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The EU Party System after Eastern Enlargement

Hermann Schmitt
Jacques Thomassen

Institut für Höhere Studien
Institute for Advanced Studies
Vienna

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Contact:

Hermann Schmitt
☎: +49/621/181-2881
email: Hermann.Schmitt@mzes.uni-mannheim.de

Jacques Thomassen
☎: +31/53/489-3225
email: j.j.a.thomassen@bsk.utwente.nl

Founded in 1963 by two prominent Austrians living in exile – the sociologist Paul F. Lazarsfeld and the economist Oskar Morgenstern – with the financial support from the Ford Foundation, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, and the City of Vienna, the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) is the first institution for postgraduate education and research in economics and the social sciences in Austria. The **Political Science Series** presents research done at the Department of Political Science and aims to share "work in progress" before formal publication. It includes papers by the Department's teaching and research staff, visiting professors, graduate students, visiting fellows, and invited participants in seminars, workshops, and conferences. As usual, authors bear full responsibility for the content of their contributions.

Das Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS) wurde im Jahr 1963 von zwei prominenten Exilösterreichern – dem Soziologen Paul F. Lazarsfeld und dem Ökonomen Oskar Morgenstern – mit Hilfe der Ford-Stiftung, des Österreichischen Bundesministeriums für Unterricht und der Stadt Wien gegründet und ist somit die erste nachuniversitäre Lehr- und Forschungsstätte für die Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften in Österreich. Die **Reihe Politikwissenschaft** bietet Einblick in die Forschungsarbeit der Abteilung für Politikwissenschaft und verfolgt das Ziel, abteilungsinterne Diskussionsbeiträge einer breiteren fachinternen Öffentlichkeit zugänglich zu machen. Die inhaltliche Verantwortung für die veröffentlichten Beiträge liegt bei den Autoren und Autorinnen. Gastbeiträge werden als solche gekennzeichnet.

Abstract

From 1953 on, a party system of the European Union has been build up with, at the end, some 6 or 7 distinct and more or less cohesive parties acting in parliament and beyond. It has been said that this party system was “ready for power” during the 5th legislature of the directly elected European Parliament. In this article we ask whether and how Eastern enlargement has changed this state of affairs. The result of the empirical analysis is remarkably ambivalent: first, Eastern enlargement has increased the proportion of “homeless” MEPs, i.e. the non-aligned, and has at the same time added to the strength of the conservative majority of the house. Second, it did not significantly affect the format of the party system nor the stature of its political groups, neither their distinctiveness nor their cohesiveness. And third, the parties from the new Eastern member countries are not yet very well “rooted” in their national electorates. This is why the diagnosis of this early examination has to remain somewhat inconclusive – probably for some years to come.

Zusammenfassung

Seit 1953 hat sich ein Parteiensystem der Europäischen Union (EU) herausgebildet, das aus mittlerweile 6 bis 7 mehr oder weniger kohärenten Parteien besteht, die im Europäischen Parlament und darüber hinaus operieren. Manche Beobachter haben behauptet, dass dieses Parteiensystem in der 5. Legislaturperiode seit der Direktwahl des Europäischen Parlaments „ready for power“ gewesen sei. In diesem Paper wird der Frage nachgegangen, ob und wie die Osterweiterung diesen Stand der Dinge verändert hat. Das Resultat der empirischen Analyse ist auffallend ambivalent. Erstens hat die Osterweiterung den Anteil an „heimatlosen“ – d.h. nicht an Fraktionen gebundenen – Europaparlamentariern erhöht und gleichzeitig die konservative Mehrheit im Parlament gestärkt. Zweitens hat die Osterweiterung das Format des Parteiensystems und die Gestalt der Fraktionen nicht signifikant verändert – weder ihre Unterschiedlichkeit noch ihre Kohärenz. Und drittens sind die Parteien der neuen osteuropäischen Mitgliedsstaaten noch nicht richtig in den nationalen Wählerschaften verankert. Zum jetzigen Zeitpunkt lassen sich daher noch keine eindeutigen Schlussfolgerungen über die Auswirkungen der Osterweiterung auf das EU-Parteiensystem ziehen.

Keywords

EU-party system, Eastern Enlargement, party competition, party cleavages, ideology

Schlagwörter

EU-Parteiensystem, Osterweiterung, Parteienwettbewerb, Parteikonfliktlinien, Ideologie

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Introduction

One of the more accepted definitions of a party system looks at it as the sum of all relevant parties of a political system plus the relations they have with one another (Sartori, 1976). This definition gains complexity when applied to the multi-level system of governance of the European Union.[1] What is a European Union party? For being an EU party, does it require to be based on an 'own' EU-wide extra-parliamentary organisation? Does an EU party, itself, need to "present at elections, and be capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office" (as Sartori put it in his seminal definition of a political party)? What if national and local member parties in their place nominate candidates and in local campaigns compete for votes, does this harm the notion of EU parties, of an EU party system and of a democratic EU-wide party competition?[2]

The contrary seems to be the case. In order to properly recognise the multi-level nature of the EU party system, we need to consider EU-national party relations (between EPP and CDU, for example) as much a part of it as EU-EU party relations (like those between EPP and PSE), and even national-national relations (between the French PS and British Labour, or between VVD and D'66) are a part of the overall picture. Cross-level party relations in particular might attract strategic conflict and policy disagreement. But local autonomy and regional variation is a fact of life in many national party systems as well, and must therefore not be seen as holding-up the efficient functioning of the overall system.

If we accept the notion of a multi-level party system, with some functions allocated in local party organisations, others at the national level, and still others at the level of the European Union, the question of compatibility of the different layers of the party system arises. Building an overall EU party system upon those of the EU member countries obviously requires some basic structural similarity between them. One school of thought argues, in the Rokkanian tradition, that this compatibility has been granted in the past by a roughly similar cleavage structure which gave western European party systems their particular shape (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). At the time of suffrage expansion, i.e. at a time when social cleavages were first translated into (mass) electoral alliances, the basic and most salient socio-political conflict was fought between industrial labour and capital. This has led almost everywhere to the formation of labour unions and, in the political and parliamentary sphere, of a labour party (or a socialist or social democratic party) which opposed the liberal and conservative (or Christian-democratic) forces that were more or less closely allied with entrepreneurial

1 See on multi-level systems of governance e.g. König et al. (1996), Kohler-Koch and Eisig (1998), or Hooghe and Marks (2001).

2 Transposed to the European level, it suggests that Estonian or Portuguese EP candidates – to name just two geographically distant member nationalities – must not be selected in Brussels by a central party authority. In fact, there are good normative democratic reasons (going back to the participation rights of local members and supporters) why they should not be selected centrally but locally (e.g. Abendroth, 1964).

interests. Other, older, socio-political conflicts – the one between the primary and secondary sector; between church and state; or between centre and periphery – have also contributed to the characteristic form of west European party systems. While there is considerable variation in the national cleavage structures upon which west European party systems have been build, the commonalities between them have been strong enough to support a EU-wide 'super structure' which successfully aggregates, in a few EU-wide parties, almost every national party gaining representation in the elections to the European Parliament – irrespective of obvious differences between governmental status and participation in coalition governments in which these parties are involved nationally.

On May 1, 2004, eight post-communist party systems (plus those of Cyprus and Malta) were added to the EU party system by what was called the 'eastward enlargement' of the European Union. Roughly six weeks later, in mid-June, the members of the European Parliament were directly elected. This time, about 350 million[3] EU citizens from 25 member countries were entitled to vote. The question that we will pursue in this paper is whether these new post-communist party systems are sufficiently similar to the western European 'model' in order to be easily integrated. Put in another way, we are asking whether the eastward enlargement might have weakened the EU party system – characteristic dimensions of its strength having been the relative concentration of the party system, and the distinctiveness and cohesion of its constituent parts.

3 The voting age population of the USA is 100 million less.

1. The EU Party System before May 1, 2004

During its first five decades, the EU party system was a remarkably efficient device for integrating a host of new entrants into a rather 'slim' structure.[4] The basic design of it was established already in 1953 when, in the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community, Christian-democrats, socialists and liberals established the first trans-national parliamentary groups. From the very beginning of the European project, only eight years after the end of the second world war, national political parties were organising their European co-operation on the basis of common socio-political roots and ideological proximity rather than nationality.

New entrants to be integrated in the early defined European party system came from altogether nine additional member-countries which joined the original six between 1973 and 1996. [5] But also 'really new' parties emerging in the existing member-countries eventually entered parliament.[6]

1973 was a turbulent year for what is now called the EU party system: three new political groups emerged. A communist group was formed out of French (PCF) and Italian (PCI) deputies. In 1989, with the breakdown of communism and some time ahead of the collapse of the post-WW II party system of Italy in 1992, this group lost the main successor-party of the PCI (the Italian PDS) to the socialist group, leaving the French communists with some new 'far left'-acquisitions (the German PDS, among others) in a somewhat diminished far-left group.

Still in 1973, British Conservatives (and allies) and French Gaullists (and allies) formed a new political group each. Due to their different social roots and political perspectives (not least on matters of European integration), both did not easily fit into the Christian-democratic EPP. Yet the draw of this powerful agglomeration of EP members eventually overcame these socio-political obstacles: The British and Danish conservatives associated themselves with the EPP in 1992 (following the Spanish conservatives who already had joined the EPP in 1989), and the Gaullist RPR joined after the 1994 European Parliament election.

All of these parties institutionalise socio-political conflicts that originate in the more or less distant past. But European Parliament elections also helped the new party family[7] of the Greens to establish itself. The first Green deputies entered parliament after the European

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4 See for the following Henig (1979); Hix and Lord (1997); and the web pages of the political groups of the EP.

5 The parties of Ireland, Britain and Denmark entered the European Parliament in 1973; those of Greece in 1981; Spanish and Portuguese parties entered in 1983; Austrian, Finnish and Swedish parties in 1996.

6 Examples are the green parties that emerged in many European countries in the 1980s (e.g. Müller-Rommel, 1989); or the parties of the second Italian republic from 1992 on (e.g. Mershon & Pasquino, 1995).

7 See Mair & Mudde (1998) for a useful discussion of the somewhat unwieldy concept of 'party family'.

Parliament election of 1984 and settled with a rather heterogeneous 'Rainbow Group'. One election later, in 1989, the Greens became numerous enough to build a readily identifiable ecologist group which persisted in every parliament since.

Christian-democrats and conservatives, socialists, liberals, the far left and the greens – together they define the basic structure of the contemporary EU party system. There are two additional groups right-of-centre which aggregate Euro-critics of different rigor, the Europe of Democracies and Diversities (EDD, which became the Independence and Democracy Group after the 2004 election), and the Union for a Europe of Nations (EoN). Both groups are of about equal size; they compete with one another for members of the same ideological background, and one might assume that in the long run only one of the two will prevail. And there is finally the group of the 'Non Inscrits' which traditionally has been dominated by extreme-right members.

Just before eastern enlargement, the EU party system integrates about 130 national parties in not more than five consolidated party groups, and in two less consolidated but minor 'ideological areas' – the euro-sceptic right-of-centre, and the far-right. And these numbers, as small as they are, still give a false impression of the format of the EU party system which is essentially characterised by two predominant political groups – the PES on the left, and the EPP on the right.

In the world of party systems at least, small numbers are good numbers. They signify governability, centripetal competition, alternation of governments, accountability – all the good things of the two-party model of governance are associated with them. The format of the EU party system which goes all the way back to the Common Assembly of the ECSC of 1953 should therefore not stand in the way of a democratic EU polity.

But of course, the 'democratic potential' of a party system does not only depend on a small numbers of parties and on party system concentration. It also depends on the distinctiveness and cohesion of its partisan actors. But here as well, empirical analyses of political preferences and behaviours of samples of EP-voters and of various branches of party elites (Schmitt & Thomassen, 1999; 2002), of content analyses of political parties' election programmes issued at the occasion of European Parliament elections (Thomassen & Schmitt, 2004; Wüst & Schmitt, 2005), and of analyses of roll-call analyses of members of this parliament (Hix, 2002; Kreppel & Hix, 2003) all have revealed that this party system works surprisingly 'normal'. No matter what data source is analysed, political groups are 'distinct', which is to say that they differ from one another in policy and ideological terms. And despite their enormous performance in integrating new members, these groups are also astonishingly 'cohesive', which is to say that their constituent parts are comparatively similar in policy and ideological terms. What is more, distinct and cohesive EP groups base their parliamentary vote increasingly upon ideological distance. It seems that 'grand coalition' strategies that were pursued in the past by the two major players of the system, the EPP and

the PES, in order to increase the powers of the parliament vis à vis the council have become less popular (Kreppel & Hix, 2003).

In short, this party system was ‘ready for power’ (Hix, 2002) at the time of the sixth European Parliament election of June 2004. This election added about 40 central and eastern European parties to the EU system, thus elevating the overall number to some 170 national parties sending delegations to the European Parliament.

2. The Party Systems of East Central Europe – Do They Fit In?

The basic structure of west European party systems has been defined by socio-political cleavages. These cleavages were translated into partisan alignments more or less at the time when universal suffrage was achieved. In most places, this happened around the late 19th and the early 20th century. But what about the central and east European systems that democratised – or re-democratised (Agh, 1998a) – only in the early 1990s? As a matter of fact, competitive party systems emerged very rapidly in these countries. But do they rest upon socio-political cleavages, or on less stable pillars like specific issue alliances or the personal charisma of political elites that predominated during regime change?

The latter assumption, sometimes referred to as the *tabula rasa* theory, has received little empirical support (Kitschelt et al., 1999). Actually, there seems to be a stable structure of social divisions (Evans and Whitefield, 2000), while the political sphere is still characterised by substantial levels of volatility both on the side of the voters and on the parties' side (e.g. Birch, 2001). This reminds us of the fact that social divisions are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for socio-political cleavages. As Bartolini and Mair (1990: 216) have put it: "Social divisions become cleavages when they are organised as such". Organisation requires time, resources and opportunities, all of which might not yet have been sufficiently available in post-communist democracies. In addition, the formation of cleavages also requires political elites who actively promote the partisan organisation of social divisions. Under present-day conditions of mass political communication, however, this is not necessarily always in their own best interest.[8]

For quite different reasons, then, socio-political cleavages in central and eastern Europe are probably less developed than is sometimes claimed (e.g. Bakke and Sitter, 2005; a bit more implicitly also Whitefield, 2002). But this is not to say that social conflicts do not contribute to ideological divisions which, finally, may be represented politically by various, and varying, partisan actors.

This is what Ágh (1998b) and, following him, Oppelland (2003) refer to when they identify two overarching conflict dimensions and four phases of party system development in Central and Eastern Europe.[9] The first phase, ranging from the collapse of communist regimes to the first more or less free elections, was characterised by one dominant ideological division: the one that separated communists from anti-communists or, perhaps more precisely,

8 See in this context also Sitter (2002) who highlights the impact of party (leader) strategy on party system stability and change.

9 Note that this overall perspective necessarily ignores local particularities. See again Kitschelt et al. (1999) for a detailed analysis of the historical path dependency of the specifics of post-communist politics in four nations.

supporters and opponents of the *ancien regime*. During that period, spontaneous idealistic mass movements formed and soon transformed into ‘umbrella parties’ which served to unite and strengthen the anti-communist forces.

In the second phase, roughly the first half of the 1990ies, the previously dominant ideological conflict line between communists and anti-communists was supplanted, or supplemented, by a new conflict line between the winners and losers of the economic transformation from ‘central planning’ to ‘free market’ economy. The former umbrella parties disintegrated as soon as truly free elections were held. Anti-communist parties, formerly united within an ‘umbrella’, formed mostly unstable coalition governments. A great number of parties with a narrow popular base gained representation in parliament.

During the third phase which occupies the second half of the 1990s social conflicts between winners and losers of the transition to market economy aggravated. The political result of the second free election which often fell in this phase was that social-democratic successors of the former communist party took over in many places. In structural terms the post-communist party systems concentrated, while electoral volatility was extremely high in that period.

The fourth and currently last phase that extends over the early 2000s did not alter the main conflict lines. Post-communist social-democrats lost where they failed to deliver on their promises. Despite these changes, the political camps of the third phase proved to be stable and the number of parties in parliament did not rise again. In this phase, a relatively stable and modestly concentrated party system has emerged that seems to be organised along the familiar left-right scheme. Based upon this observation, Oppeland (2003) expects that after the European Parliament election of 2004 post-communist parties will fit quite well into the political structure of the European Parliament: only about a third of the new eastern deputies would not easily associate with one of the major political groups of the house.

3. Dimensions of Party Competition in the European Union

Before we go on and test the actual fit between parties and party systems from old and new EU member countries in the European Parliament after the 2004 election, we need to be clear about what we want to look at. There is a considerable literature on the dimensionality of the European party space.[10] Gabel and Hix (2002) and Gabel and Anderson (2002) identify some variant of the left-right scheme as the one dimension that structures the European political space. For Hix and Lord (1997) and Schmitt and Thomassen (2000), two orthogonal dimensions structure the European political space: these are the left-right axis and a dimension of EU support or opposition.[11] Others, like Gary Marks *cum suis*, arrive at a three-dimensional picture of ideological divisions: economic left-right, new politics, and again the dimension of EU support (e.g. Hooghe et al., 2002; Marks et al., 2004).

Some of this scholarly dissent may originate in technicalities – in different methods applied, different sorts of data used, and so on.[12] This certainly calls for a critical evaluation. However, rather than methodologically, we intend to proceed conceptually. We propose that the issues that are dealt with at the EU level of the European multi-level system fall into two categories: constitutional issues and ordinary ones (Schmitt and Thomassen, 1999). Constitutional issues are about the structure of the evolving political system of the European Union. The relations between Parliament, Commission and Council are part of it; enlargements and the question of admission of new members are another; the constitutional process and EU-treaties more generally are a third; more examples could easily be added. These constitutional issues are not about EU policies, but about the EU polity. A characteristic point of dissent is about more or less integration.

In contrast to these constitutional struggles, ordinary issues are about concrete policies. They tend to (but do not have to) assume a multi-level nature in the sense that they are discussed and dealt with at various levels of the EU multi-level system of governance. Examples are the economy, the welfare state, the environment, and so on. For those 'ordinary' issues, an 'ordinary' measure of ideological conflict should apply. The most prominent of those is the left-right dimension. A wide variety of conflicts relate to it: political (equality vs. hierarchy), economic (poor vs. rich), religious (abstainers vs. believers), and time oriented (change vs. continuity; see Laponce, 1981; also Bobbio, 1996). Due to the

10 See e.g. the special issue of *Comparative Political Studies* (Vol. 35, No. 8) for an excellent overview on the topic.

11 'Scepticism' is the *en vogue* term, see Taggart and Szerbiak (2005a; 2005b).

12 Some of the cited research pieces use complex factor analytical techniques while others look at bivariate associations. Part of them is based on representative surveys of party voters and party elites, others use party programmes as a source of information, and still others rely on expert judgements on where the parties are (or were at some point in recent history) on a number of issue and ideological dimensions. Some of the survey based work uses broad summary indicators, while others analyse a multitude of subtle judgements (danger of non-attitudes). All of these differences might have an impact on the findings.

'imperialistic' character of this ideological scheme (Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990), the connotations of left and right (or, put another way, the alliances of political oppositions with either the left or the right ideological camp) are changing through history. But the impetus of the ideological archetypes seems to prevail: a leftist perspective favours political change towards more equality, while a rightist perspective defends individual liberties and tries to keep things as they are or move them back.

The change in the meaning elements of the left-right political code is particularly pronounced in times of rapid social change when traditional socio-political conflicts are weakening and new controversies are assuming their place.[13] In those phases, the contours of what 'left' and 'right' means are becoming fuzzy, and doubts arise about the utility of these spatial archetypes. Quite typically, during those turbulent times, notions like 'the new politics' (late 1970s), 'the new left' (1980s) or 'the new right' (1990s) become fashionable. A few years later, 'new politics' are not so new anymore, and what once was 'the new left' or 'the new right' has become a regular component of the left-right political code. It is therefore that we do not follow the work of Hooghe and Marks (Hooghe et al., 2002; Marks et al., 2004). In the present paper, we refrain from distinguishing different dimensions of the left-right divide and concentrate on the one overarching ideological cleavage. Together with the EU dimension (furthering vs. moving back European integration), these are the two dimensions of party competition that we will concentrate on in the following analysis.

13 Needless to say that this general statement applies in particular in periods of regime change like the breakdown of communism in the former Soviet Union and the members of the Warsaw Pact (see e.g. Evans and Whitefield, 1998).

4. Data

Before we finally move on and test the fit between parties and party systems from old and new EU member countries in the European Parliament, we need to say a word on the database that we rely on in the present paper. While we start out with a look at official election statistics, the core of our empirical evidence comes from the European Elections Study 2004. This study comprises 26 representative mass surveys conducted after the European Parliament election of June 2004, in altogether 24 member-countries of the European Union.[14] While there is considerable variation in terms of survey administration,[15] all of these studies have implemented the same core questionnaire.[16] This study is part of an ongoing research programme. However, other than previous European Election Studies (EES), the 2004 study was in many ways a decentralised operation: translation and back-translation of the common core questionnaire, organisation and conduct of the interviewing, local data file preparation and, last but not least, the funding of all of this was part of the duties of national study directors.[17]

In the present paper, we analyse only two of the many concepts that are operationalised in this study: popular perceptions of the location of nationally relevant parties on (a) the pro-anti-EU dimension[18] and on (b) the left-right dimension[19]. We do so by computing measures

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14 While Malta is the only member-country that was not covered this study, there are two countries with more than one representative survey: Belgium (both a Flemish and a Wallon sample of voters has been interviewed) and the United Kingdom (with two separate studies, one for Great Britain and one for Northern Ireland).

15 In many of the west European EU member-countries, a telephone survey methodology was used. By contrast, in many of the new eastern member-countries face-to-face interviews were preferred. In Ireland, Italy and Sweden, a postal survey was conducted.

16 With some variation in terms of completeness; the Swedish and the Lithuanian survey in particular, if for different reasons, could only administer some parts of the common core questionnaire.

17 These national study directors are: Günther Ogris (Austria), Marc Swyngedouw and Lieven Dewinter (Belgium), James Tilley (Britain) and John Garry (Northern Ireland), Bambos Papageorgiou (Cyprus), Lukas Linek (Czech Republic), Jorgen Goul Andersen (Denmark), Alan Sikk and Vello Pettai (Estonia), Mikko Maatila and Tapio Raunio (Finland), Pascal Perrineau and Bruno Cautres (France), Hermann Schmitt and Andreas Wüst (Germany), Ilias Nikolakopoulos and Eftichia Teperoglou (Greece), Gabor Toka (Hungary), Michael Marsh (Ireland), Renato Mannheimer and Roberto Biorcio (Italy), Ilze Koroleva (Latvia), Algis Krupavicius (Lithuania), Patrick Dumont (Luxembourg), Cees van der Eijk (the Netherlands), Radoslaw Markowski (Poland), Pedro Magalaes (Portugal), Olga Gyrfasova (Slovakia), Niko Tos (Slovenia), Juan Diez Nicolas (Spain), and Sören Holmberg (Sweden). For more information on the specifics of the 2004 surveys, see www.europeanelectionstudies.net.

18 The question wording goes as follows: “Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion? Please indicate your views using any number on a 10-point-scale. On this scale, 1 means unification ‘has already gone too far’ and 10 means it ‘should be pushed further’. What number on this scale best describes your position? […] And about where would you place the following parties on this scale? How about the Labour Party? And […]” Note that in the Swedish study an eleven point scale (from 0 to 10) was used and that respondents were asked whether they agree with or oppose Sweden’s EU membership, and where they locate the Swedish parties on this scale. We tried to adjust the different scale format by collapsing scale categories ‘0’ and ‘1’ into scale category ‘1’. The Belgian survey did not ask this question which is why Belgian parties cannot be considered in this analysis.

19 The question wording goes as follows: “In political matters people talk of ‘the left’ and ‘the right’. What is your position? Please indicate your views using any number on a 10-point-scale. On this scale, where 1 means ‘left’

of central tendency (arithmetic means) and dispersion (standard deviations)[20] of voters perceptions of party positions and interpret these measures as indicators of true party locations and of the certainty – or the lack thereof – with which such true party locations can be identified.[21] Essentially, then, our units of analysis are political parties and the positions they assume on the left-right and the pro-anti-EU dimension. This reduces the number of cases that we are dealing with from some 25.000 (respondents) to 158 (parties).[22]

In order to determine the effect of Eastern enlargement on the EU party system, we will compare the distinctiveness and cohesion of EP groups with and without their new Eastern members. This can be done by computing grand means (means of party-specific mean scores) and mean dispersions (mean standard deviations) for subgroups of our 158 parties that belong to a party group – once with all its current member parties, and another time with only those from Western Europe. This strategy treats every party equally, as if they all had the same size and impact on the politics of the party group. This however, as we know, is not the case: there are powerful parties with a delegation of 30 and more MEPs, and there are minor others with a delegation of only one or two representatives. We can take this into account by weighting the party data by the number of deputies that each party sends into the EP. Doing so not only assumes that national publics have a rather clear perception of the positions of their relevant national parties on the left-right and the pro-anti-EU dimensions; it also assumes that the deputies of a party share more or less the same political orientations (or, in a weaker version of this, that possible deviations from the 'true party position' are random and cancel each other out). Realising that the latter assumption in particular is of a somewhat heroic nature, we will report both weighted (by the size of national party delegations in the EP) and un-weighted (each party, disregarding its EP size, counts the same) results.

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and 10 means 'right', which number best describes your position? […] And about where would you place the following parties on this scale? How about the Labour Party? And […]" Here as well, the Swedish study used an eleven point scale, which we tried to adjust as described in the previous footnote.

20 We are aware that for particularly skewed distributions, mean scores and standard deviations may suggest misleading results. This is why a next draft will compare the present findings with those that interpolated medians and agreement scores would have yielded.

21 Van der Brug and van der Eijk (1999) have shown that voters' perceptions of party locations (the latter being operationalised by party elite perceptions of where the party is) are relatively accurate as long as general policy and, in particular, ideological dimensions are concerned. We believe that both the EU-dimension and the left-right dimension that are analysed here are of such a general nature and that party positions can reliably estimated on the basis of representative mass surveys.

22 Note that Northern Irish parties are still lacking in the present analyses.

5. Findings

5.1. The 2004 Election Result – East and West compared

We begin with a basic look at official election result figures. The question we try to shed light on is: how different was the eastern vote? For a start, we distinguish between votes that were given to any of the parties involved in an EP group (‘any EP group’), votes that were given to a party that gained representation but did not join one of the groups (‘non-inscrits’), votes that were given to a party that did not master the threshold of representation (‘not represented’), and finally those that abstained (‘non voters’). The result of our computations is obvious: ‘Post-communist’ voters are heavily over-represented among non-voters and among voters of parties that did *not* join an EP group, while they are clearly under-represented in the electorates of parties that did join one of the established political groups of the European Parliament. The proportion of unrepresented votes is virtually identical in East and West (Table 1).

Table 1

EP Voting Behaviour, West and East

(first row: millions of EU citizens; second row: row percentages)

	any organised EP group	“Non Inscrits”	unre-presented	non voters	entitled to vote
EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta	125,2 **92.0%**	9,6 78.7	8,5 83.3	148,3 77.9	291,6 83.6
8 post-communist countries	10,8 8.0%	2,6 **21.3**	1,7 16.7	42,0 **22.1**	57,0 16.4
EU 25	136,0 100%	12,2 100	10,2 100	190,3 100	348,6 100

Sources: official statistics as published on the web pages of the European Parliament as well as by www.europa-digital.de, www.parties-and-elections.de, and www.electionworld.org.

But this is not the only perspective to apply. Comparing the vote shares that the different groups of the European Parliament received in 'old' and 'new Europe', we find that EPP-ED support is somewhat stronger in the East, while PES and Far Left support considerably weaker there. Support for liberal parties is almost identical. The same holds for EU-sceptical parties (taking EoN and I&D members together): vote shares are limited in the West and in the East, and certainly much less dramatic than some authors suggested (e.g. Beichelt, 2004). Quite spectacular, however, is the lack of a green electorate among post-communist voters, and, as we have seen before, the fact that many of the Eastern votes elected representatives who could not decide which parliamentary party to join (Table 2).

Table 2

The Distribution of Votes between EP groups

(first row: millions of voters of parties that gained EP representation;
second row: row percentages)

	EPP-ED	PES	Lib	Green	Far Left	I&D	EoN	non-inscrits	all
EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta	49,3	37,3	11,8	10,1	9,2	3,4	5,0	9,6	135,7
	36,3%	27,5	8,7	7,4	6,8	2,5	3,7	7,1	100
8 post-communist member countries	5,4	2,7	1,1	0,1	0,5	0,0	1,0	2,6	13,4
	40,4%	20,1	8,2	0,7	3,7	0,0	7,4	19,5	100
EU 25	54,7	40,0	12,9	10,2	9,7	3,4	6,0	12,2	149,1
	36,8%	26,8	8,7	6,8	6,5	2,2	4,0	8,2	100

Sources: official statistics as published on the web pages of the European Parliament as well as by www.europa-digital.de, www.parties-and-elections.de, and http://www.electionworld.org/.

Elevated shares of non-voters and a high proportion of votes for 'unaffiliated' representatives, these are perhaps the clearest signs of a less than perfect fit between still consolidating Eastern European party systems and the super-structure of the EU party system (Schmitt, 2005). Eastern European party systems are still somewhat less inclusive than their Western counterparts – turnout in first-order national elections prior to the European Parliament election was at 63 per cent on average, and some 15 per cent lower than in the West. But not only is participation lower, those who participate are different. Volatility figures reveal that party alignments of post-communist voters are still much more fluid: an average of 37 per cent of 'aggregate vote switches' suggest that, in the two previous first-order elections, almost every second Eastern voter supported different parties; this compares to only 11 per cent in the West of the European Union. Weaker party alignments and higher volatility finally translate into a higher fragmentation of post-communist party systems – this is at least what the comparison of the effective number of parties suggests: the 8 Eastern party systems have on average 5,5 effective parties, as compared to 4,2 effective parties in the West of the European Union (Table 3).

Table 3

Inclusiveness, Stability and Concentration of the 25 National Party Systems

(figures are means and standard deviations)

	turnout previous national election	volatility previous pair of ntl. elections	effective number of parties previous ntl. election
EU 15	78,1	11,0	4,2
+ Cyprus and Malta	11,8	6,8	1,6
8 post-communist member countries	62,6	37,1	5,5
	9,5	19,4	1,8
EU 25	73,1	19,4	4,6
	13,2	17,2	1,7
sig. (F)	.004	.000	.068

Sources: official statistics as published by www.europa-digital.de, www.parties-and-elections.de, and www.electionworld.org. Note that our concept of volatility considers voters to switch if they vote in two consecutive elections for parties with different names, no matter whether these parties are mergers of previously separate parties; compare for a different view Sikk (2001).

5.2. The European Union Party System before and after Enlargement

As we have already seen, the 2004 election of the European Parliament has strengthened the Christian-conservative group, and it has weakened the left broadly speaking. Eastern enlargement has significantly contributed to these developments. But over and above the political result of the election, did enlargement change the structure of the party system? Are EP groups less distinct and cohesive now? And what about the structure of party competition?

The short answer is: Eastern enlargement has done surprisingly little to the EU party system. With or without the new members – the EP groups look very much the same, both with regard to their left-right and their pro-anti-EU position. The new Eastern parties – that is to say: those who have joined one of the traditional groups – fit in very well. Neither the positions of those groups relative to one another have changed much, nor have they lost their cohesiveness. Note that these findings are largely independent of the weighting decision: whether we count each party observation only once, or as many times as its delegation size suggests, does hardly affect the result (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4

The Left-Right Position of EP-Groups with and without the New Eastern Members

(figures are mean scores and N of cases)

	weighted (a)			unweighted		
	mean	std dev	N of cases	mean	std dev	N of cases
Far Left						
EU 25	2,3	0,6	40	2,4	0,5	17
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	2,4	0,6	34	2,5	0,5	16
The Greens						
EU 25	3,8	0,7	37	4,0	1,0	14
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	3,8	0,6	36	4,0	1,0	13
Social Democrats						
EU 25	3,9	0,7	185	4,0	0,9	23
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	4,0	0,6	160	4,1	0,6	15
Liberals and Democrats						
EU 25	5,5	1,1	72	5,5	1,1	22
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	5,5	1,1	61	5,6	1,0	16
Non Inscrits						
EU 25	6,1	1,4	17	6,1	1,7	4
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	7,5	*	8	7,5	*	2
Europe of Nations						
EU 25	6,4	1,0	35	6,2	1,4	9
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	6,1	1,0	25	6,1	1,5	8
Christian-Democrats and Conservatives						
EU 25	7,1	0,8	254	7,0	0,9	35
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	7,1	0,8	192	7,1	0,9	20
Independence and Democracy						
EU 25	7,7	0,9	25	7,5	0,8	5
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	8,0	1,0	14	7,7	1,1	3

Source: European Election Study 2004 (pre-release data as of March 2005). Note that the 'raw data' analysed here is the mean score of the left-right placements that national respondents assigned to each party. (a) The weighting factor applied is the number of representatives that a party sends to Strasbourg.

Table 5

Pro-Anti-EU Position of EP-Groups with and without the New Eastern Members

(figures are mean scores and N of cases)

	weighted (a)			unweighted		
	grand mean	std dev	N of cases	grand mean	std dev	N of cases
Social Democrats						
EU 25	6,1	0,6	185	6,3	0,7	23
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	6,1	0,6	160	6,1	0,7	15
Christian-Democrats and Conservatives						
EU 25	5,9	0,9	254	6,2	0,9	35
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	5,7	0,9	192	6,2	1,1	20
Liberals and Democrats						
EU 25	5,9	0,7	72	6,1	0,7	22
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	5,8	0,6	61	6,0	0,6	16
The Greens						
EU 25	5,6	0,7	37	5,2	1,0	14
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	5,6	0,7	36	5,2	1,0	13
Independence and Democracy						
EU 25	5,6	0,7	25	5,2	1,6	5
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	5,4	0,9	14	4,6	1,9	3
Far Left						
EU 25	4,0	0,9	40	4,0	1,0	17
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	4,1	1,0	34	4,0	1,1	16
Europe of Nations						
EU 25	3,5	0,6	35	3,8	0,8	9
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	3,7	0,5	25	3,9	0,8	8
Non Inscrits						
EU 25	3,4	0,9	17	3,6	1,0	4
EU 17 (EU 15 + Cyprus and Malta)	2,8	0,2	8	3,0	0,4	2

Source: European Election Study 2004 (pre-release data as of March 2005). Note that the 'raw data' analysed here is the mean score of the pro-anti EU placements that national respondents assigned to each party. (a) The weighting factor applied is the number of representatives that a party sends to Strasbourg so that a large party counts more (in the computation of the mean and standard deviation scores) than a small party.

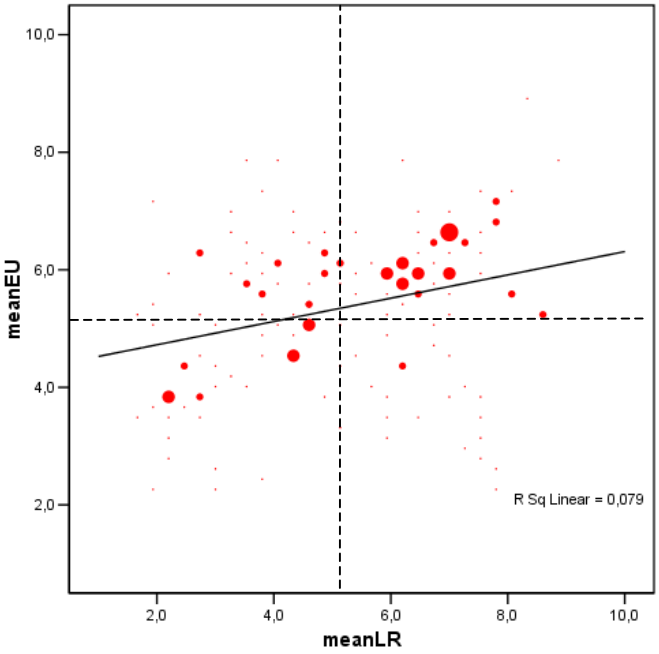
When Eastern enlargement did not affect the positioning of the EP groups along the left-right and the pro-anti-EU dimension, it still could have had an impact on the relation between these two basic dimensions of party competition in the European Parliament. In the past, there was all but consensus among scholars in this domain. The basic point of dissent has been whether left-right orientations determine pro-anti-EU positions (e.g. Hooghe et al., 2002), or whether the two are independent from and orthogonal towards one another (e.g. Hix and Lord, 1997).[23] Our data suggest that the two dimensions are only weakly correlated (r=.282, p=.000, n=158), and that this correlation is virtually identical for Western (r=.267, n=109, p=.005) and Eastern (r=.276, n=49, p=.055) parties.

Graph 1 displays this modest but significant association between the two variables graphically. It suggests that political parties have a somewhat higher chance for Euro-positive orientations the more to the right they are located. But the model fit is indeed very poor and one is probably right in describing the EU political space as two dimensional, with left-right orientations and pro-anti-EU attitudes independently structuring it.

23 Note that this dissent could again originate in the different data sources that are used. While expert survey analyses seem to report a substantial correlation between the two dimensions (e.g. Whitefield et al., 2005), analyses of mass survey data usually tend to the opposite conclusion (e.g. Schmitt and Thomassen, 2000).

Graph 1

European Political Parties in the Two Dimensional Ideological Space after the 2004 European Parliament Election



Source: European Election Study 2004 (pre-release dataset of March 2005).
N of cases (parties) = 158 from 22 member countries. The larger the dots in the graph, the more parties are located at this point.

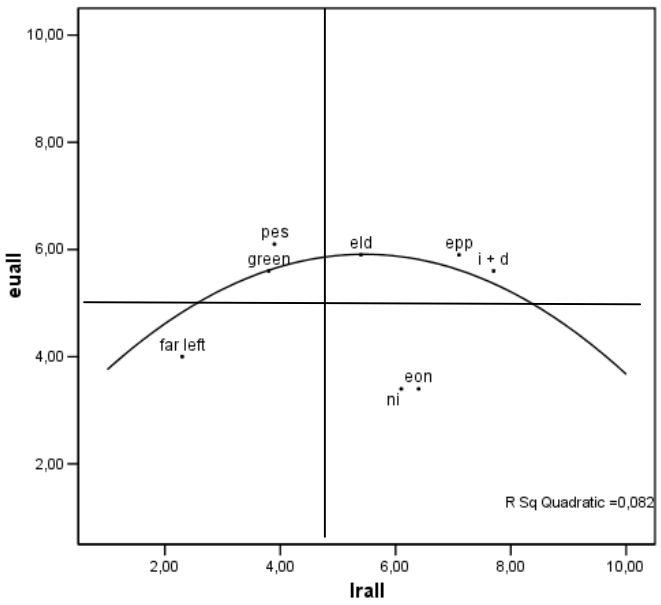
In the present context, in any case, the most important finding is that the two dimensions are as dependent or independent in Eastern as in Western parties. This also implies that the structure of party competition in the European Parliament was hardly affected by the 'big bang' of May 2004.

Graph 2 displays the familiar 'horseshoe': the gravity line of EU party competition that was first introduced by Hix and Lord (1997). While there is a considerable spread of EP group positions along the left-right dimension, variation along the pro-anti-EU dimension is less pronounced. Nevertheless, far-left and far-right parties tend to be somewhat more sceptical about the European Union than centre-left and centre-right parties. The latter also tend to be the larger ones, which might have nurtured the impression that there was hardly any choice offered to the voter in European Parliament elections.

Would we distinguish Eastern and Western member parties of EP groups and display them separately, the pictures would be much the same – with one significant difference though. The overall 'centre-right' location of the 'Non Inscrits (NI)' would be on the 'far right' for Western members only, and it would be in the 'centre' for new Eastern members only. If this 'technical group' is united by anything, it is certainly not the left-right ideology.

Graph 2

EP-Groups in the Two Dimensional Ideological Space:
The 2004 European Parliament



Source: European Election Study 2004 (pre-release dataset of March 2005). The positions of party groups as indicated in Tables 4 and 5; the weighted mean score is used in each case. For the regression, party group positions have been weighted by their EP strength so that the positions of larger groups weight heavier.

Conclusion

Surprisingly enough, the EU party system has not changed much as a result of Eastern enlargement. The EPP-ED has gained additional strength, both PES and the Far Left suffered, and the proportion of unaffiliated members has increased due to the fact, that a good number of Eastern members did not join one of the traditional political groups. However, the cohesiveness of EP groups did not visibly suffer from the addition of new 'post-communist' members, nor did the distinctiveness of the parties decline. The 'horseshoe'-like gravity line of EU party competition is very much the same before and after eastern enlargement, with centre-left and centre-right groups more in favour of further integration than far-left and far-right groups.

Some party system consequences of eastward enlargement of the EU may not yet be fully visible. Eastern party systems are still in flux, with a limited reach of electoral politics in general, high levels of volatility among those who do participate, and a significantly greater diversity of partisan actors than in the West. To the degree that these transitory characteristics of eastern party systems are declining, one might expect the eastern vote to undergo significant changes in the future.

One expectation in particular was not born out by the election. In the political process of the new eastern member-countries, the issue of EU membership was much less politicised, and the strength of EU sceptical parties much less pronounced, than was predicted by many. Bielasiak can probably explain part of it when he writes that "[…] there is a tension between the notion that the party systems of post-communism render the integration issue relevant to the competitive process, and the acknowledgement of a long-standing broad policy consensus on the 'return to Europe'" (2004: 1). As a result, "[…] the integration question has remained largely a second-order political concern rather than a primary contestation issue in the charged competitive dimension of the former communist states." (2004: 22)

Phenomena of below-average electoral participation and unsuccessful integration of elected members in established EP groups aside, the integration of the parties from the new countries worked out comparatively smoothly. Was this the case despite of major ideological discrepancies, as Kreppel and Gungor (2004) propose? They argue that integration of the new members should cause little problem because they are all coming from backgrounds characterised by strong parliaments and weak parties – much as the EU parliamentary and party system. While this might be the case, our analysis has shown that ideology was not a major obstacle, but rather a catalyst for adaptation and integration.

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