

# **The Role of Political Parties in the European Union**

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### ***1. Party politics as usual? The role of political parties in EU legislative decision-making***

Björn Lindberg; Anne Rasmussen; Andreas Warntjen

Scholars have raised doubts about the ability of political parties to fulfil their traditional role as 'transmission belts' between citizens and legislators in the EU. We discuss how the different institutional environment of the EU affects the assumptions and predictions of theories of political parties developed for the national context and discuss how political parties can influence EU legislative decision-making. We distinguish between partisan effects in the electoral and legislative arena, and argue for a clear distinction between the effects of national parties, national party delegations and transnational party groups when studying EU party politics. The empirical literature shows that, whereas parties play a role in most institutions, they are not always the dominant players, and their effect varies both across and within these institutions.

### ***2. Who leads, who follows? Re-examining the party-electorate linkages on European integration***

Johan Hellström

This article re-examines and evaluates the link between electorates' opinions and national political parties' positions on European integration, i.e. the extent to which political parties lead and/or follow public opinion on this issue. Applying a method for causal modelling (Granger causality tests) to panel data concerning political parties' positions and voters' opinions in 15 countries from 1973 to 2003, I find (contrary to previous investigations of this relationship) that there is little empirical support for an electoral connection or reciprocal causation between party positions and electorates' opinion regarding European integration. Parties have an influence on voter opinions, but are at the same time unresponsive to changes in voter opinion.

### ***3. Decision-making dynamics in the European Commission: partisan, national or sectoral?***

Arndt Wonka

Its monopoly power to formulate policy proposals and set the European Union's (EU's) legislative agenda guarantees the European Commission considerable prominence in EU legislative studies. It is commonly conceptualized as a unitary actor, acting cohesively - often in its own supranational interest - in EU decision-making. Recent theoretical developments and empirical studies, however, cast doubt on this conceptualization. This paper takes up these matters and investigates the decision-making mechanisms and dynamics of the Commission's executive politics. Two case studies show that the formal division of power along portfolios puts formally responsible Commissioners in a privileged position to influence the content of legislative proposals in internal decision-making. This influence, however, is circumscribed by the opposition of other Commissioners. At least in the cases studied here, Commissioners' position-taking and conflict in internal decision-making follow a national and, to some extent, a sectoral rather than a partisan pattern.

#### ***4. Party soldiers in a non-partisan community? Party linkage in the European Parliament***

Anne Rasmussen

Even though the European Parliament is the EU institution which most resembles national parliaments, party politics here is more complex than in the national context because MEPs are both members of national and transnational parties. In order to increase our understanding of party politics within this body, the article compares the character of the links that MEPs hold to their national parties and EP party groups, and examines whether the type of committee membership that MEPs hold affects the strength of these party links. Based on responses to a recent survey in the European Parliament, it demonstrates that MEPs have strong links to both national and EU-level parties, but that the character of their links to the two differs. Even though transnational party groups regulate MEPs in day-to-day politics, they feel more inclined to represent their national parties. In contrast, MEPs who have served as conciliation delegates do not have stronger party links than standing committee members in general.

#### ***5. Are political parties controlling legislative decision-making in the European Parliament? The case of the services directive***

Björn Lindberg

This case study analyses the efforts of the transnational party groups in controlling the legislative decision-making process inside the European Parliament. The case study focuses on one of the most important and contested pieces of European legislation: the services directive. The study addresses the choice of the rapporteurship for the legislative proposal through comparing the trade-offs between policy preferences, party loyalty and expertise in the nomination process. Further, the study analyses the party group internal conflict patterns, which emerged in the first reading of the proposal. The results show that party group voting loyalty and preference proximity to the party might have been a decisive factor in the nomination of the rapporteur for the services directive. The two largest party groups were also able to secure a compromise solution, which determined the final outcome of the intra-institutional decision-making process.

#### ***6. Parties in the Council?***

Sara Hagemann; Bjorn Hoyland

Ideology is widely seen as a powerful explanatory force of behaviour in collective decision-making. Yet, research on the Council of the European Union, the chief legislative body in the European Union, has only recently started to pay attention to ideology. We investigate to what extent formal position-taking can be explained by the ideological party affiliation of the governing parties. The focus is twofold. First, can aggregated coalition patterns be explained by ideological party affiliation? Second, do countries change coalition partners when there is a change of parties in government?

#### ***7. Party politics in the European Council***

Jonas Tallberg; Karl Magnus Johansson

This article explores the extent to which the growing party politicization of the EU extends to the European Council. We advance the argument that three central factors shape the extent to which party politics influences European Council outcomes: the salience of an issue along the left-right dimension, the partisan composition of the European Council, and the cohesion and mobilization of transnational parties. We explore the influence of these factors empirically through an inventory of elite interview evidence as well as two case studies - the employment chapter of the Amsterdam Treaty and the Lisbon

agenda. We conclude that the conditions for party influence in the European Council are demanding, and that the scope for party politicization is less extensive than in the other major EU institutions. The issues on the agenda of the European Council often cut across partisan divides, the heads of government are seldom mobilized along transnational party lines, and decision outcomes instead tend to reflect issue-specific coalition patterns.

#### **8. *The party political make-up of EU legislative bodies***

Andreas Warntjen; Simon Hix; Christophe Crombez

This research note provides an overview of the party political make-up of EU legislative bodies for the period 1979-2004 (Commission: 1979-2007) in terms of the left-right and pro-/anti-Europe dimensions. The various methods of measuring political positions are discussed and compared. Measures for the left-right dimension based on party manifestos and expert surveys are relatively strongly correlated for the time period. This is not the case for the pro-/anti-Europe dimension. The dataset is available via the homepage of the European Legislative Politics Research Group ([www.elprg.eu](http://www.elprg.eu)).

#### **9. *Towards a partisan theory of EU politics***

Simon Hix

A decade ago parties were largely absent from research on and theories of EU politics. The role of parties is now a central part of the research agenda, particularly in the area of EU legislative politics. The new research on parties in EU politics has made significant theoretical contributions, led to the collection and dissemination of new datasets, and employs some of the most advanced statistical methods in contemporary European political science. What is still missing, however, is a general theory of the role and impact of political parties, which helps to explain actors' behaviour in EU politics in a range of situations. This paper sketches some of the basic elements of what might be called a 'partisan theory of EU politics', starting from a discussion of how the policy and office incentives of national parties are shaped by the EU's 'upside-down polity'.