliament, partisan organization plays a key role. Political groups are the dominant form of organization within the European Parliament. They participate in selection of Parliamentary leaders, appoint members to committees, and draw up plenary agenda. Political groups have priority in speaking and

⁸See among others Ian Budge, and M. J. Laver (eds.) Party Policy and Government Coalitions (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), and A. De Swaan, Coalition theories and cabinet formations. A study of formal theories of coalition formation applied to nine European parliaments after 1918 (New York: Elsevier Scientific Publication Co., 1973).

⁹The ECPSR party manifesto project has focused a great deal of attention on this point. See especially, Ian Budge, David Robertson, and Derek Hearl (eds.), Ideology, Strategy, and Party Change. spatial analyses of post-war election programmes in 19 democracies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹⁰See Michael Laver and Norman Schofeld. Laver and Schofeld discuss in detail the justification for treating parties as unified actors, but also note cases in which it is useful to relax this justification.

receive funding for group activities and staff. Political groups issue voting instructions (though have few ways of assuring compliance), and try in most instances to present a common voice. A senior member of the Christian Democratic secretariat in the Parliament pointed out the key role that political groups play in the Parliament:

In the Parliament the whole basis of organization is the political group. There is no national delegation, as in the Council [of Ministers]. Nothing. Only political party counts here.¹¹

The role of parties in government in the European Union is more limited, both the power and in scope. Unlike parliamentary governments, partisanship does not serve directly as a tie between the executive and the legislature. Having said that, European parties have taken the lead in creating informal ties between the Parliament and both national governments and the Commission.

Parties in the Central Office There are currently only four transnational parties with extraparlimentary party organizations, the equivalent of the central party office. The Maastricht Treaty, seeking to respond to concerns about the "democratic deficit," encouraged the establishment of European political parties. The party federations that then existed were transformed into political parties after Maastricht. The Socialists, the Christian Democrats (i.e., the European People's Party), the Liberals, and the Greens now have extraparlimentary party organizations.

European political parties are not direct reflections of their parliamentary versions. Some MEPs and parties are members of the parliamentary political groups, but not of the European party or vice versa. For example, the British Conservatives are members of the parliamentary European People's Party, but not of the extraparlimentary European People's Party. The Socialists, in contrast, have unified membership of both their extraparlimentary and parliamentary groups. However, the extraparlimentary party includes some members from countries who are not members of the European Union. Because these partisan organizations are outside of the institutions of the Union, they do

¹¹In an interview with the author, June 1994.

not participate directly in policy-making. They are used as a forum for cross-national consultation, and parliamentary groups do at times look to the political parties for guidance on votes and issues. However, transnational parties do not directly participate in debates or in political group decisions.

Extraparliamentary parties have few defined roles. Because European elections are dominated by national parties, and because the extraparliamentary parties have no sure resources (depending on contributions from national parties and their parliamentary groups), they have less power and influence than either their parliamentary counterparts or their national member parties.

Summary In European parliamentary democracies, the role of parties links the electoral, parliamentary, and governmental arenas. Parties dominate elections, they organize parliamentary actions, and parties participate in governmental formation. Their actions in these three arenas are complementary.¹² Parties in the European Union play a role mostly within the parliamentary arena, and the actions of parties there are somewhat isolated from actions in elections and in governments. The effects of this form of partisan organization is therefore best seen in the European Parliament.

In the European Parliament, the connection between political group membership and the European elections is not direct. Political groups do not participate directly in the elections. The membership in political groups at times involves decisions of individual members to affiliate with one group or another rather than decisions made by the political group or by the national party.¹³ Three national parties currently have their members split in the Parliament among two or three political groups.¹⁴ Moreover, there are relatively

¹²This is true even in the hybrid French system. Recent experiences with cohabitation demonstrates that despite the independent election of the president, the government is responsive to electoral changes in the Assembly.

¹³The European Socialists unified the Socialist political group and the Socialist European party. Membership in one requires membership in the other. Membership in the group is via national party affiliation with the European Socialists rather than affiliation of individual members. In other groups, in most cases national parties affiliate themselves with the political groups, but this is by no means universal nor is it required as it is in the Socialist group.

¹⁴The parties which currently have members in more than one group are the French UDF/RPR (13 members in the EPP, 14 in the EDA, and 1 in the LDR), the Portuguese PSD (1 in the EPP, 8 in the

frequent shifts in political group membership between election periods, both due to the actions of individual members and to changes in national party affiliations. In the Parliament elected in 1989, there were two major shifts of national party affiliation¹⁵, and a score of shifts by individual members from group to group, or between non-aligned status and group membership.

Political group leaders in the European Parliament note that this separation from the electoral process affects partisanship in the Parliament. The domination of elections by national parties has been a concern of the parliamentary groups. Control of party lists at election time can be a potent stick to ensure group cohesion. Political groups lack that basic lever to influence group members.

The weakness of political groups in this regard is best illustrated by an example from the Socialist group the most recent election. National political parties, rather than the political groups, decide on party lists for the European elections, and their decisions about the list, and the ranking of members on the list is frequently informed by national rather than transnational interests. The result is high turnover during election periods. In the 1994 election, 6 of the 8 Dutch representatives in the Socialist group were excluded from the top of the list. One Socialist noted

that is a sign to members. Don't bother about working your socks off in Strasbourg and Brussels, but just keep in with the party nationally. And the French, it was even worse. It is appalling that only three or four of the existing members go back on the list. Particularly, if it had been a punishment for bad behavior, absenteeism, but it wasn't. It was a punishment for presence. We have a pretty hefty turnover in the group as a whole, and in the Parliament it must be over 50%. It is not an encouragement.¹⁶

LDR), and the Spanish *Covergencia y Union* (3 members in the LDR and 1 in the ERA). The UDF/RPR is actually an alliance of several parties, so its division between groups is not unexpected.

¹⁵The British and Danish Conservatives joined the European People's Party (EPP) as individual members in 1992. About the same time, because of internal party changes and a name change, the Italian Communists (now the Party of the Democratic Left) joined the Socialist group.

¹⁶This and other quotes from political group leaders are based on interviews by the author with senior members of the political group secretariats for the Socialist Group and the European People's Parties in June 1994.

The assumption in European politics is that parties reward governmental and legislative behavior in elections. The separation between the partisan role in elections and in Parliament prevents European parties from offering similar motivations.

Though this is unusual in the European context, and leads many to note the oddity of European parties, this pattern of partisanship resembles in many ways American parties.

In the United States, as in the European Union, parties tend to play a secondary role in elections. In the US it is candidate organizations that dominate elections, and parties simply play a supportive role, as do European parties.¹⁷ Because of the presidential system, parties in the legislature are separate from the executive and do not have a role in supporting a government. This too parallels the European parties in the European Union. Eldersveld called American party structures "stratarchies," an organization with layers of largely autonomous but connected layers, rather than a hierarchy of control from the top.¹⁸ This description of the United States system highlights the independence of party actions in one area from partisan actions in other arenas of partisan action, an apt description of party politics in the European Union. The one difference is that American parties do play a role in presidential selection process, a role European parties lack. Nonetheless, the role of parties in the European Union parallels that of the American system much more closely than its Western European counterparts. The key institutional peculiarity of parties in the European Union is the independence between the parties in the electorate, parties in government and parties in the central office.

Because of the close relationship between the party in government, in the electorate, and in the central office, the organization of parties in most European states results in relative unity. In parliaments, voting almost always reflects party discipline and support.

¹⁷For example, see Samuel Eldersveld, Political Parties in American Society (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1982), p. 105.

¹⁸Samuel Eldersveld, Political Parties: A Behavioral Analysis (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964) p. 9-10, 98-117. In Samuel Eldersveld, Political Parties in American Society (New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, 1982) Eldersveld describes the same relationship but with a focus on the Congressional party and the national party organization as "co-archy" or a "multiple unit power-sharing system, a set of leadership units virtually isolated from each other in a formal sense, minimally collaborative, and jealously guarding their prerogatives" (p. 104). This also emphasizes the separation of arenas of partisan action in ways that are similar to the European Union.

for party positions. In contrast, in the United States system, with separation between the executive and legislature and a loose relationship between regional and national party organizations, parties are fragmented, and in the Congress there is less partisan discipline and cohesion. In 1950, critics of the American party among political scientists suggested that the United States' parties needed to emulate European parties in order to achieve more cohesion, more emphasis on program, and more accountability.¹⁹ Though those recommendations have been criticized, they point out the differences in partisan actions that result from differences in structure. The organization of transnational parties in the European Union more closely resembles the United States than parties in its member states. The central party organization is weak. Regional parties dominate the party in the electorate. The party in government reflects the fact that the executive is not selected by the parliament and is independent from the parliamentary parliament. Nonetheless, as in the United States, the work in the parliament is organized along party lines, and selection party leaders reflects partisan interests and party strength.

How does this institutional context affect partisan action in the Parliament? Since the Parliament is the major arena of partisan actions in the European Union, it is an appropriate venue in which to study party actions. Little attention is generally paid to behavior in national European parliaments. This is because actions of parliaments and parliamentarians are so constrained by partisanship. The ability of parties to punish and reward MPs in elections, and the potential costs of not supporting the government for parties in the government coalition means that legislative actions are strongly tied to electoral outcomes (i.e., the distribution of seats to parties) and governmental preferences.

Again, the United States is a case where the legislative party has limited power over its members (because of limited control in elections and over government). Literature on parties and candidates has generally emphasized reelection as their most important motivation for individual members of parliaments. When parties can use their electoral role

¹⁹"Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System," *American Political Science Review* (Supplement, 1950)

as a sanction or a reward for party loyalty, individual politicians have incentive to follow the party line. Though parliamentarians may also have more substantive policy goals, fulfillment of those goals also requires reelection.²⁰ In the American context, where parties have little or no control over nominations, this has meant relatively low levels of party cohesion most of the time. Members of Congress are less constrained by their parties than are their parliamentary counterparts. Parties in the United States have little party discipline because of the independence of candidates in the electoral process. When parties control nominations in elections, party loyalty is valued by members of parliament, and voting discipline is strong. Within party coalitions in the United States Congress, there is less cohesion than in European parliaments with disciplined parties.²¹

The fact that political groups do not control whether members of the European Parliament are renominated nor their list position should lead to weaker group cohesion and voting discipline, as in the United States. One would expect that in the European Parliament, party cohesion would be lower than in European national parliaments because of the limited ability of political groups in the Parliament to discipline their members during elections.

Though politicians are affected by electoral sanctions and rewards, policy goals and ideology are also important. In both the United States and in European national parliaments, ideological competition between parties exists, and ideology differences have been found between parties. Though arguments have been made that the ideological bent of parties in power is irrelevant, most evidence shows that parties of the left and parties of the right have different priorities, and that parties seek to implement their policy.

²⁰One advocate of this view of politicians is Joseph Schlesinger, most recently in 'Understanding Political Parties: Back to Basics,' The American Review of Politics 14 (Winter 1993), p 481-496. In the American context, see Richard Fenno, Congressmen in Committees (Boston: Little, Brown 1973) for comparative politics; see the distinction between careerist and believer in Angelo Panebianco, Political Parties: Organization and Power (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988) p 25-30, and Frank P. Belloni and Dennis C. Beller, "The Study of Party Factious as Competitive Political Organizations," The Western Political Quarterly XXIX, 4 (Dec 1976), p 531-49.

²¹See comparison of voting cohesion in the US and in Europe in Julius Turner, Party and Constituency: Pressures on Congress Revised Edition (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1970) p 20-25.

priorities²² In multi-party systems like the European Parliament, one would expect that members of leftist political groups would have higher levels of voting agreement with one another than with political groups on the right.

These expectations of partisan behavior will be tested by looking at roll call votes in the European Parliament. Analyses of national parliamentary parties frequently focus on the ability of parties to achieve voting majorities. Parliaments and assemblies make authoritative statements via voting on bills and resolutions. This is true in the European Parliament as elsewhere²³ The ability of political groups to achieve internal party cohesion and discipline in parliamentary votes is an indication of their success or failure. Roll call voting is also a way of gauging competition and cooperation across political groups. Which political groups tend to vote together, and which tend to oppose one another's positions?

Data and Measures

The data for this analysis relies primarily on a randomly selected set of roll call votes in the European Parliament between 1989 and 1994. Most votes in the European Parliament involve a simple show of hands. The Parliament only takes roll call votes when the outcome of the vote is unsure, when an absolute majority of members are needed²⁴ or when 23 members of a group request a roll call vote in advance. In addition, only votes that are formally requested by groups are recorded and published in the Official Journal of the European Communities. The population of votes used, therefore, is only a portion of all votes taken in the Parliament. However, frequently roll call votes are called for by groups on votes they consider important. Groups request a roll call vote when they want an official record of the vote, when they want to check their own members' votes, or want

²²an Budge, David Robertson, and Derek Hearl (eds.), Ideology, Strategy, and Party Change: spatial analyses of post-war election programmes in 19 democracies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

²³The fact that the European Parliament offers advisory opinions rather than definitive legislation may change MEP's attitudes toward their votes. I have chosen to assume, though, for the purpose of this analysis that voting is comparable to voting in national legislatures for MEPs

²⁴For votes on the budget or for cooperation, assent, or co-decision procedures

to publicize the position of another group. Reportedly, the European Right has been particularly assiduous in requesting roll call votes. The limited number of votes recorded does introduce some bias into the votes sampled.²⁵ One of the problems with this sampling strategy is that all votes are included in the sample, even relatively routine or broadly accepted votes. Also, political groups emphasize cohesion primarily on votes about which they care. This approach does not indicate the importance of those votes. Using all roll call votes reported in the Official Journal of the European Communities as the universe of cases, seventy-three votes from the 1989-94 Parliament were randomly selected.²⁶ In analyzing group cohesion, I used only votes when more than one third of the members (173) of Parliament were present and when at least 10% of those present did not vote with the majority. Fifty-five votes met that criteria. I used those votes to calculate an index of agreement for each group.

This index is a measure of voting cohesion in the political groups. It is adapted from a measure widely used to evaluate cohesion in national legislatures, the Rice party cohesion measure.²⁷ That measure takes the percentage of party members supporting the majority position (for or against a measure) and subtracts the percentage in the minority. This measure ranges from 0 to 100. This measure is inappropriate for use in the European Parliament. There, abstentions are fairly frequent and seem to be meaningful, but would be ignored using the Rice measure. Members may vote for or against a measure, but may also

²⁵For a full discussion of the process of voting and cases when roll call votes are recorded see Francis Jacobs, Richard Corbett and Michael Shackleton, The European Parliament, 2nd edition (Essex: Longman Current Affairs, 1992), 147-151. In addition, members of both the Socialist and PPE secretariat noted in interviews with the author that their groups call for roll call votes to check on their members' votes. Both also claimed that the European Right more frequently than other groups requested roll call votes.

²⁶Official Journal of the European Communities (1989-1990). For a full list of the votes used and their document numbers contact the author. I did not differentiate between votes on resolutions, on amendments, or on Commission drafts. Obviously some votes are more important than others. However, my goal was to infer to the whole set of plenary votes so I did not differentiate between types of votes. Though there may be a number of similar or identical votes on issues, I also did not try to exclude any duplicate votes on the same issue in specifying the population of votes. Again, my goal was understand political group voting as a whole. I did not as a matter of fact have any votes in my sample that were on issues identical to any other vote.

²⁷Stuart Rice, Quantitative Methods in Politics (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928) 208-209 cited in Julius Turner, Party and Constituency: Pressures on Congress Revised Edition (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1970), 20-21. Various uses of this measure and other roll call measures are found in Joel Silbey (ed.), The Rise and Fall of Political Parties in the United States, 1789-1989. The Congressional Roll Call Record (Brooklyn: New York Carlson Publishing Inc., 1991).

officially abstain from voting (and those abstentions are recorded with votes for and against the measure) In interviews, it was reported that abstentions frequently (but not always) were used by members who disagree with the group position but did not wish to vote against the group position ²⁸ Excluding abstentions from the analysis would, therefore, underestimate internal disagreement in the groups Fulvio Attuna uses a variant of the Rice measure to evaluate political group cohesion in the European Parliament which takes into account abstentions ²⁹ Three voting options are considered in his analysis voting for a measure, against a measure and abstaining His index of agreement

is the percentage measure of the relation between (a) the difference between the highest numbering modality and the sum of the other two modalities in a vote by the MEPs of a Group, and (b) the total number of votes cast by the Group

$$IA = \frac{\text{highest modality} - \text{sum of the other two modalities}}{\text{total number of votes cast by the group}} \times 100 \quad ^{30}$$

As a result, the index of agreement used in this analysis ranges from -33 to 100 ³¹ A score of 100 indicates perfect unanimity among voting members in the group Positive scores indicate that a majority of the group voted together A zero score indicates that exactly half of the group members did not vote for the modal position Negative scores indicate that most group members did not vote for the modal position A score of -33 indicates that the group was perfectly divided between the three options Measures of group cohesion measure unity within the group, independent of the votes by other groups

In the analysis, the modal vote of the group is considered the group position, a decision that is open to question The fact that most of the group voted in one way does not mean that the group actually instructed its members to vote in that way (though in all cases where I had any information on group positions, the modal position and the group

²⁸Members may also choose to be absent from the vote in that situation Absences, though, occur for a variety of reasons It seemed likely that a larger share of the abstentions than absences were due to opposition to the group For this reasons, abstentions are included in the analysis but absences are treated as missing data

²⁹Fulvio Attuna, "The Voting Behavior of the European Parliament Members and the Problem of Europarties " European Journal of Political Research 18 (1990) 557-579

³⁰Attuna, p 564

³¹This odd scale is one of the drawbacks of this measure This analysis points up the absence of well-established measures for roll call analysis which allow one to include abstentions in the analysis

instructions corresponded) It would be helpful to have copies of the group whip lists (i.e., the voting instruction) to indicate both the actual group position, and the intensity of group instructions In the absence of such information, though, the sampling strategy and measurement strategy were the best options available

For each political group, from among the 55 valid votes, only votes which in half of the group members were voting were used to measure cohesion for that group The number of votes that qualified varied by group, ranging from 5 to 26 For each vote with sufficient group participation, an index of agreement was calculated Those indices were averaged by group to determine an average index of agreement These are the values reported in this analysis On average 14 votes were used for each group to calculate the index of agreement Because the number of votes used to determine the index of agreement are small, the findings are somewhat tentative

The same universe of votes was used to look at party competition The measures of party competition focus on the two largest groups, the European People's Party (on the right) and the Socialist Group (on the left) It is assumed that these large political groups will be the focus of voting blocs For each vote, the modal position of these two political groups was taken as the group position The percentage of members of other groups voting with those group positions was recorded for each vote If, for instance, most Socialists voted for a bill, for each of the other groups, the percentage of members of that group voting for the bill would be recorded Those percentages across all of the votes are then averaged The reported scores are the average percentage of group members voting with the Socialists and with the European People's Party These averages are first computed across all of the votes Then votes in which 90% or more MEPs voted together are excluded and the average percentages are recalculated Both scores are reported In addition, a measure of the difference between those scores are reported

Partisan Cohesion and Competition in the European Parliament

Despite expectations that levels of cohesion were likely to be low among the political groups in the Parliament, in general they show very high levels of agreement in voting, much higher than one would expect given the absence of sanctions and paucity of rewards they can provide to members who follow the group position (see Table 2) All except three groups have scores of more than 80 on measures of cohesion. This means that on average, more than 90% of the members of these groups vote for the group position

[Table 3 about here]

The Rice measure of party cohesion provides a point of reference for comparison, though it is not identical. In the United States, with notoriously low levels of cohesion, party cohesion measures have ranged between 55 and 89, generally hovering around 70³². Parliamentary parties evidenced higher levels of party cohesion, generally achieving scores of 90+³³. Though the European parliament does not have a government to support, and despite the fact that political groups have little ability to sanction defection, the level of voting cohesion of groups in the European Parliament is much closer to that found in European parliamentary systems than in the United States Congress.

The notable exception to the generally high level of cohesion is the Rainbow group. Its score is only 25, significantly below the others. The Rainbow group has more diversity in its membership than any other group in the Parliament. It also deliberately does not enforce cohesion. The heterogeneity of the group, and the absence of a national partisan base among some members make it unlikely that this group would be cohesive.

In general, the groups with low levels of cohesion are not dissimilar in most ways from those with higher levels. The three lowest vary by size. The LDR is the third largest group, averaging 47 members, and including 10 countries and between 16 and 17 parties.

³²Barbara Deckard Sinclair, "Determinants of Aggregate Party Cohesion in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1901-1956," in Joel Silbey (ed.), The Rise and Fall of Political Parties in the United States, 1789-1989. The Congressional Roll Call Record (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1991), p. 181-201; Melissa P. Collie and David W. Brady, "The Decline of Partisan Voting Coalitions in the House of Representatives," in Silbey, p. 295-310.

³³Julius Turner, Party and Constituency. Pressures on Congress Revised Edition (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1970), p. 15-40.

during the parliamentary term³⁴ The Rainbow Group is among the smallest groups, averaging 14.5 members, 8 or 9 member states and 10 or 11 parties during the parliamentary term. The EDA is somewhere in between the two, with 21 members, but with only 4 nations and 4 parties included among its membership. The three groups with the most cohesion are small, but their rates of cohesion are virtually the same as the largest group, the Socialists.

There is also diversity among those with the lowest levels of cohesion in party dominance and ideology. The EDA is dominated by the French Gaullists, a condition which would lead one to expect higher levels of cohesion because most group members share membership in one national party. The LDR and Rainbow Group, in contrast, have no clearly dominant party or national group. Ideologically, there is also no clear pattern. Parties of the right are found both among the most and least cohesive groups. Though EDA represents parties of the right, the Rainbow Group has no particular ideological position, and the LDR is generally thought to be center right. The European Right is unexpectedly among the top three groups in cohesion.

The institutional context of the European Parliament suggests that cohesion within groups should be lower than it is in actual fact. Understanding the importance of this is impossible without examining patterns of competition between groups. Within most parliaments, parties of the left tend to vote together as a bloc, as do parties of the right. Ideology provides connections between sets of parties. The two largest political groups in the European Parliament between 1989 and 1994 were the European People's Party (on the right) and the Socialists (on the left). One would expect to find these parties within ideologically distinct blocs of political groups, and in fact during plenary sessions, groups are seated roughly by ideological position. Allied with the Socialists should be the groups

³⁴Because of shifting membership during the term, these size variables are given as averages or ranges. To compute averages, I took the number of members at each point in time, multiplied by the number of months at that size, and then divided by the total number of months. In the regression analysis and correlations used later, averages of all size variables (number of member states, number of parties, and share of seats held by the largest party) are used.

on the left or center left, including Left Unity and the Greens. The right and center right groups, which might ally themselves with the EPP, include the European Right, the European Democratic Group, and the European Democratic Alliance. The third largest group, the Liberal, Democratic, and Reformist Group, is a centrist group, perhaps leaning to the right. The Rainbow Group does not have a clear ideological position.

To analyze competition between groups and the nature of voting blocs, the modal categories on each vote are used as group positions for the EPP and the Socialists. The percentage of members of other groups voting with the EPP and with the Socialists are recorded separately. To analyze competition between groups and the nature of voting blocs, the percentage of members voting with both the EPP and the Socialist positions are calculated for each vote and averaged for all votes.³⁵ Figures 1 and 2 report those average percentage of members of other political groups supporting the EPP position and the Socialist position.

[Figures 1 and 2 about here]

What is striking about these tables is their similarity to one another. Contrary to expectations, the Socialist Group and the EPP vote together more than any other groups. The third largest group, the LDR votes almost as often with those two groups. The clearest voting bloc, therefore, is not defined by ideology, but by group size. For both the Socialists and the EPP, the European Right is the group least likely to vote with their position. On average, less than one third of ER members vote with either the EPP or the Socialists.

This result indicates that within the Parliament, a coalition between the largest groups tacitly exists. This is understandable, given that neither group holds a majority of the seats. The only issues which come to a vote may be those which garner support of the largest groups. The isolation of the European Right (who represent nationalist parties)

³⁵The modal category is used as the group position for the Socialists and the EPP.

also suggests that goals of integration or expanding the role of Parliament or the Union may be the tie between these groups, and explain the cooperation between the largest groups

Though the cooperation between the largest groups is important, ideology also plays a role. When the results for the EPP and for the Socialist Group are compared, there are very different ordering of groups beyond the top two. For the Socialists, the Left Unity and the Greens follow the top two. For the EPP, the EDA and the ED occupy similar positions. Though there is general cooperation between the largest groups, there also seems to be an alliance between ideologically similar groups. Figure 3 illustrates these alliances. In that figure, both sets of scores are reported (excluding the EPP and Socialists). Above the line, the number reported is the difference between the average percentage of the group voting with the EPP position, and the average voting for the Socialists. A positive number indicates more support for the Socialists. The Greens, the Left Unity, non-aligned members and the Rainbow Group (ARC) ally themselves frequently with the Socialists. The EDA, the ED and the LDR are more closely allied with the EPP. Not only does this figure show the existence of two voting blocs, but also the extent of support for the blocs. The bloc of groups supporting the EPP position vote with the Socialists almost as often as with the EPP. The groups supporting the Socialist position have significantly lower levels of support for the EPP. This figure shows a much more consolidated and clear Socialist bloc.

[Figure 3 about here]

Analysis of cohesion within groups and competition between groups in the European Parliament is counter to expectation. Given the institutional setting, one would expect low levels of internal cohesion. The level of cooperation between the largest groups is also unexpected. What explains these findings? In part, this result calls into question the influence of institutions. Given a similar setting to that faced by United States parties, parties within the European Parliament do not behave similarly. The socialization process within disciplined national parties may be part of the reason for the for the

discipline within groups. In interviews with members of the Socialist and EPP political group secretariats, the assumption that in most cases members of the groups will follow the group position is emphasized. One Christian Democrat explained:

Members of the group must vote with the group. This is expected, unless the [national] party has objections.³⁶ If the person does not like the vote, he must say so in group meetings [during the group week before the plenary session]. That is what those meetings are for. Some of the best debates I have seen are in group meetings. In plenary, the debate is nothing. You can express your views among the group and try to convince the group. But in the vote, the group must be supported.

A Socialist noted that members who disagree with the group position frequently choose not to vote rather than to vote against the group.

Sometimes I'll go in the bar, and someone will be there. I will say, "Shouldn't you be voting?" and the member will say, "You don't want me to vote on this one." They can follow their conscience without voting.

This anecdotal evidence suggests that norms of behavior carry over from national parliaments, and that institutional rules and structures alone do not account for the behavior within groups.

Conclusions

The alliance between the EPP and the Socialists is a more important reflection of the institutional differences between national parliaments and the European Parliament. The need for the largest groups to cooperate with the Commission and the Council of Ministers, who are often of different partisan backgrounds, may be the reason for the emergence of a tacit grand coalition in the Parliament. If the largest groups are interested in expanding the role of the Parliament in the European Union, they would have to work together to achieve those ends. The absence of a majority by any party in the Parliament is also probably important. No one political group has the ability to achieve their goals without cooperation from other groups. Nonetheless, the fact that ideology does appear to influence voting behavior, and that there are ideological differences in voting competition suggests that European parties do exhibit partisan behavior, and that transnational partisan action does

³⁶There is a so-called "conscience clause" that allows national parties to exempt themselves from supporting the group if it is politically necessary. This differs from individual differences, though

Table 1

Political Groups in the European Parliament
1989-1994 and 1994-present

Political Groups 1989-1994

Socialist Group (PSE)
The European People's Party (PPE)

Liberal, Democratic, and Reformist Group
(LDR)
European Democratic Group (ED)
The Greens
Group of the European Left (EUL)

Group of the European Democratic Alliance
(EDA)

Technical Group of the European Right
(ER)
The Left Unity Group (LU)
The Rainbow Group (ARC)

Political Groups 1994

Socialist Group (PSE)
The European People's Party (PPE)

Liberal, Democratic, and Reformist Group
(LDR)
The Greens

Group of the European Democratic Alliance
(EDA)
Europe of the Nation-States
Confederal Alliance of the European Left
The Rainbow Group (ARC)
Forza Italia (FI)
European Radical Alliance

have an effect. In future, analysis of subsets of votes may make clear the reasons for cooperation among those political groups, and when there are higher levels of conflict. The cooperation between groups may be most evident on issues of integration or governance in the European Union, and least evident on substantive social and economic issues.

Figure 1

Average Proportion of Group Members Voting With the EPP Members

