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Euro-parties as Organizations: the impact of Central and Eastern Enlargement[1]

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EU scholars have mostly assessed the institutional impact of Central and Eastern enlargement by focusing on the European Commission, the Council of Ministers or the European Parliament. Political parties at the European level have rarely constituted their object of analysis. This paper, by considering Euro-parties as "organizations" and treating Central and Eastern enlargement as an "external shock", seeks to assess whether enlargement(s) represent an important factor for the institutional development of the Euro-parties. In particular, drawing on classic works on party organizations and development, posits that Central and Eastern enlargement is likely to be a significant and positive factor for their structural institutionalization. Theoretically, institutionalization is defined as the process by which Euro-parties become more complex or "bureaucratized", and more autonomous from their national components. Empirically, this paper is based on original documentary material gathered from the archives of the political Groups in the EP, supplemented by about thirty interviews with senior administrators and leaders.

Introduction

The Central and Eastern Enlargement (CEE) of the European Union took place in two rounds. On 1st May 2004 ten countries, eight of which were formerly under Soviet influence, joined the EU, while on 1st January 2007 Bulgaria and Romania also entered the club. The 'Big Bang' enlargement represented a novel event: never in its history the EU faced such a widening of its boundaries in such a restricted time. In less than three years, the EU-15 became the EU-27, with entirely new issues and challenges facing the project of European integration. This paper focuses on a particular effect of CEE, and it seeks to assess its impact upon the process of structural institutionalization of the Euro-parties.[2] Indeed, not only the EU institutions, but also its actors were asked to include new members. However, the enlargement of the Euro-parties has generated comparatively little attention by either academics or practitioners.

In recent years, the academic community has carefully investigated the institutional effects of CEE. For instance, in Best *et al.* (2008), several leading researchers have empirically addressed the fundamental issue of its impact upon the functioning and performance of the EU institutions (including the Council, the Commission, the Parliament...). Other research endeavours have targeted specific institutions or actors (i.e.. Brunazzo, 2008; Paterson; 2008). Nonetheless, in the midst of this growing interest, contributions on Euro-parties are lacking. Besides an edited volume

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1 Draft version. Please do not quote without permission of the author.

2 I use the all-encompassing term "Euro-party" when it does not seem necessarily to specify which organizational entiry I am focusing upon. When I specifically look at one of the Euro-party 'faces' , I rather employ the labels: "extra-parliamentary party" (in the literature also referred as transnational federations), "political Groups" (in order to refer to the party Groups in the European Parliament) and national parties (when I indicate the Euro-parties' national units).

on the legitimacy of the EU after enlargement, where parties have an important role (Thomassen, 2009), political parties at the European level have not occupied a central place in this literature. And no attention at all has been devoted to the impact of CEE on their institutional rules and organizational structures.

There are at least two substantial reasons because of which this question needs to be addressed. First, stable political parties are crucial for the prospects of the EU democracy. As the literature addressing the nexus between party institutionalization and democracy suggests (i.e. Randall, Svasand, 2002), institutionalized political parties are necessary for democratic consolidation. There seems to be no valid alternatives to party development to reduce the EU democratic deficit. Second, given that the Euro-parties organize the EP legislative work, it is important to assess if and how the political Groups adapted to their expansion in size and diversity. A poor adaptation might lead to an increasingly difficult management of the legislative activity in the House, with severe consequences for the EU decision-making system.

This paper is a qualitative study about the impact of enlargement on the three largest and oldest political Groups: the Group of the European People's Party (EPP), the Group of the European Socialists (PES)[3] and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). Ideally, a study on Euro-party institutionalization should include both the parliamentary and the extra-parliamentary parties. However, I assume that the strongest instance of partyness at the EU level is still to be found in the House. Albeit a formal recognition of the extra-parliamentary parties in the Treaties, they still lag much behind the parliamentary Groups in terms of staff, visibility and policy influence. Therefore, if the analytical focus is to be restricted selectively upon a specific Euro-party 'face', there are strong reasons to focus on the political Groups.

The rest of this work is structured as follows. Part 1 will introduce the key concepts and speculate on the likely effect of CEE. Part 2 will deal with data and measurement issues. Part 3 will first present an historical narrative of the organizational development of the Groups and will then focus on enlargement. Finally, Part 4 will present the conclusions.

1. Theory
1.1 Enlargements and Party Change

Drawing on recent scholarly work, seeking to capture theoretically the effects of enlargement(s) on different EU institutions and/or organizations, this work conceptualizes CEE as

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3 The name of the Group of the European Socialists changes to Socialists and Democrats in the VIIth Parliament. Given the temporal focus of this work, the old label (PES) will be used.

an "external shock". As it has been argued, enlargement(s) are likely to represent "perturbations for EU institutions and organizational actors", which "impose on preexisting rules and routines a certain degree of adaptational pressure, to which actors can respond by fostering change" (Best *et al.*, 2008). If enlargement(s) and, in particular, 'Big Bang' enlargements, are regarded as "external shocks", they are likely to be primary forces behind party change. This prediction is consistent with a 'discrete theory' of party change, positing that "though parties may also change under other circumstances, the most dramatic and broadest change will occur only when the party has experienced an external shock" (Harmel, Janda, 1994:265; Harmel, 2002). The concept of "external shock" seems to be well suited to describe CEE: on the eve of enlargement, both the practioners' perceptions and the observers' comments shared a serious concern about the capacity of the EU and its institutions to survive such a huge expansion.

In their theory of party change (1994), Harmel and Janda posit that the primary source of party change is when political parties experience a 'shock' impacting upon their primary goal. For instance, for parties whose main objective is to maximize votes, an electoral defeat ("external shock") is likely to be a fundamental source of change (in policy position, organization, leadership etc.). In the abstract, the sequence of events can be so described: first, an external event (e.g. a constitutional change, an electoral defeat, the rise of a new competitor) – so directly related to the party 'core business' to be labelled 'shock' – occurs. Second, the 'shock' translates into actors' preferences by leading party decision makers to re-evaluate the party effectiveness and performance. Third, organizational reforms are undertaken in order to adapt to the new situation.

When this abstract model is applied to our case, the sequence of events is as follows. First, enlargement takes place. National parties from the new EU members enter the existing Euro-parties, producing a substantial change in size (graph 1). Second, the 'shock' (enlargement) affects the party performance related to its main goal. While the literature on political parties ascribes to them three main objectives – it is argued that parties maximize their gains in relation to votes, office, or policy (Strom, 1990) – Euro-parties can be regarded as neither vote- nor office-seekers. Euro-parties do not directly compete for the votes of the European people[4]: European elections are still fought by national parties in national settings. Nor they can be considered office-seekers. Nominations in the EU top jobs are the result of a compromise between the heads of government and only marginally reflect the preferences of the Euro-parties[5]. In contrast, Euro-parties have a far greater impact on

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4   Regulation 2007/1524 allows Euro-parties to directly campaign in the Member States on the eve of the European Parliament elections. However, the 2009 EP Elections have shown that the Euro-parties role is still very limited

5   For instance, in the negotiations to find a name for the position of High representative, an agreement was found, within the Socialist political family, on the former Italian Prime Minister D'Alema. However, as it was clear that the British Labour Party (in government) was not going to get the post of the President of the European Council, it opposed this designation. Germany and France backed the new British proposal (Baroness Ashton) and D'Alema,

EU-policies. The clear goal of the parliamentary Groups[6] is to pursue policy objectives: when the Parliament is involved in the EU legislative process under the ordinary legislative procedure (the former codecision), the Groups are as important as the Council in shaping the content of legislation. Finally, the key decision-makers will re-consider the rules of their organization, in order to deal with the new situation and preserve the organization capacity to perform in the altered environment.

The reasons why enlargement is likely to affect the performance of the Euro-parties as policy-seeker actors can be accounted for by drawing from the 'functionalist' literature on institutional change (Heritier, 2007:11-22). The organizational rules which were guaranteeing their effectiveness as policy-maker actors in the pre-enlargement environment – with a relatively small number of actors involved in the the Party decision-making bodies – come under strain in the post-enlargement environment. The huge increase in the number of delegations will increase the transaction costs of bargaining and negotiating to reach agreements within the Party. Monitoring compliance to the Party decisions will be more difficult with more members and the costs of ensuring cohesion will grow. In this context, the organization's performance will only be guaranteed by changing the rules.

Graph 1: Political Groups' composition before and after Enlargement
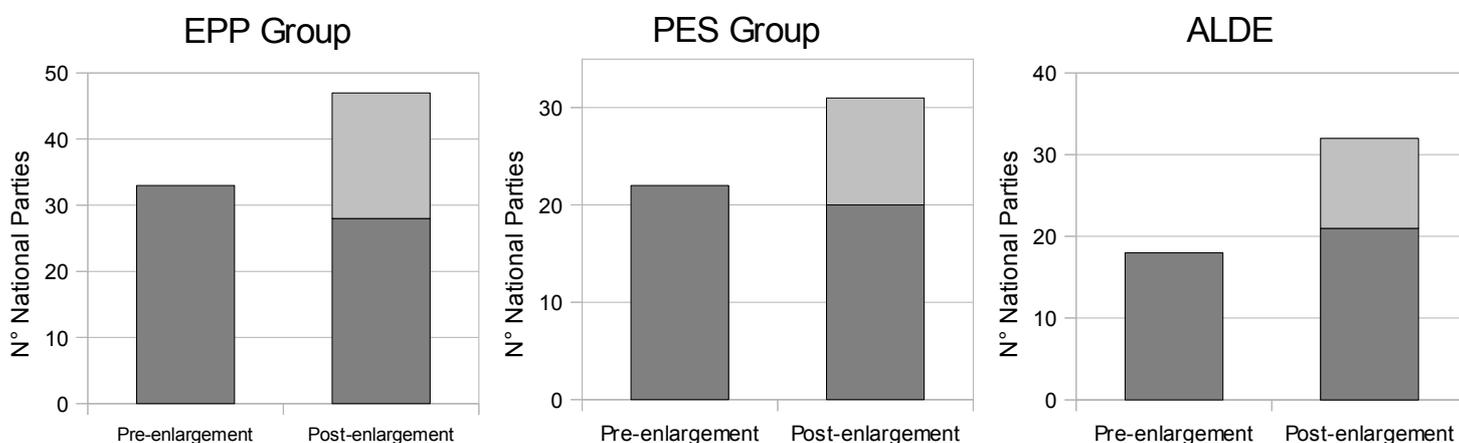
Note: in light-gray parties from the New Europe

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notwithstanding the initial endorsement of the Socialists, had to step back.

6   Beside, the extra-parliamentary parties also pursue policy objectives. However, their capacity to impact on the policy agenda is disputed (i.e. Lightfoot, 2005)

1.2 Enlargements and Party Institutionalization

The focus of this work is placed on a more demanding concept than that of party change, i.e party institutionalization. The latter concept is widely employed in the literature on political parties, but its meaning is far from being unanimously accepted (see Levitsky, 1998). Even if the literature does not investigates sistematically the relationship between the two concepts, it can be safely said that party change and institutionalization are not independent: quite clearly, institutionalization is a particular instance of change (i.e. Panebianco, 1988:250-251). In this work, the analytical focus will be strictly placed on "structural institutionalization" (Randall, Svasand, 2002:12-13) – that is to say, on the process through which parties consolidate *as organizations*. I fully acknowledge that institutionalization also includes a 'value', or 'ideological', dimension. However, I am here only interested in party structural institutionalization or, differently said, to the development and consolidation of party organizations.

The literature suggests that at least two parameters should be considered in order to evaluate a party structural institutionalization: '*organization*' – also called 'complexity' or 'systemness' – and (decisional) '*autonomy*'. A fully automous party does not depend from its environment or from collateral or sponsoring organizations or groups but it is, rather, able to control (and even transform) the environment where it operates. Organization refers, instead, to the party internal coherence and the elaboration of a formalized structure (Hungtington, 1968:20-21; Randall, Svasand, 2002:12-13).

My expectation is that enlargement will not simply lead to organizational change, but will also trigger the party structural institutionalization. In order to understand why, I draw from the literature on party organizations (Michels, 1999 [1910], Panebianco, 1988). In this classic works, size is frequently taken as a most fundamental variable to account for party organizational change. In brief, it is argued there is that it exists a strong positive relationship between increase in size and a) party complexity b) centralization of power within the party, i.e. autonomy of the leadership.[7] In this literature, party size is measured through the number of rank-and-file members. This operational notion could easily translate to the European context, where Euro-party size represents the number of national member parties, and membership expansion is not the result of suffrage expansion (as in Michels's work), but – mainly – of enlargements.

From the definition of structural institutionalization we introduced above, 'complexity' and 'autonomy' are not only parameters for change, but they also point to the structural consolidation of the party. Therefore, my expectation is that – as a result of an external shock (Central and Eastern

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7As Panebianco neatly sums up: "growth in size is correlated with growth in internal division of labor, multiplication of hierarchical levels, and bureaucratic development" (Panebianco, 1988:183)

enlargement) impacting upon the the Euro-parties main goal (pursuing policy objectives), Euro-parties will undertake structural reform (change) consolidating their organizations (structural institutionalization). The next section moves from the theory to the empirics, introducing the operationalization of our institutionalization dimensions and discussing the available data.

2. Collecting data and measuring institutionalization

Methodologically, studies on party organizational change/institutionalization have either tried to quantify 'party change' by devising numerical indicators that could be used in statistical regression models (e.g. Harmel *et al.*, 1995) or privileged more qualitative research approaches – relying on longitudinal comparisons or on process tracing (e.g. Panebianco, 1988; Mueller, 1997). In order to study the impact of CEE upon our cases – the three largest and oldest political Groups – this work has chosen a qualitative research strategy. Besides the few cases, it is also retained that an in-depth investigation of the actors' motivations is needed in order to cast light on the causal process formerly outlined.

As it concerns the data, this work draws on a wide documentary evidence, constituted by the Groups' rules of procedures – their 'official story' – together with a broad range of party documents (organigrams, activity reports, official publications...) Besides, the documentary material has been integrated with about thirty interviews, which were mostly conducted in Brussels with MEPs, top administrators and policy advisors, between November 2009 and July 2010. There were two main difficulties involved in the the data collection, which I describe below.

The first problem regards the accessibility of the political Groups' archives for researchers. Kreppel once wrote that the study of the organizational development of the political Groups is an "elusive goal" (2002:177). It is very difficult indeed – today as it was in mid-Nineties, when she conducted her research – to make a systematic collection of the 'official stories' of the Groups. The Secretariats of the political Groups do not generally keep official track of the historical versions of the Rules. This makes often difficult to place an organizational change back in time with exact precision. Furthermore, the archives of the Groups are often managed by the services of the Group Secretariats in Brussels. Accessibility is often limited and it might be granted only through personal contacts – in any case, the minutes of the Bureau meetings are rarely made accessible.

A second important question which needed to be asked was: who shall be interviewed? Potential candidates could be found among politicians working in EU politics and party administrators. After a few exploratory interviews, I discovered that the latter group was, on average, more informative. It was harder to grasp organizational details from MEPs: only a few of

them are involved in organizational matters and – having conducted most of my interviews at the beginning of the VIIth legislature – few have been active in EU party politics for a sufficient time to be able to describe party organizational *development*. Conversely, party administrators working in the Groups and, especially, top-administrators such as secretary-generals or heads of department, often made an entire carrier in the Group. I conducted interwiews in an open format and framed my questions in general terms. I considered it a more effective way to concentrate on the field data, rather than insisting on testing a hypothesis or getting some information out of the interviewee which he/she might have regarded as irrelevant (Dexter, 2006:57-58).

Moving from the data collection to measurement issues, a number of indicators can be used to capture party institutionalization. As argued in section 1, structural institutionalization is characterized by two dimensions: organization and autonomy. The former dimension translates well from national to European-level parties (and, indeed, to any organization). A change in organization – meaning *more* organization – can be measured by several indicators. The number of formal rules included in the party 'constitution' is a rough measure, but it has been nonetheless widely utilized to capture Euro-party development (e.g. Hix, Lord, 1997:100-110; Kreppel, 2002:192-198). Other classic measures include the number of staff, its specialization, the differentiation of the tasks to be performed within the organization (horizontal differentiation) and the hierarchical differentiation among levels (vertical differentiation). It is also argued (e.g. Panebianco, 1988) that a strong organization makes a more effective use of its sanctioning mechanisms in order to reward its loyal members and punish those who defect 'from the line'.

The indicators for the second dimension of structural institutionalization – 'autonomy' – are more specifically designed for the Euro-parties. Autonomy is meant *vis-a-vis* their national member parties. More autonomous Euro-parties are more *European* parties, because the power within the organization translates from the the unit-level (the national parties) to the central level (the Euro-party organs). Three indicators are meant to capture this shift of power. First, the centralization of decision-making, when the decision-making power moves from the Plenary (the base organs) to the Bureau or the Presidency (the apical organs). Second, the change in the decision-making rules. If the voting rules shift from unanimity to majority rule, the units' control over the centre becomes weaker. Evidently, this change is all the more important as it involves political, rather than technical and administrative, decisions. Third, representation rules. A less than proportional system of representation of the member parties in the apical organs points to stronger autonomy. Again, the European element of the Euro-parties becomes stronger. Here implied, it is also an element of trust: if (say) the Italians are represented in the Presidency by their Dutch colleagues, responsibility roles within the party are no longer (exclusively) based on nationality, but (also) upon functional lines.

Table 1: Structural Institutionalization: dimensions and indicators

Concept: change in...	Indicators: change in...
Organization	• number of formal rules; • number of staff; • specialization (who performs what administrative tasks); • variety of tasks performed; • hierarchical differentiation; • control mechanisms
Autonomy	• centralization of decision-making (more powers to apical organs); • voting rules (more majority voting); • representation of national member parties (less proportional)

Note: see also Harmel, 2002

In the following paragraphs, I will empirically assess the validity of my expectation. After a descriptive presentation of the organizational structures the Groups' adopt (Part 3.1), I will focus upon their organizational consolidation over time. This section (Part 3.2) will be mainly based upon the parties 'official stories' and on a review of the secondary literature and will seek to (logically) associate important external events with subsequent changes on the institutionalization dimensions. Finally, Part 3.3 will zoom on enlargement and it will attempt to trace the causal mechanism at play in-between the 'external shock' (enlargement) and the outcome (institutionalization).

3. Empirical Analysis

3.1 Background: the political Groups organization and role in the House

As it is very well known, the political Groups are the backbone of the European Parliament legislative structure (i.e. Corbett *et al.*, 2007). However, even though the EP as it looks today would be unthinkable without the political Groups, the latter have been seldomly studied as *organizations* (among the few exceptions: Fitzmaurice, 1975 and Kreppel, 2002). Consequently, this section presents a simple description of the basic organizational model they adopt, highlighting their key organs and tasks.

All the political Groups have two basic organs. The '*Plenary*', or simply 'Group', is the organ where all the MEPs are represented. It is the Plenary which decides on the final position of the Group on legislative dossiers and resolutions and formally nominates Group members to the

Parliament and Group bodies. Beside the Plenary, the '*Bureau*' is a more restricted organ – including the Group President and Vice-Presidents, one or more members per national party together with the MEP occupying positions of responsabilities in the Parliament (Committee Chairmen, members of the EP Bureau etc.) - and it has traditionally been attributed preparatory and administrative tasks.

In the EPP and the ALDE, but not in the PES, the '*Presidency*' is a distinct organ. It is a more restricted organ than the Bureau – comprising only the President, a number of Vice-Presidents and a Treasurer – and it represents the Group externally and takes decisions in urgent cases. Moreover, the day-to-day working of the Groups is guaranteed by the *Secretariats*. The Secretariats employ a number of staff which varies according to the number of MEPs one Group has. Nowadays, the smallest Groups employ between thirty and forty people, while the biggest groups are large burocracies featuring more than two-hundred employees.

If the Plenary, the Bureau and the Presidency constitute the bulk of the organizational structure of the Groups, '*National Delegations*' are also often mentioned by the Rules. In each and every Group – the exception seems to be the Green-EFA Group[8] – national delegations are formally set up, have their separate meetings before the Group meetings and have their own leaders (often) represented in the Group decision-making organs. The shift of decision-making power from the national delegations to the Group organs is the key aspect to increase the autonomy of the political Groups.

In order to illustrate the case of a Group where all the decision-making power lies in the national member parties and the Group (as a transnational body) is conversely void of competences, the Euroskeptic Europe of Freedom & Democracy (EFD) can be considered. In the EFD, unanimity is the rule to take 'common political decisions' and majority voting is only used for 'administrative questions'. 'Sub-groups' – as national delegations are named by the Group – are each represented by a Vice-President in the Bureau and enjoy the most complete freedom: single members can even act and sign documents on behalf of themselves. In brief, the Group results to be nothing more than the sum of constituent parts.

In the next section, through an historical presentation of the organizational structures of the main political Groups, I will seek to show to what extent the EPP, the PES and the ALDE have grown in complexity and autonomy from their early days in the non-elected Parliament to the late Nineties. The next section will then deal specifically with the impact of Central and Eastern Enlargement.

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8   This is how a top-administrator of the Greens-EFA Group describes the Group: "In the Green-EFA Group there are no delegations, no real national delegations. There is a numerical primacy of the Germans or the French people. But there is no right for a delegation to block something. Members of the same nationality sometimes meet for breakfast, but that's all". Interview, 05.02.2010

3.2 Historical phases in the institutionalization of the political Groups

The scholarly literature has theorized the importance of two environmental factors playing the role of key catalists for the political Groups' institutionalization (Bartolini, 2005:326-329; Kreppel, 2002:44-45): i) the introduction of direct elections in 1979, leading to a huge growth in their membership figures; ii) the extention of the EP legislative powers via Treaty reform. Here, I have suggested that the 'Big Bang' enlargement is likely to play the role of a further environmental catalyst. Following each of these events, broad organizational reforms should then be expected.

Before direct elections, the political Groups all scored poorly in terms of autonomy from the national party components. According to the EPP Rules (dating 1975), the Bureau – where each national party was represented by at least one Member – was an administrative body responsible for the day-to-day management of the Group. The Chairman's Office – later called Presidency – was assigned the task to represent the Group externally and leading the Group internal meetings. It also included a Vice-President per each national delegation not yet expressing the Chairman. In the ancient EPP Group, the most important organ was the Plenary. It had the power to take decisions on all political questions, to decide upon nominations in Committees and to nominate Group Members to the EP top jobs.

A very similar organizational structure characterized the PES. Its Rules (dating 1977) granted the most important role to the Plenary. The Plenary should establish the Group policy position, appoint the spokesmen for the plenary debates and, following a proposal from the Bureau, the PES members in the EP Committees. By contrast, the Bureau was an administrative organ. It had to be composed up by at least nine members: one for each national delegation and two for the biggest ones. Within the Group, decisions were taken by simple majority – if at least half of the Members were present. However, it was reported that "votes in the Group are reduced to a minimum, the consensus approach being preferred" (Fitzmaurice, 1975:89).

As for the Liberal Group, its organization was minimal. The Group carried out much of its work informally and assigned to its Plenary the key political role. There, votes were rarely taken and consensus was always sought. The Bureau – consisting of one representative for Member State – was described as "not important [...] it does not even meet too often" (Fitzmaurice, 1975:109).

As it regards the organization dimension, the political Groups did not have sanctions to punish the least loyal Members. Only loose instruments of control existed. In the EPP, for instance, individual Members were asked to inform the Chairman's Office prior to presenting a resolution, an emendment, or a written question, and the Chairman's Office had the power to delay action in order

to seek consultation with the Plenary. The mechanisms of control devised by the PES were even looser and contained a so-called "conscience clause", which granted Members' the right, for important political reasons, not to abide to the Group position.

Both the differentiation and specialization of the Group organs and secretariats were very limited. Both the EPP and the Socialists had – on the eve of direct elections – about fifteen administrators within their ranks. The Secretariats did not only serve the EP Group but, for instance, the EPP Secretariat was shared with the extra-parliamentary organization and the Group in the Assembly of the Council of Europe. The EPP Secretariat lacked any formal regulation and the division of tasks and competences between its members was very basic (Fontaine, 2009:138-139; 141-143).

In the period ranging from direct elections to the late Eighties, all Groups introduced new rules or codified existing informal practices. In particular, important changes were observable in the specialization of the Secretariats and in the differentiation of the Group functions. For instance, the EPP introduced working groups – each covering the policy area of a number of Committees – and the senior administrators were assigned specific policy responsibilities. The doubling in the membership figures of the Group brought to a consequent expansion and re-organization of the Secretariat. It was divided into four departments (central secretariat, parliamentary work, press, documentation) and staff regulations were also adopted (interview, 02-12-2009; Fontaine, 2009:139, 147-48, 175-6). In the early Eighties, the EPP had about 55 staff members, while the Socialists employed 77 people and the Liberal Group about 20.[9]

The increase in complexity is also evident for the Socialist and the Liberal Groups. In the former Group, the number of formal rules boosted from the original 21 (in 1977) to 48 (in 1986). A few 'monitoring' provisions were added: Members were asked to participate to the Group, EP organs and Committee meetings; written questions had to be transmitted to the Group and the power to decide upon the allocation of speaking time – including the allocation of time to express "minority positions" (art. 36) – was given to the Group.[10] The Liberals adopted a regulation where – in 22 articles – several of the previous informal practices were codified. The new Rules also included some loose mechanisms of control: in case of a personal initiative, the relevant documentation had to be submitted to the Secretariat, and individual speakers had to inform the President.

However, changes in complexity were not matched by a parallel increase in the Groups' autonomy. Throughout this period, the decision-making system of the Groups remained, practically,

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9   Figures from EP, 2010:31,42,138

10 However, a "conscience clause" could still be adduced by Members for "serious political reasons" (art. 19)

unaltered. Only the PES rules registered some limited transfer of powers to the Bureau.

A further step towards the institutionalization of the political Groups was made in the early Nineties, following the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty. Changes in the Group structure were introduced by the EPP with the 1989 versions of the Rules[11]. Some previous informal norms were formalized: for instance, the Coordinators were officially recognized. A new function for monitoring the Members' presence – the "chief Whip" – was introduced and assigned to a Vice-Chairmen. The need for more coordination by the Secretariat was met by setting-up a "management team" - comprising the Secretary General and the heads of Department (Fontaine, 2009:272, 362).

The extention of the EP legislative powers was also reflected in the increase in the PES organs specialization. The Vice-Presidents were each attributed a specific portfolio, coordinators and working groups were included in the formal rules and a "Whip list" was established. The enhanced importance of legislative work also required a re-organization of the Secretariat.[12]

In general, what the historical record reveals is that all political Groups have undergone a significant process of consolidation, moving from the loose and undifferentiated structures of the mid-Seventies to the powerful burocratic machineries of the Nineties. However, the increase in complexity has not been matched by a parallel strengthening of the Groups' decision-making autonomy. They entered the new century with a very substantial power still firmly located in the hands of the national parties. Whether this situation still holds in the enlarged EU is what the next section explores.

3.3 The impact of Central and Eastern enlargement

The political Groups all reformed their Rules between 2003 – when the CE members joined the Groups as 'observers' – and 2005. What kind of organizational changes did they implement? Were organizational innovations a response to CEE? In general, it can be anticipated that the expectation that enlargement would have triggered the structural institutionalization of the political Groups holds true – although the magnitude of the impact varies among the observed Groups[13].

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11 The 1994 Regulations were made up of 34 articles, with only a slight increase from the previous version.

12 The structure of the Liberal Group remained formally unaltered, notwithstanding several revisions of the Rules. However, the Group reacted to the legislative empowerment of the EP by hiring more staff, with more specialized competences (interview, 04.11.2009).

13 Between 2003 and 2005, the European Parliament did not experience any growth in its legislative power. Therefore, the comparison of the Groups organizations before and after enlargement keeps the EP legislative powers – one of the main factors responsible for political Groups' organizational change – constant

3.31 The Socialist Group

The most wide-ranging reforms have been implemented by the Socialist Group. The new Rules (April 2003) include, in 52 articles, a substantial reform of the decision-making system and a fundamental restructuring of the Bureau. If the Group is defined by the Rules as "the highest political autority" (art. 17), it is the Bureau that takes most of the key decisions. According to the Rules, the Bureau plays the role of "key strategic player" (art. 28) and, *inter alia*, drafts the annual programme, prepares the Group positions and decides upon the nomination of Group candidates to the parliamentary bodies.

The new Rules radically changed the composition of the Bureau. The new Bureau is only made up by the President, seven Vice-Presidents[14] and a treasurer. An article (art. 28) specifically states that the members of the Bureau should all be of a different nationality. In the composition of the Bureau, several parameters need to be kept into account: a balancing between men and women, between the EU macro-regions (Eastern Europe, Mediterranean countries...) and the size of the national delegations. This is a substantial shift from the exclusive concern with national representation in the composition of the pre-2003 Bureau.

Two further elements characterize the new Bureau and are worth mentioning. First, the Bureau decides by simple majority - where each member has a vote, which is no longer weighted for the size of the national delegation of that member. In order to take decisions, a 5/9 quorum is required. Second, a "motion of no confidence" against the Bureau may be tabled by a national delegation or by a group of members representing at least 10 percent of the Group members (art. 14). This provision finds no equivalent for the other Groups and clearly points to the key political importance the Bureau has been granted in the new Rules.

Besides the empowerment of the Bureau, the Socialist Group has also moved forward in terms of specialization, vertical differentiation and staff. The Vice-Presidents have been allocated sectoral responsabilities. One Vice-President acts as spokesman, another Vice-President as parliamentary secretary and the five others are each assigned a specific sectoral area (economic and social affairs, citizens' Europe...). The Vice-Presidents are then asked to chair the horizontal working groups (art. 31). This is a new structure that the Group has set up in order to better coordinate its members and smoothening out conflicts among them. The horizontal working groups bring together the working groups established at the committee level in nearby policy areas. Their importance is clear when there are distinct preferences between Members of the Group in different committees. With them, the Socialists seek to reconcile the policy position of the members by

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14 The number of Vice-Presidents was extended to nine in 2006

working out a compromise. Moreover, the expansion of the Group bodies has been paralleled by a growth in the number of staff members. The Group had about 60 administrators in 2001, which became about 90 in 2009.

The interviews point to this reform as to the "most important" undetaken by the Group since the early Nineties. How has it been motived by the key decision-makers in the PES? A top-administrator of the Group recalls the moment preceding the reform: "the Group was reformed following the reflections made by a group of 'wise-men' – people of several EU States with great experience in the Group works – who had several meetings in 2003. They thought about a change in the structure of the parliamentary Group in order to prepare it to the most important enlargement: the 2004 enlargement, which then became the 2004-2007 enlargement...but, at the time, we thought that enlargement would have immediately brought into the EU not only 10, but 12 countries...the problem we faced was: how can we make a Group made by 27 nationalities much more fluid and organizationally capable to perform?" (interview, 27.11.09). An interesting element is that reform in the Socialist Group *anticipated* the likely impact of enlargement. Key decision-makers in the Group imagined that the radical upgrade in membership to be soon experienced by the Group had to be confronted with a more efficient and performing structure.

The Group decision-making structure was already under strain in the pre-enlargement Parliament. The Bureau was considered to be too large and its proceedings too cumbersome and unwieldy. As a former Deputy Secretary-General of the Group remarks: "we got to a point where nearly a third of the Members or a quarter of the Members were on the Bureau, or we would have them in if we hadn't reformed the Bureau. So, you could have a discussion in the Bureau, which would make a proposal to the Group, where you would have the same Bureau members plus as many more, and then another third absent" (interview, 09.11.09). Because – before 2003 – the Bureau was made up of at least a member per national delegation, the heads of delegation were *de facto* constituting the Group executive.

As the PES was on the eve of enlarging, the Group leaders expected a Bureau with 27 national delegation leaders and a more important strategic role to play to perform unsatisfactorily. This is well illustrated by another PES senior admistrator: "When we started, the Bureau brought together all the heads of delegation. So, it was a 'confederal' structure. The Bureau was the policy executive, preparing positions in the Group and, until 2004, the key players in that sort of strategic role were the heads of delegation. But, with enlargement, you had more and more delegation represented. You can't bring together 27 national delegations and national delegation leaders and have the same effectiveness. The Bureau was restructured to make it smaller, and people were no longer there as leaders of the delegations. In fact, we have a rule that you can't be both a delegation

leader and a member of the Bureau" (interview, 28.10.2009). In brief, the structure of the Group was made more "supranational", or "federalist" (interviews; 09.11.09, 27.11.09): since 2003, members have been seating in the Bureau with sectoral responsabilities, and were no longer the representative of their national party.

The reform of the Bureau was accompanied by a substantial reform of the Group management of the legislative activity. After enlargement, the sheer volume of legislative work, in combination with the need to take into consideration more opinions and viewpoints from the national members, urged the PES to set-up a three step procedure to decide upon legislative issues (interviews, 28.10.09; 21.01.10). First, an issue is tackled at the committee level. If it proves to be a divisive issue, it is also dealt by at the upper level by the 'horizontal working group' – bringing together committees in connected policy areas. At last, the issue may reach the Plenary where – if consensus cannot be achieved – a vote is finally taken. It is important to underline that, although the introduction of the 'three step' procedure gets especially justified by the fact that the amount of legislative work makes no longer possible to deal with each and every dossier directly at the Plenary level, the reform is only implemented in 2003, even if the EP legislative powers were not incremented between the second half of the fifth (2002-2004) and the sixth legislature.

3.32 The Liberal Group

After enlargement, the ALDE Group also experienced an important organizational reform. In particular, the reform centralized the Group decision-making power by granting more visibility and power to the Presidency and the Bureau. The Presidency is now made up by the President and a maximum of six Vice-Presidents – one of them being the Treasurer and another one the Whip. The Bureau – previously, only attributed an administrative function – shall now prepare the "strategic decisions of the Group" (art. 10) and it shall decide on the creation of permanent working groups – a competence which was previously attributed to the Group. The voting procedures were also emended. The new RoP establish that 'simple majority' (rather than absolute majority) suffices.

The most important organizational changes experienced by the ALDE Group are described by a top administrator: "There are two separate developments which, I think, also took place in the two other big Groups. The former is that the amount of workload doesn't allow anymore for dealing with all political issues in full Group meetings: therefore, we have all structured our working groups, which prepare the Group meetings in such a way that only controversial issues come to the full Group. The second development, a new feature of last years, is a better coordination role for the parliamentary coordinators, the ones who have to coordinate work in the different Committees. In

all legislation we try to create maximal cohesion of our forces. Twenty years ago, it's clear that with less legislative powers it mattered less than now how you voted, but now it matters, and so the Coordinators have their own role in coordinating Members and also in collectively organizing the Group cohesion" (interview, 04.11.2009).

What is clear is that, because of the increasing amount and relevance of the legislative decisions taken by the EP, the Group has adapted its organization by setting up new structures or formalizing the existing ones. Nonetheless, as for the case of the PES, an external catalyst was needed in order to implement more wide-ranging reforms. Why were the official regulations of the Group only substantially modified in 2005 – when the Parliament had already known more than a decade of legislative empowerment? A top-official of the ALDE Group provides us with a reason: "I think the main difference between the old parliamentary Group and that in the last Parliament [*2004-2009*] was of an organizational nature. The sheer size and the workload meant that we had to start with working groups: this had nothing to do with the fact that our Members came from two Euro-parties [*the ELDR and the EDP*], but with the fact that because we have more delegations – total number of delegations – we need more coordination. And that is the reason. People have different backgrounds, the starting point is different, they come from different national party delegations but, in the end, it is about talking to each other about policy issues. Eveybody – and again, I think I can speak for the other two big Groups – eveybody expected a cultural shock in 2004 because of the 'Big Bang' enlargement. In reality, it was more an organizational problem: how to talk with all the new national delegations, the new languages, more people only speaking their mother tongue...the key question became: how can we organize?" (interview, 04.11.2009; interview 02.07.2010).

In short, the Group – which was already burdened by a huge workload – had to face a large expansion in membership brought in by enlargement. The old organization was not designed to manage the coordination of such a big number of members and the existing structures (in particular, the plenary) were placed under pressure. The ALDE reacted first by shifting some decision-making powers from the Group to the Bureau and the Presidency and, second, by introducing some intermediate structures (the working groups) and reinforcing the coordinators' role. Thus, the ALDE adapted its organization to perform in its new environment as a policy-making actor.


3.33 The Group of the European People's Party

The EPP adopted its new Regulations in Mars 2004. The new Rules, in 36 articles, brought innovation, with respect to the previous Rules, in a few well-delimited fields. First, they better

defined the competences of the Bureau. It has been added that the Bureau shall prepare the "strategic" decisions of the Group and, in view of the Plenary meetings, it shall highlight "the most difficult questions for the Group from the different national perspectives" (art. 6). Second, the Rules explicitly introduced an "opting-out" clause for the European Democrats component, made up by the British Tories and a few smaller parties, by means of which they were granted the right "to promote and develop their distinct views on constitutional and institutional issues" (art. 5).

What strikes about the new Rules is their similarity with the 1999 version. Briefly said, the powers of the decision-making organs, the differentiation and specialization of the Group organs and their functions remain fundamentally the same. In the case of the EPP(-ED) Group, at least when the focus is placed on formal rules, the CEE impact appears to be very limited. The absence of broad organizational reform is surprising and defies our expectations – all the more considering that the EPP was able to attract members from *all* CE countries. The difference with the other Groups is striking. Why did both the PES and the ALDE substantially reform their structures, while the EPP could keep them basically unaltered? In other words: how could enlargement have such a different impact on the three largest Groups?

Both the interviews and the EPP official documents point to one most likely explanation: the Group had already experienced a huge expansion in membership *before* CEE occurred. From the early Nineties, the EPP adopted a strategy of expansion towards the centre-right parties which did not belong to the Christian-Democratic tradition, such as the British and Danish Conservatives, the Scandinavian Conservative Parties and the Italian Forza Italia (e.g. Jansen, 2006:155-160). As it is clearly displayed in graph1, the EPP knew a massive expansion between 1994 and 1999. In the fifth Parliament, the EPP became the largest political Group with 232 seats – leaving behind the Socialists and growing by about 80 seats.

Graph 1: MEPs in the three largest political Groups

Source:*http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/archive/staticDisplay.do?language=EN&id=214*
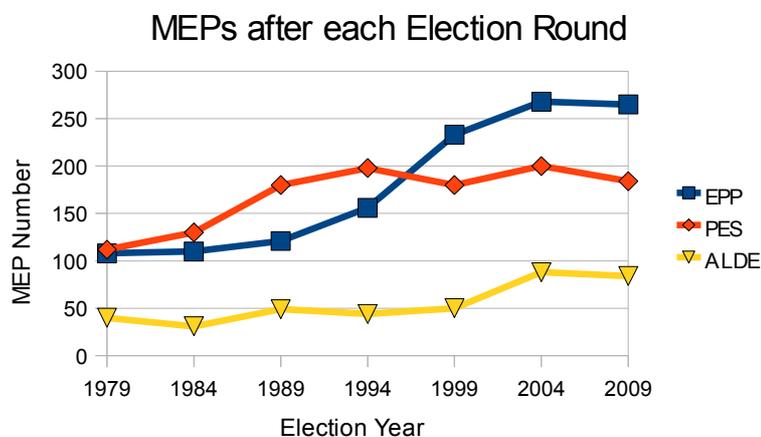
This expansion is reflected in the substantial reform of the Group organization of the late Nineties. First, the 1999 introduced a new decision making organ, empowered with a key strategic role – the "Group Presidency and Heads of National Delegation". Its importance was underlined in art. 12: "[it] shall meet regularly to discuss key guidelines and to prepare decisions of major importance for the political strategy of the Group". In terms of membership, it was a more restricted organ than the Bureau: as its name reveals, only the members of the Presidency and the Heads of the National Delegations could attend its meetings. Second, the EPP Group set a ceiling to the maximum number of Vice-Chairmen and the Presidency became a more 'federal' organ: the right of each national delegation to have its representative there ceased.

The reform of the Presidency is described by an EPP senior official: "The Presidency became a much stronger organ than it had been. Before 1999 the Presidency was a sort of honorific body: people were elected to the Group Presidency not because there was really any specific policy task to carry out, but because it was the senior 'politburo'. They dealt with a lot of administrative and staff issues. It was decided in 1999 that we needed to strenghten our Presidency. The role of the Presidency should really be to be the leading organ of the Group. And that is when we made the Presidency much more politically accountable and the Vice-Presidents also took responsability for the Working Groups. The members of the Presidency suddenly acquired a political influence and began to really have an important role in coordinating the political work of the Group" (interview, 01.07.2010). The 'Presidency and Heads of National Delegations' was then set up to counterbalance the powers of the new Presidency and exert a national influence on the federal organ. The need to make the largest Group in the House more efficient also brought to a reform of its Secretariat. The Management Team started to meet more regularly since 1999 and the department for parliamentary work was re-organized into five working groups, each corresponding to a standing working groups.

Overall, these organizational innovations are very similar to those implemented by both the PES and the ALDE. Here again, the EPP modified its organization by reinforcing its apical organs and introducing more specialization within the Secretariat. What is different is not really the outcome, but its timing. The Group experienced a 'shock' well before Eastern enlargement, due to the opening of the Christian-Democratic boundaries to Conservative parties and its new position as the largest Group in the House. Moreover, and differently from the other Groups, the EPP had already set up standing working groups since the early Eighties, and their basic structure needed only to be more formalized and integrated with the Presidency (interview, 02.07.2010).

To be sure, this argument should not lead to the conclusion that enlargement has not had any impact upon the EPP. Simply, it has not led to the more substantial reform experienced by the

Liberals and the Socialists. For instance, enlargement caused an impressive rise in the number of staff: its members were 129 in 1993, 163 in 1998, 200 in 2003 and 288 in 2008 (Fontaine, 2009). As a senior administrator argues: "there has clearly been an upgrade not only in the quantity of staff, but also in its quality. After enlargement, English has definitely become the main working language. This means that people have to know at least English, possibly French, plus another language" (interview, 02.12.09). However, the overall evidence seems to indicate that the pre-existing EPP organizational structure was already apt to face the burden of enlargement: both the reform of the Presidency and the traditional working groups structure have proven to be effective tools for the management of the largest Group in the House.

Conclusion

The expectation that enlargement would have played the role of an external shock for the political Groups organizational development holds generally true. This is because enlargement impinges upon the party primary goal – the management of EP legislative activity – placing their organizational structures under strain. The Groups' key decision-makers know that the costs of non reforming the Rules would be very high: the risk of not being able to comply with the task they are expected to perform is tremendous. Faced with this perspective, the party leaders act and reform the structures of their organizations – with an increase in the number of staff, in the specialization of the Group organs and Secretariats and by introducing new intermediate structures, such as working groups, to tackle legislation.

However, the impact of enlargement is not homogeneous across the observed Groups. The Socialists and the Liberals have considerably adapted their organizations. They both introduced horizontal (or permanent) working groups to more effectively deal with legislation and possibly solve internal conflicts. They both strenghtened the Presidency and the Bureau – by making them more 'federal' organs and by attributing them more political competences (e.g. the responsability of the working groups). By contrast, after CEE the EPP Group did not change extensively its organizational structure. The most likely explanation for this absence of broad-ranging reform has to do with the higher level of organizational development reached by the EPP before 2004. It has been shown that the EPP knew a massive expansion in numbers and diversity between the fourth and the fifth legislature. Thus, in the late Nineties, the Group implemented an important reform of both its Presidency and its Secretariat. Significantly, the EPP organizational innovations would be 'adopted' by the PES and the ALDE a few years later.

This work has also shown that enlargement has brought to an important change in the

developmental trajectory of the political Groups. If previous environmental catalysts (such as the 1979 elections, or the EP legislative empowerment) led to a consolidation of the Groups' organizations, after enlargement the Groups have also grown considerably in their autonomy. The Group leading political organs, the EPP and ALDE Presidency and the PES Bureau, are now federal organs organized along functional lines. To be sure, the Groups' apical organs have regular meetings with the national delegations – which are even formalized by the EPP in the "Presidency and Heads of National Delegations" – but the break with the system of national representation is a very important advancement in their process of structural institutionalization.

Finally, I see two main limits in the findings of this research. Its focus was exclusively and selectively placed on the structural dimension of institutionalization and on the political Groups in the European Parliament. For a more accurate depiction of Euro-party development, both the 'value' dimension of institutionalization (Randall, Svasand, 2002:12-13) and the Euro-party extra-parliamentary organizations should also be included in further research.

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09/11/2009 Former Deputy Secretary General, PES Group

11/11/2009 Former Deputy Secretary General, ALDE Group

19/11/2009 Senior Administrator, PES Group

27/11/2009 Senior Administrator, PES Group

02/12/2009 Senior Administrator, EPP Group

05/02/2010 Senior Administrator, Green-EFA Group

30/06/2010 Political Advisor, ALDE Group

01/07/2010 Senior Administrator, EPP Group

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