

Organising for a Europe of the Regions: The European Free Alliance-DPPE and Political Representation in the European Union

European Union Studies Association conference, Montreal 17th to 19th May 2007.

Peter Lynch,
University of Stirling
Stirling FK9 4LA,
Scotland.
p.a.lynch@stir.ac.uk

Introduction

For a period in the later 1980s and early 1990s, the idea of a Europe of the regions gained political prominence within the European Union. The idea of a Europe of the regions was an old one, but it was given contemporary resonance in this period due to the European Union's structural fund reforms in 1988 which gave a new level of prominence to regional governments, with those regional governments also seeking some level of institutional representation within the EU. The outcome of this pressure was twofold: the creation of the Committee of the Regions as a consultative body within the EU (Loughlin 1996, Kennedy 1997), comprised of members of local and regional authorities, and the passage of the Treaty of European Union (Maastricht), which gave regional governments the constitutional ability to represent Member State interests within the Council of Ministers. For regional governments (as well as local governments), there was now a level of institutional recognition in the EU, with efforts to improve the regional level at subsequent EU treaty revisions at Amsterdam, Nice and then with the Convention on the Future of Europe. At this latter juncture, some regional governments had grouped together to establish the Congress of Local And Regional Authorities in Europe in 1999. This body sought to promote the interest of 'constitutional regions' in the EU – meaning those regions with strong powers and the ability to make legislation. This organisation also gave birth to REGLEG (Regions with legislative powers) and sought to promote greater representation for constitutional regions in the EU, a defined role for the regions in the EU constitution, a clear definition of powers and functions between the EU,

national and subnational level, a strengthening of the Committee of the Regions and a direct right of appeal for regions to the European Court of Justice (Lynch 2004).¹

Of course, these institutional developments are a small element of what would be a more ambitious view of a Europe of the Regions. The idea of a Europe of the Regions has been around for decades, though not necessarily in any coherent form. A Europe of the Regions has been seen as both a slogan (Loughlin 1996a: 150) and utopian vision for regionalists (Borras-Alomar et al, 1994: 2). The idea originated in the work of federalist writers such as Denis De Rougement (1966) and Guy Heraud (1974), who sought to promote European integration but also a role for regions in the political process. Heraud, for example, saw Europe as a federation of regions as opposed to a construction of artificial nation-states (Heraud, 1974). This idea had also been explored before this by committed regionalists such as the Bretons Maurice Duhamel (Dumhamel 1928) and Yann Fouere, with his idea of a Europe of a hundred flags (Fouere, 1968) as well as in Flanders by Maurits Van Haegendoren (1971). Such ideas provided some of the background to regionalist party thinking about European integration and these ideas, in addition to post-war consensus on the need for European co-operation to avoid military conflicts generated regionalist support for European unification (Lynch 1996). Besides a generally positive outlook towards Europe, regionalist parties found the Europe of the regions idea attractive because of hostility to centralised states but also to the perceived impact of European institutions in reducing the powers of the state upwards, whilst the regional level of government would reduce the powers of the state downwards: a regionalist version of the withering away of the nation-state.

The Regionalist Party Family

Regionalist parties have been active in Europe since the 1890s, with periods of mobilisation in the 1930s, 1960s and subsequently. Some regionalist parties are historic and existed before European integration came onto the political agenda – take the Partido Nacionalista Vasco from 1898 – whilst others are relatively new such as the Ligue Savoisiennne, which was created in 1994 (Roux 2006). Despite the vastly different

patterns of regionalist party formation, electoral performance, electoral success, ideology and autonomy goals, the fact that regionalist parties share the issue of regional autonomy as their 'core business' qualifies them as a party family (De Winter et al 2006). Moreover, with some exceptions, most of the regionalist family is broadly supportive of European integration as a principle, though with qualifications on the exact nature of integration in relation to EU institutions, the policies pursued at the EU level and the various changes proposed to the EU treaties. Whilst individual regionalist parties have policies on EU policies, many of the parties are members of the European Free Alliance-Democratic Party of the Peoples of Europe, which operates as a transnational federation of regionalists and acts as a collective voice in the EU and European Parliament. Thus, whilst regional governments have had representative organisations such as the Assembly of Regions, CALRE, Committee of the Regions, etc, regionalist parties have used the EFA-DPPE organisation to advance their cause in the European Parliament and Committee of the Regions. This is a much smaller focus than the COR, as most regions do not have regionalist parties, even though they may have regional governments. This paper will examine the development and success of the EFA-DPPE in organising regionalists as well as advancing its own version of a Europe of the Regions.

Regionalists and a Europe of the Regions

The European Free Alliance was formed in 1981 by six regionalist parties, driven by the reality of direct elections to the European Parliament. Since then, the organisation has waxed and waned in size to become the European Free Alliance-Democratic Party of the Peoples of Europe in 1994: a Euro-party. Though the EFA started out with 6 founding members, it grew to 31 full members and 2 observer party members in 2007. However, expansion in the size of the party family has been incomplete in two ways. First, there remain some significant regionalist parties which are not members of the European Free Alliance such as *Convergencia i Unio*, the *Lega Nord* and *Sud Tiroler Volkspartei*. Therefore the EFA has never operated as an exclusive representative of the regionalist party family. Second, EFA representation within the European Parliament has been limited, partly as a consequence of the decision of some regionalist parties to sit with the

traditional party families - CiU sits with the Liberal Democrats for example – whilst the EFA parties have had limited success in electing representatives to the European Parliament historically. Indeed, since direct elections to the European Parliament began in 1979, there has been only one parliamentary term 1994-9, in which the EFA were the predominant force in a political group in Strasbourg. Indeed, EFA MEPs have participated in five different political groups since 1979. Thus, despite the EFA's success in growing its membership to become a stable organisation, this stability has not translated to the European parliamentary level, where the 5 EFA-DPPE MEPs sit in a combined group with the Greens.

Like the other Euro-parties, the EFA-DPPE has had to operate in a changing Europe. If the European Union's deepening and widening agendas are taken into account, it is clear that the EFA-DPPE now exists within a more integrated Union, with a single currency in many member states (with mobilised regionalist parties) and a large number of common policies. Moreover, compared to the early 1980s, the European Parliament is institutionally stronger – making it an important political arena for regionalists – whilst regional governments have come to play some role in European institutions and policymaking through bodies such as the Committee of the Regions. Whilst regionalist parties within the EFA-DPPE have been generally supportive of the last two decades of European deepening, they have faced a challenging political opportunity structure through the widening of the EU. Indeed, with the exception of Spanish accession in 1986, enlargement has brought little to the EFA-DPPE in the way of member parties, new allies and MEPs. Despite the fact that regionalists have not benefited from the enlargement of the EU to add Greece, Portugal, Austria, Finland and Sweden, followed by ten new states in 2004 and then Bulgaria and Rumania in 2007, the EFA-DPPE has grown, albeit through adding relatively small parties. However, it is arguable that the Eastern enlargement has had a negative impact on the EFA-DPPE, as it has markedly altered the balance of the EU away from states with strong regionalist parties and regional governments. Enlargement in 2004 added ten predominantly centralised states to the European Union as opposed to regionalised or federal states.² Indeed, as this paper will argue, whilst other Euro-parties benefited from enlargement at the European elections in

2004 - with new states bringing large numbers of new MEPs – the EFA-DPPE struggled to maintain let alone expand its level of representation in the European Parliament. The nature of the expansion also made the prospect of a Europe of the regions even more remote. However, this situation is very much the *status quo* for the EFA-DPPE. It has faced endemic problems in electing MEPs and constructing a political group from 1979 onwards: especially as EFA MEPs currently only represent 3 EU member states. Participation in political groups with MEPs from other party families has been the norm for the EFA-DPPE.

Of course, whilst regionalists might support and have an interest in the creation of a Europe of the Regions, there is no exact constitutional design or policy advanced by regionalist parties for a Europe of the Regions. There are several connected reasons for this. Keating (1998) amongst others, has argued that European regional government is actually asymmetrical government, meaning that there is no uniform regional government across EU member states, no ‘third level’ and even significant asymmetries between regional governments within states (Spain and the UK for example). A similar point could be made about regionalist parties. Whilst the parties share the ‘core business’ of autonomy, the level of autonomy they seek is highly differentiated. De Winter (1998) organised regionalist parties into five different types according to their autonomy goals: independentists, autonomists, protectionists, national-federalists and irredentists.

In this sense, it would be difficult for regionalists to adopt a common constitutional model for the EU either individually or as part of a common programme within the EFA-DPPE organisation. For example, individual regionalist parties support independence (SNP), full sovereignty (PNV), have ambiguous attitudes to independence and autonomy (Plaid Cymru), support federalism (Volksunie/SPIRIT, Partido Andalucista) and support regional autonomy. This diversity of opinion is reflected in the EFA-DPPE’s stance on European integration and regional autonomy. In its 2005 statutes, the EFA-DPPE stated that it supported ‘European unity and the creation of a European union of free peoples based on the principle of subsidiarity who believe in solidarity with each other and other peoples of the world’ in addition to ‘promoting the European integration based on the

diversity of peoples, cultures, languages and regions.’³ This position on the regionalists’ ‘core business’ is obviously quite vague, reflecting the difficulties of generating an acceptable common position that reflects the variety of specific regionalist autonomy goals, not least when the parties goals have evolved through both European integration and internal changes.⁴

A Weak Regionalist Party Family?

The European Free Alliance can be considered as a weak but growing party family. Since its inception, the EFA has succeeded in organising the majority of active regionalist parties in Western Europe into its ranks. Though some of these parties are small and attract little electoral support, the EFA did manage to include the larger parties such as the SNP in the 1980s, the Lega Nord in the 1990s (until its expulsion in 1994) and the Partido Nacionalista Vasco as an EFA observer from 1999-2004. However, the fact that not all regionalist parties are within the EFA is significant, as it has rendered the EFA as an incomplete family representative (De Winter 2001). The most prominent examples are *Convergencia i Unio* in Catalonia, which has never joined the European Free Alliance or associated with other regionalists in the European Parliament; the Lega Nord in Italy, which was an EFA member in the early 1990s before its expulsion from the organisation through its association with the DN in the 1994 centre-right coalition government of Berlusconi; the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* in Italy and the *Svenska folkpartiet* in Finland.⁵ What is crucial about these parties is that they enjoy electoral representation in their member states, with a role in government and representation in the European Parliament.⁶ The latter fact deprived the EFA-DPPE of 8 MEPs in the European Parliament from 1999-2004 and then 6 MEPs from 2004 onwards (with 1 CDC, 1 PNV and 4 Lega Nord MEPs). Thus in the current period, the EFA-DPPE has only 5 MEPs from the regionalist family. In addition, there are a number of outliers within the regionalist party family who do not associate with the EFA or rather parties which the EFA would refuse to have as a member. The former Herri Batasuna from the Basque Country is one example, whilst the Vlaams Belang is another. Whilst the autonomy goals

of these two parties might fit with the European Free Alliance, their ideological attributes, policies and strategies do not. However, they add to the fragmented nature of the regionalist political family and the lack of fit between the EFA-DPPE and the universe of regionalist parties.

The European Free Alliance – Moving East?

The genesis of the European Free Alliance was the Bastia agreement of 1979, which laid the foundations for the formation of the EFA in 1981. The Bastia agreement sought to establish a common manifesto for the first direct elections to the European Parliament. It was signed by five parties which became EFA members – the Volksunie, Fryske Nasjonale Partij, Partei Deutschsprachiger Belgier, Unione di u Popule Corsu and the Elsass-Lothringischer Volkspartei – but also two parties which did not: Convergencia Democrática de Catalunya and the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (which became an EFA observer for a time two decades later). Notably, these latter two parties emerged to become major electoral forces in their regions and governing parties with representatives within the European Parliament after the Spanish accession in 1986. However, these parties joined the traditional political groups within the European Parliament and did not participate in the EFA or any regionalist grouping within the parliament, effectively limiting the EFA's operations within the European Parliament on a permanent basis.

Over time, the EFA began to develop as a transnational party federation. It developed a common platform that began as a set of common principles and then evolved into broader manifestos and policy positions. The EFA-DPPE parties are pro-European integration, seek defence/promotion of minority languages and support greater autonomy and representation for regions within EU institutions. In 2000, the EFA-DPPE sought to define itself as a proponent of 'progressive nationalism' meaning a party committed to:

- democracy and constitutionalism
- respect for human rights and minorities
- opposition to racism and xenophobia

- civic and inclusive identities
- universal support for rights to self-determination of stateless nations
- pluralism over the constitutional form of self-determination
- peaceful political activities
- sustainable development and cultural and ecological diversity (EFA-DPPE 2000: 2)

The institutionalisation of the EFA-DPPE within the European Parliament and its participation in the Greens-EFA political group has led to a range of different policy positions and activities. The EFA-DPPE adopts policy positions in relation to sustainable development (Greens/EFA 2001); the main themes at European Council summits (Green/EFA 2002); a position on globalisation at the world parliamentary forum in Porto Alegre (Green/EFA 2002a); a policy towards the Convention on the Future of Europe (Green/EFA 2002b); and policy and participation at the United Nations summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg. These types of policy positions, in addition to policy stances adopted by the EFA at its general assemblies and the positions adopted by its MEPs mean that the EFA is now a much deeper organisation in terms of policy than it was at its inception. Not only have member parties adopted common policies, but policies in line with Green parties, which will become part of the platforms of new political parties joining the EFA-DPPE in future through enlargement: all examples of the impact of the Europeanisation of political parties that has been driven by European integration (De Winter and Gomez-Reino 2002).

Table 1. Membership of the European Free Alliance-Democratic Party of the Peoples of Europe 2007

Full Members (state)	Observer Members (state)
Alleanza Libera Emiliana (Italy)	Liga Transilvania-Banat (Romania)
Ålands Framtid (Sweden)	Magyar Federalista Part (Slovakia)
Bloque Nacionalista Galego (Spain)	
Chunta Aragonesista (Spain)	
Enotna Lista (Austria)	
Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Spain)	
Eusko Alkartasuna (Spain)	
Fryske Nasjonale Partij (Netherlands)	

Liga Fronte Veneto (Italy)
Ligue Savoisiennne (France)
Lithuanian Polish Peoples Party (Lithuania)
Mebyon Kernow (UK)
Moravané (Czech Republic)
Mouvement Région Savoie (France)
Partido Andalucista (Spain)
Partei Deutschsprachigen Belgier (Belgium)
Partit Occitan (France)
Partit Socialista de Mallorca (Spain)
Partito Sardo D'Azione (Italy)
Partitu di a Nazione Corsa (France)
Plaid Cymru (UK)
Ruch Autonomii Slaska (Poland)
Scottish National Party (UK)
Slovenska Skupnost (Italy)
SPIRIT (Belgium)
Union Démocratique Bretonne (France)
Union de Peuple Alsacien (France)
Union für Südtirol (Italy)
Union Valdôtaine (Italy)
Unitat Catalunya (France)
Vinozhito Rainbow Party (Greece)

The imminent prospect of EU enlargement in 2004 provoked efforts at EFA-enlargement: though this activity has been a constant one since the establishment of the European Free Alliance in 1981. However, given the political landscape in the East with relatively new, weak and unstable regionalist political parties, extending the EFA family has not been easy. The positive side of enlargement for the EFA was the large number of ethnic and linguistic minorities in the Eastern states though the negative side was the political complexion of some of these parties and the absence of regional governments in the acceding states. Whilst there are clear minority questions in states such as the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia, very few of these minorities have strong language or regionalist political parties: the Hungarian community in Slovakia stands out as the only example. Moreover, there is little of the 'bottom-up regionalism' found in Western Europe (Keating and Loughlin 1997), where regionalist parties have politicised the centre-periphery cleavage to the extent that central governments have established regional government. Regional structures have been on the agendas of Eastern European

governments in recent years, with decentralisation linking up with the need to manage EU structural funds in the regions, but there are few similarities at this time with the Basque Country, Catalonia, Flanders or Scotland. This is not to discount future developments however, for two reasons. First, regionalism as a political force can be quite fluid and unpredictable, clearly indicated by emergence of new regionalism through the unexpected rise of the Lega Nord in Italy, the Vlaams Blok in Flanders as well as smaller parties in France and Spain. Regionalism is not purely a product of the 1960s and 1970s. Second, regionalism is not merely the practice of political parties. Regional governments also drive regionalist policies and agendas. Despite their ethnic and linguistic homogeneity and lack of regionalist parties, the German Länder have been active in setting the regional agenda domestically and across Europe to become assertive policy actors within the European Union. The development of regional governments in Eastern European states in the coming years may therefore generate a form of regionalism that boosts regional involvement in EU institutions and policies.

The EFA itself has sought to expand into the accession states and beyond. In the early 1990s, the Slovene minority party in Northeast Italy, Slovenska Skupnost and the Slovak independence party, Slovenska Narodna Strana joined the European Free Alliance. Similarly, the EFA and Rainbow Group became involved in the International Network of Centre Parties, to explore links with parties from Scandinavia (in preparation for Finland and Sweden joining the EU in 1995) as well as the Baltic states and East-central Europe. The EFA parties were involved in meetings in Poland and Estonia with centrist parties from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary and Poland, but the collapse of the Rainbow group in 1994 led to the abandonment of this project (Lynch 1996: 149). However, such efforts continued in the 1990s and into the new century. For example, representatives of the Hungarian minority came to Brussels to meet with the EFA in March 2001. An event quickly followed by the EFA visit to Slovakia in April 2001 to investigate the treatment of the Hungarian and Roma minorities in the accession state, and also explore the prospects for electoral co-operation and member parties. At the EFA general assembly in November 2001, four regional/minority parties joined the EFA as observers, with some subsequently becoming full members (see table 1). Further visits were made by the EFA

to Poland in 2002 and 2003, with an EFA conference in Poland alongside the Silesian minority. The EFA also organised conferences in Lithuania in July 2003 and Romania in September 2003, to explore minority issues as well as the prospects for post-enlargement electoral co-operation and EFA membership.

One of the difficulties with the EFA expansion to the East is the quality, organisation and electoral presence of the various regionalist parties who have sought to become EFA members. For example, electoral data on the 4 parties from the accession states that have become members and observers of the EFA is extremely thin. *Ruch Autonomii Slaska* (established in 1990) from Poland did not feature prominently at the 2001 election to the Sejm, where it was part of the Civic Platform list, in contrast to *Mniejszosc Niemiecka* (MN - German Minority) which gained 47,230 votes (0.36%) in 2001 and then 34,469 votes (0.3%) in 2005 and 2 seats on each occasion and *Niemiecka Mniejszosc Górnego Slaska* (MGS - German Minority of Upper Silesia) which gained 8,024 votes in 2001 (0.06%). *Ruch Autonomii Slaska* and the MGS agreed to establish an electoral coalition for the local and regional elections of 2002, but there is no data on its performance at this election. Where *Ruch Autonomii Slaska* did perform at the 2001 election was in the Senate contest, where its candidates gained an average of 17% in the three main Silesian constituencies (Gliwice, Katowice and Rybnik) where it gained a total of 157,277 votes. However, this level of support was completely obscured by the electoral performance of the main political parties in Poland.

The Magyar Föderalista Part also did not feature in recent elections in Slovakia in 2002, 2003 and 2006, in contrast to *Strana mad'arskej koalície - Magyar Koalíció Pártja* which achieved 321,069 votes (11.16%) and 20 seats at the 2002 election to become the fourth largest party and had four Ministerial posts in the coalition government. In alliance with other parties, the MKP won control of 5 of the 8 Slovak regional councils at the 2003 followed by 11.7% and 20 seats at the 2006 general election. In the Czech Republic, there is no electoral record for *Moravané*, a current full EFA member, though the *Moravska demokraticka strana* (Moravian Democratic Party) gained 12,957 votes (0.27%) in 2002. Finally, the Liga Transilvania-Banat became involved with the EFA-DPPE before the

2007 Romanian accession, but is a party that had no presence in recent Romanian elections, in contrast to the DMR/RMDSZ - Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (*Uniunea Democrată a Maghiarilor din România*) which gained 736,863 votes (6.8%) and 27 seats at the 2000 legislative elections and 6.2% and 22 seats in 2004. The only other EFA member from enlargement was the Polish Peoples Party in Lithuania for which there is no electoral data (though it has succeeded in electing an MEP and joining the Greens- EFA group in the European Parliament), in contrast to Electoral Action of Lithuanian Poles (*Lietuvos lenku rinkimu akcija*), which gained 28,641 list votes (1.95%) and 40,376 constituency votes (2.75%) and 2 seats out of 141 seats at the 2000 election and 2 seats and 3.8% in 2004.

The EFA's limited success in recruiting regionalist parties through EU enlargement is not surprising, as it reflects the limited numbers of existing parties in the East and the absence of regional structures. The area is characterised by linguistic and national minorities, border issues, etc, but these have not played into the EFA's hands at this point. The EFA's difficulties in the East – in terms of recruiting parties and also prospective MEPs – are clearly illustrated in comparison to the traditional party families. For example, the Socialist Group in the European Parliament has 6 MEPs from Bulgaria, 9 MEPs from Hungary, 9 MEPs from Poland and 3 from Malta, whilst the European Peoples Party group has 15 MEPs from Poland, 9 from Romania, 8 from Slovakia and 13 from Hungary. In addition, many of the parties from the 2004 and 2007 accession states are large parties and also governing parties. Moreover, as indicated above, some of the parties which might be expected to associate with the EFA-DPPE such as the *Magyar Koalíció Pártja* in Slovakia are members of another political group - in this case the EPP. The MKP's two MEPs therefore sit with a non-regionalist party group, giving no aid at this stage to the prospects for expanding the MEP-contingent within the European Parliament to advance the prospects of a regionalist party group. Thus Eastern enlargement may have the effect of adding to the size of the regionalist contingent within the European Parliament which is not aligned with the European Free Alliance or a regionalist political group within the parliament. Of course, this situation has been the norm for the EFA parties since European elections began in 1979. It might be somewhat

depressing for the EFA-DPPE to realise that enlargement will not bring a regionalist political group, but, that has been reality for the EFA since its inception. From 2004-9, the EFA-DPPE continued to cooperate with the Greens in a joint group in the European Parliament.

However, one of the defining characteristics of the EFA since its inception has been its involvement in party-building and alliance construction. The EFA staff in Brussels and the Volksunie MEPs in particular were active in assisting small regionalist parties to develop their policies, organisations and electoral capacities.⁷ Indeed, in terms of administration, electoral expertise and organisation, the EFA structure operated as an external support system for regionalist parties in France and Italy. Similarly, the EFA assisted regionalist parties to construct and maintain electoral alliances for European elections in order to increase the chances of regionalist MEPs being elected: evident in France, Italy and Spain, with some successes over time. Thus, whilst the current electoral/organisational situation of regionalist parties in the accession states looks bleak, the EFA-DPPE organisation will seek to improve this situation through intervening to aid parties in terms of support, resources and expertise and help create electoral coalitions to help Eastern regionalists to surpass electoral thresholds at European, national and regional elections. However, even here, we are talking about very small numbers of MEPs being elected.

Regionalists in the European Parliament

The political parties associated with the European Free Alliance have struggled in relation to representation in the European Parliament. The EFA had some transnational predecessors in the 1940s (FUEN and the International Congress of European Nations and Regions) and the 1970s (the Bureau of Unrepresented European Nations), though most inter-regionalist contact occurred bilaterally between individual parties (Lynch 1996): 135-141). However, European integration in the specific form of direct elections to the European Parliament from 1979 onwards altered such practices considerably. Indeed, European elections drove the formation of the EFA, efforts at the construction of

a regionalist political family, the establishment of a regionalist political group in the European Parliament as well as the development of cross-party co-operation between regionalists within EU member states to create electoral alliances for European elections (especially in France, Italy and Spain). However, whilst European elections have driven the construction of the EFA, the EFA has been least successful in relation to elections to the European Parliament, with very few of the EFA-DPPE parties succeeding in electing MEPs. For example, only 8 of the 31 existing EFA-DPPE members have elected MEPs since 1979. Moreover only 7 of those parties had MEPs in the 1999-2004 European Parliament, with one of them, from the Union Valdôtaine sitting with the ELDR not the other EFA-DPPE parties within the Green-EFA political group. The post-2004 position, despite enlargement, is not much better – with only 5 EFA MEPs.

The most striking characteristic about the impact of the regionalist political family in the European Parliament has been its failure to produce a regionalist political group. The EFA and DPPE emerged, but a strong and coherent regionalist political group has continued to elude the EFA parties. Instead, regionalist MEPs have participated in a range of political groups within the parliament. The EFA core around the Volksunie (now represented in the EFA by SPIRIT), was a member of five different groups since 1979 (see table 2). The Technical Co-ordination Group from 1979-84 was an ad hoc group of unattached MEPs, who sought to align to gain resources, committee memberships and staff: the prizes available to political groups. But, it only contained two regionalist MEPs, one from the Volksunie and one from the now extinct *Rassemblement Wallon*. Matters did not improve with Rainbow Group 1 from 1984-89, where 2 Volksunie MEPs and 1 Partito Sardo d’Azione MEP sat with the Greens, anti-European Danish party and some other small parties. However, from 1989-1994, the EFA was the predominant numerical contingent with Rainbow Group 2: the nearest thing to a regionalist political group.⁸ The EFA parties performed badly at the 1994 European elections and were left to form a small part of an ad hoc group with *Énergie Radical* from France and the Radical Party from Italy. Things improved in 1999 when the EFA-DPPE was reunited with the Greens, in a much more coherent political group, but there are still more regionalist MEPs outside this group than the ten EFA-DPPE MEPs in the parliament. The situation since 2004 is

not dissimilar to this. The clear picture that emerges, though, is that the EFA’s difficulties at group formation have become a permanent difficulty following each European election and that the EFA-DPPE has failed to organise all its potential parties within one political group. The EFA-DPPE may have become institutionalised as a party family, but the family has never become institutionalised in the European Parliament, in spite of over 25 years of organisational efforts, alliance-formation and bridge-building amongst regionalist and non-regionalist parties.

Table 2. The EFA-DPPE and Political Groups in the European Parliament 1979-2004

Session	Group Name	Regionalist MEPs (group total)
1979-84	Technical co-ordination group	2 (12)
1984-89	Rainbow Group 1	3 (20)
1989-1994	Rainbow Group 2	8 (15)
1994-1999	European Radical Alliance	4 (19)
1999-2004	Greens-European Free Alliance	10 (45)
2004-2009	Greens-European Free Alliance	5 (42)

The 1999-2004 parliament, can be seen as something of a high point for the EFA parties, during which they had their highest number of MEPs elected and formed a more substantial component of the Green-EFA political group. However, even at its peak, the downside of this situation is that the EFA contingent only involved 3 member states – Belgium, Spain and the UK – and a small number of parties. Marginal changes to support for those parties with two MEPS (Plaid Cymru, SNP and SPIRIT) or reduced representation of member states in the European Parliament due to enlargement itself, could see the EFA MEPs reduced in number quite significantly. Indeed that was exactly what happened in 2004. Plaid was reduced to one MEP, the Volksunie disappeared into successor parties like SPIRIT (De Winter 2006) which is an EFA-DPPE party that sits in the Socialist group whilst shifting electoral alliances and losses of electoral support in Spain saw the loss of the MEPs who represented the BNG, PNV and Partido Andalucista

and only left the MEP shared by Eusko Alkartasuna/ERC. The 2004 election therefore had consequences for the EFA-DPPE parties within the European Parliament, with little prospect of their replacement by regionalist parties from the accession states as was explained above. If these problems weren't enough, the rules of the game for recognition and funding of Euro-parties and political groups changed with enlargement. Euro-parties will be required to contain at least 8 member parties from the 27 member states, with representatives elected at the European, national or regional level. Whilst political groups within the European Parliament will have to comprise MEPs representing at least 20% of the member states, with a minimum of 20 MEPs needed to form a group (European Parliament 2003).

Regionalist Parties and Multi-level Governance

Whilst regionalist parties have experienced a limited role within the European Parliament due to the electoral performance of party family members, European integration has generated other arenas for regionalist political mobilisation. Both the Committee of the Regions and the recognition of Constitutional Regions within the EU have produced new opportunities for regionalist parties (Lynch 2004). Within the Committee of the Regions, the EFA parties were initially marginalised but following the organisation of COR representatives into party groups they developed a more coherent role – though for one term of the COR only. Within the COR, EFA aligned with a group of independents from English local authorities plus Ireland's governing party, Fianna Fail, to establish the European Alliance as a party group from 1999-2004. The group had clear parallels with the organisation of regionalists in the European Parliament, with the need for a formal alliance with non-regionalists to establish political groups that would be recognised and funded by European institutions. The EFA parties were a minority within the European Alliance, but then so were Fianna Fail and the Independents. Clearly, without this group, each would be unattached members of the COR and lack committee places and political clout. The EFA members within the COR were not marginal figures within the sphere of multi-level governance. EFA members of the COR included: Paul Van Grembergen of SPIRIT, the Flemish Minister for Interior, Housing, Civil Service, Foreign Trade and

Urban Policy; Keith Brown of the SNP, a local council leader; Juan José Ibarretxe of PNV, who is President of the Basque Country; Dino Viérin of the Union Valdotaïne, who is President of the Autonomous Region of Val D'Aosta.⁹ Thus, four of the European Alliance's COR delegation of ten members came from the EFA parties. Amongst the alternate COR members, the EFA was represented by politicians from SPIRIT, Plaid Cymru, the PNV and the SNP. Similarly, though the European Alliance was a relatively loose grouping of regionalists and non-regionalists, it developed some programmatic coherence as necessitated by European institutional rules plus the need for group coherence within the COR. The European Alliance had eight main principles, which were closely aligned with long-standing EFA policy positions:

- Environmental and Sustainable development as defined in the Brundtland Report from the UN with the full implementation of the Kyoto Protocol.
- Peace, détente;
- Freedom and right of self-determination;
- Defence of all languages, cultures and local government;
- An open Europe of autonomous regions and nations;
- Openness and grass-roots democracy;
- Sound management of all European structures, in order to prevent fraud and waste.
- The defence of human rights (European Alliance 2004).

European Alliance members we are committed to 'actively support and vote for an open Europe of regions and nations and the highest possible standards for environmental protection, workers' health, consumer protection, veterinary rules, social welfare and democratic principles. The members commit themselves to work together to obtain and defend such rights and equality of treatment. At the same time, they acknowledge the full political autonomy of the individual members and groupings.' (European Alliance 2004). Thus, similar to previous quasi-regionalist political groups, the European Alliance simultaneously adopted common positions and allowed members to act autonomously: another uneasy balancing act for the parties involved. However, this version of the European Alliance ran

for only one term. From 2004, the organisation was reconstituted as the Union for Europe of the Nations-European Alliance group and the EFA-DPPE parties left. Despite EFA-DPPE representation in the COR and the presence of EFA parties in regional parliaments and some governments, the regionalists found themselves institutionally marginalised within the Committee of the Regions.

Conclusion

Despite the 2004 and 2007 enlargements and the addition of 12 new member states to the European Union, the prospects for a Europe of the Regions seems as remote as ever. However, given the vague, utopian aspect to the concept, this should not be surprising. The real question worth considering is whether the EU enlargements have assisted the rise of a 'third level' in the EU and the political representation of regionalists in EU institutions. What seems clear is that the traditional party families and political groups have benefited most from the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, with a host of new MEPs, member states governments and party members. Such developments extended the institutional and policy advantages of the PES, EPP and ELDR within the European Parliament and other institutions, leaving the EFA-DPPE an even more marginal player. Similarly regionalist involvement in the Committee of the Regions has declined with the reorientation of the European Alliance group and changes in support for regionalist parties. However, this is very much an extension of a current reality rather than anything radically new. The EFA-DPPE response has been the same as at every enlargement – look for potential allies and members, assist member parties in forming electoral coalitions and try to push towards a stronger EFA-DPPE contingent within the European Parliament with the prospect of the EFA family creating a stand-alone regionalist political group. However, as the post-2004 experience has demonstrated, a stand-alone regionalist group remains as remote as ever, due to electoral decline and the fact that a number of regionalist parties associate with other political groups in the European Parliament.. The alliance with the Greens in the European Parliament therefore seems set to become a more permanent phenomenon.

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1. Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (2002), *Declaration on Future Governance of the EU*.

2. If enlargement involved the latter states – more Spains and Belgiums – this would impact upon the Committee of the Regions, regional relations with the Commission and pressure for regional participation in the Council of Ministers.
3. From the statutes passed at the meeting of the EFA General Assembly in Rennes, 27th-28th May 2005.
4. See for example, the evolution of the Partido Nacionalista Vasco's autonomy position towards 'full sovereignty in Perez-Nievas (2006), 'The Partido Nacionalista Vasco: Redefining Political Goals at the Turn of the Century', in Lieven De Winter, Marga Gomez-Reion Cachafeiro and Peter Lynch ((Eds), *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity Politics and the Revival of the Territorial Cleavage*, Barcelona: ICPS.
5. To this short list one could add a large number of regionalist parties in the autonomous communities in Spain.
6. The CiU was in government in Catalonia from 1980 to 2003; the Lega is currently part of the centre-right coalition in Italy, whilst the Sfp has been a member of most post-war Finnish governments. Moreover, the CiU has two MEPs in the ELDR, the Lega has four MEPs in the technical co-ordination group, the SVP has an MEP within the EPP the Sfp has one MEP in the 1999-2004 European Parliament who sits with the ELDR.
7. Whether these efforts continue with the VU's demise remains to be seen, though the SPIRIT MEPs who succeeded the VU have maintained a guiding role within the EFA-DPPE.
8. The group contained MEPs from the VU, PsdA, SNP, Partido Andalucista, Eusko Alkartasuna/Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya and the Unione di u Popule Corsu: representing two more member states than the current EFA-DPPE configuration in the European Parliament.
9. The involvement of the Union Valdôtaine in the EA stands in contrast to the MEP from this party, who sits with the ELDR.