Bringing Instrumentality In: A Theoretical Case for the Role of Transnational Affiliations in Party-based Europeanisation

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Abstract

This article seeks to contribute to the study of party-based Europeanisation. More specifically, I explore, effectively in a theoretical manner, a new avenue of research in the study of the impact of European integration on national political parties, by focusing on the potential role of parties' transnational affiliations. I do so in an attempt to eliminate or decrease existing theoretical ambiguities and deficiencies that can be thought to lead to a narrow conceptual and empirical focus, when it comes to research on this subject. This narrowness is owed to the omission, by the extant literature, of the potential instrumentality of transnational affiliations in changing, adjusting or reconfirming national political parties' ideological profiles. By extending discussions of party-based Europeanisation, through incorporating the extant argument about instrumentality into the analysis of parties' transnational affiliations, I illustrate that the spectrum of the impact of European integration on national political parties can be wider than conceded so far.

THE ARGUMENT THAT EUROPEAN INTEGRATION HAS AN IMPACT ON NATIONAL political parties has been growing in attention and empirical testing, especially since Robert Ladrech's (2002) initial formulations. Since then, this argument has been pursued further by various scholars, leading to the formation of what can now be called a strain of literature – with a core research question, albeit through different methodological avenues. Broadly defined, this strain of literature, itself keeping in line with many other top-down conceptualisations forwarded by scholars focusing on political systems, policies and governance (for the earlier ones see, Buller and Gamble 2002; Olsen 2002; Ladrech 1994), contends that European integration has a number of indirect effects on national political parties. European Union (EU) policies and/or the EU dimension of domestic political competition lead national political parties to incorporate Europe into their party functions, in a manner that enables them "to attain indispensible goals" (Ladrech 2002: 393). Initially, Ladrech suggested five areas of party activity, each embodying a relatively

distinct function, for investigating the potential of top-down Europeanisation of national political parties: programmatic change, patterns of party competition, organisational change, party-government relations and affiliations beyond the national party system. In each, he argued, there is plenty of reason and indeed some preliminary evidence to suggest that parties are being indirectly Europeanised; that is, they change in response to EU-induced changes in their respective political systems.

The literature has by now incorporated in the study of party-based Europeanisation a careful examination of most of the above distinct areas (*e.g.* Pennings 2006; Kritzinger *et al.* 2004; Carter and Pogutnke 2010). The last area identified by Ladrech, of affiliations beyond the national party system, has arguably received very little attention (for an overview of the sub-field see Ladrech 2009a: section 2:2). Where Europeanisation scholars have touched it, focus has mostly been placed upon: a) the relation of national parties to their respective European party federations (EPFs), in terms of the salience placed on this relation and the organisational changes undertaken in order to strengthen it (Van Hecke 2009); b) the low grass-roots support and media coverage of EPFs and their activities (*e.g.* Ladrech 2007); c) the process of policy transfer and campaign guidance from the main EPFs on new Central East European (CEE) political parties, as part of the latter's integration into the former, during the accession period (*e.g.* Spirova 2008; Sloam 2005; Buras 2005; Pridham 2001, although such studies have not always and analytically employed the Europeanisation perspective; see also later). In retrospect, the transnational affiliations of national political parties have been left under-theorised in the Europeanisation literature. Largely responsible for this has been the limited focus on the issue of the instrumentality of parties' overall patterns of transnational affiliations; an instrumentality that, as I argue below, may condition the ideological profiles of national parties that in turn, may also serve various purposes instrumentally. When profiles' instrumental nature is incorporated into the question of how European integration affects political parties, the testing grounds of research and analysis widen. In this manner the conscious and strategic reactions of parties - which are in pursuit of one or more context-driven goals - to Brussels (*e.g.* Lefkofridi 2010, 2008; Steenbergen and Scott 2004; Sitter 2001), can be more thoroughly accounted for and explained.

Essentially, this study links the instrumentality of parties' transnational affiliations, with the impact of European integration on parties' ideological profiles, at the same time attempting to resolve the emerging, conceptual and methodological grey areas that present themselves, as well as give some preliminary examples in the direction of the main argument. By doing so, it illustrates that the spectrum of the impact of European integration on national political parties can be wider than conceded so far. As a note of caution, it should be added that parties' affiliations beyond the national party system may indisputably be thought to lie at the crossroads of top-down and bottom-up Europeanisation. The effects of European integration on national political parties are assumed to leave traces of influence on the EU polity or at least the structure of the developing EU party system (Van Hecke 2009: introduction; for a fuller formulation, stretching beyond parties, see Mair 2004). Nevertheless, in this article, I concentrate on a top-down pathway as a distinctive political phenomenon whereby the effect is upon parties' ideological profiles at the national level. In other words, a top-down pathway most of all means that the final resulting change regards the national level and not the EU one, although, as explained shortly, this process must not be conceptualized only as impact in the sense of something happening at the EU level.

In the next section I discuss further the limitations of relevant scholarly work on the subject so far, as well as add the concept of instrumentality, using it to conceptually reassess the Europeanisation of political parties by focusing on the role of transnational affiliations, and develop a new hypothesis. In section three I examine the logic of this new hypothesis.

Essentially, I firstly elaborate the link of parties' ideological profiles to the EU level, by drawing on existing theorisations of the concept of Europeanisation, and secondly engage with the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of the instrumentality argument, in order to shine light on the potential role that parties' transnational affiliations can play in party-based Europeanisation. In section four, I discuss methodological issues, initially by addressing possible units of analysis for instrumental change in transnational affiliations and then by assessing options for measuring the extent of Europeanisation. In section five, I provide a number of empirical pointers from the literature on both west and east European political parties, in an attempt to preliminary show the empirical relevance of the argument. In the conclusion I sum up.

What about party profiles? A conceptual reassessment

Research dealing with the party areas of patterns of party competition and programmatic change has concentrated on changes in what is being proposed and also in the extent to which EU-related preoccupations are projected. Yet, this duality of Europeanisation's effect – change, adjustment, reconfirmation of projected preoccupations, as well as the organisational and other emphasis placed upon them[1] – has been ignored in the study of parties' transnational affiliations. According to Ladrech (2002: 399), Europeanisation can be discerned in parties' transnational affiliations, when it results "in new perspectives on transnational cooperation with parties from other EU member states to the extent that new organisational and programmatic activities are promoted". The core issue in the extant literature remains that of the organisational entrenchment of the European question and it is explored through the study of subsequent organisational restructurings, reorientations of international affiliations "operations" and departments and programmatic change. There are half-exceptions. Bomberg (2002), for example, has gone a long way articulating a more multi-faceted mechanism of change in party-based Europeanisation, with a case study of the European Greens. In her analysis of ideological adjustments resulting from Europeanisation, she argued that "transnational co-operation and engagement has complimented trends simultaneously occurring at the domestic level: the privileging of certain issues over others; the softening of more radical Green views; the development of strategies favouring consensus and compromise; and an overall strategic grooming of the Greens for positions of government power" (Bomberg 2002: 40).

However, Bomberg's perspective appears under-developed in analytical terms for two reasons. First, by focusing mostly on the ultimate result of the greens' dominant patterns of transnational affiliations and spending little space on the mechanisms of change, Bomberg alludes to the unconscious or unintended nature of parties' networking patterns. Essentially, she downplays the instrumentality of their reactions to European integration and as a result also their capacity to foresee or expect the broader changes that may arise out of changing transnational affiliations or spending less or more time and resources on certain groups, federations and projects. Secondly and by extension, another key issue is that of temporality. Broader ideological changes in green parties may stem from engagement with specific transnational projects but methodologically they are conflated with changes in other separate areas of party activity. From a perspective that employs the distinction between different areas of party activity and subsequently the polymorphy of strategic action, the EU's impact on parties' identity component may manifest itself in one of three possible ways: 1) either through changes in transnational networking, only then followed by changes in the areas of programmatic rhetoric and patterns of domestic party competition; 2) or, through changes in programmatic rhetoric and patterns of domestic party competition first, only then followed by changes in transnational affiliations; 3) or, through simultaneous change in all areas.

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[1] What I have called elsewhere, 'realignment' and 'entrenchment' (Charalambous 2011).

In essence, the role of the ideological profiles of parties as a crucial component of the utility functions of parties in the dynamics of party conflict is largely missing in the study of transnational affiliations of parties. The logic of incorporating the role of transnational affiliations - as one which can be used to shape parties' ideological profiles - in the study of party-based Europeanisation, is based on the concept of instrumentality that Ladrech's original formulation hinted at, as we saw earlier, and which is prevalent in much of the party politics literature. Certain studies do employ and pursue further the concept of instrumentality, with respect either to the EU's impact on parties or parties' attitudes towards the EU. Building on the work of Muller and Strøm (1999) and Harmel and Janda (1994), Lefkofridi (2010: 3; see also 2008), for instance, begins with the observation that "in the real world, parties pursue multiple goals at the same time: votes, office, and policy", facing trade-offs between them and identifying a "primary goal". Her argument is that "the EU environment impacts the trade-offs party leaderships face in their simultaneous pursuit of votes, office, and policy". The studies by Sitter (2001) and Steenbergen and Scott (2004) employ and pursue the concept of issue positioning and issue salience, in regard to European integration and EU-related issues, thus approaching parties as integral parts of their party systems and, stressing, in the first case at least, the constant dilemmas that parties tend to face. Similarly, Neumeyer (2008: 155) speaks of the "*instrumentalization* of EU issues [by CEE parties] to gain electoral support at the expense of competitors".

In sum, if parties' ideological profiles (either *vis-à-vis* the EU or more broadly) and any changes therein condition their capacity to secure votes, office, policy, cohesion, etc., then they must be instrumental in use, throughout the process of party-based Europeanisation. And if profiles are instrumental then why not examine also the possibility of a variety of party functions, including transnational affiliations, being instrumentally utilised to adjust, change or reconfirm these profiles? This syllogism leads us to the following hypothesis:

H(1): *European integration affects national political parties, since they use their patterns of transnational affiliations to change, adjust or reconfirm their ideological profile at the national level.*

This is not to suggest that the levels of organisational entrenchment and salience be dismissed, but simply that, as in other areas of activity, they are employed not in an ideological vacuum but partly in order to either downplay or emphasise the profile dimension and any changes in it (for matters of issue salience, see Tavits, 2008). In the following section, I turn to theoretically validating this hypothesis by addressing firstly, the link between the EU level and parties' ideological profiles and secondly, the rationality of presupposing an intermediary role for parties' transnational affiliations.

Instrumentality, ideological signaling and European integration

The first question that arises concerns the theoretical logic behind the link between the EU and parties' ideological profiles. The domain of Europeanisation implies an inherent alertness towards causal effects, as these are ex vi termini the methodological trait differentiating the study of Europeanisation from other perspectives that concentrate on the relation between national, socio-political arenas and the EU. Yet, the issue of causality remains largely derivative of the overall research design employed by researchers (Exadaktylos and Radaelli 2010: 20). Perhaps in a path-dependent manner, attempts to trace the causal effect of policy, ideational or politics-related change at the EU level on a party's transnational affiliations will most probably require a more scholastic approach than attempts to trace the impact of the EU as an overarching reality. Strictness in tracing causality and consequently also the estimation of the phenomenon under question depend in large part, as in other areas of Europeanisation, on the precise parameters that delineate the term according to each author. A few words are, therefore, pertinent in an

attempt to avoid the pitfall of conceptual stretching (see Radaelli 2000), but also illuminate the possibility of a complex causal mechanism.

Europeanisation as the materialization of the chain effect sketched out in the previous section can be multi-faceted. In other words, European integration can be thought to have an 'impact' on parties' ideological profiles, through their transnational affiliations, in an indirect way. For Ladrech, (2010: 2) and many others, the central question, usually is "how, once the EU policy-making process has produced an output – whether in the form of a directive, regulation, or more far-reaching initiative – this legislation, and more importantly its continuous transposition into member states, engenders some form of adaptational pressure". However, in the case of parties, Europeanisation is indirect since no "direct legal inputs" into parties exist and therefore Europeanised parties will be those, which react to Europeanisation-led changes in their environment (see Ladrech 2009a: section 2.1; Mair 2000). In this vein, parties can be conceived to become Europeanised, when they incorporate the EU reality, into their *modus operandi* and thus respond to the EU's impact on the domestic political systems, in which they operate.

Surely, in one sense indirectness may be thought to go without saying, in so far as parties will touch on issues, which are of relevance and effect foremost at the national level. Yet what is the most appropriate way of grasping any consistency or variation in the type of incentive a party can have, in order to react to and/or through the EU? Indirectness itself means two possible (indirect) channels which may or may not involve tangible changes at the EU level. The first channel is, using Ladrech's terminology, that of an "EU-induced constraint" (2009b) or in more constructivist terms, a "perception of pressure" (2009a). When it involves changes at the EU level, these may include developments concerning EU institutional design. Alternatively, policy output can be held accountable for changes in parties' transnational affiliations (which are in turn made instrumentally) through the actions of other parties or actors affected by the original change. To name one such scenario, the final decision of an EPF on a new Treaty, or intra-EP developments, may provide the ideological fuel for a party to leave, distance itself or come closer to the EPF in question. To name another, parties of new member states may feel intense pressure from approaching enlargement and/or from the (initial) demands from their EPFs.[2] Overall, this kind of 'impact' must not mean necessarily that instrumentality is not present, on behalf of national political parties. Because, it is one thing for change at the EU level to generate a self-perceived adaptational pressure (of various degrees) on parties and another how parties respond to such adaptational pressure, especially since the absence of "direct legal inputs", makes such adaptational pressure non-binding. Furthermore, responses to changes in EU-level processes and policies are not necessary to happen immediately after these changes materialize, in order to be considered as the result of these changes. Therefore the independent variable must be conceived in a temporally wide manner, since a party may react to the formation, or development of a parliamentary group, or EPF, for example, years after this formation or development happens. On the other hand, a constraint indirectly induced by the EU needs not be even the result of a tangible change at the EU level. Evolving membership patterns, moves and changes by parties from the same national party system, or other domestic factors, influencing a party's behavior, may lead a party to feel a pressure or a constraint from or at the EU level. Nevertheless, the very presence of the EU level is the main factor translating the domestic change into a 'problem' and therefore, the 'real cause'.

The other channel is that of opportunity-seeking and includes a 'move' in transnational affiliations on one's own incentive, simply in accordance with the (changing) goals of a party at the (Europeanized) national level, again independent of whether something has

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[2] Indeed, this is the context in which Ladrech (2009b) uses the term 'EU-induced constraints' (see section five of this article for examples).

recently changed at the EU level, or not. Hix and Goetz (2000: *e.g.* 10) make clear that Europeanisation's character may mean that the EU provides all kinds of domestic actors with opportunities to pursue their interests. Although Ladrech (2009a: section five; also 2010: 134) argues that "the view that the EU acts as an environmental political opportunity structure" has comparatively little application, "because of the lack of material benefit that can be achieved [by parties]", this may be thought to change once we take under consideration the instrumental use of transnational affiliations for profile change, adjustment or reconfirmation, that will in turn contribute to domestic material change.

In both cases, the central guidepost, remains whether the presence and development of a new reality, that is built and molded into shape on the basis of policies and decision-making processes, affects the strategic considerations of parties aimed at "attaining indispensible goals", by presenting them with either opportunities or constraints, within the context of their Europeanised (at least to a degree) political systems. Indeed, Ladrech acknowledges the usefulness of the opportunity/constraint approach. He argues that, "to the extent empirical changes in political parties can be traced to the influence of the EU, the causal mechanism is less a pressure to adapt than the exploitation of opportunities to advance interests and/or measures taken to resist the spillover of EU issues interfering and thus complicating party leadership goals and activities" (Ladrech 2010: 134). The message of the literature on party stances towards the EU is similar. A strong point in this literature is, as Conti (2007: 200-1) says, the argument that, "parties should change their positions [in regard to the EU in this case] only when they shift ideologically, or according to a process of gradual adaptation of a given ideology to the set of opportunities/constraints produced by the integration process over time".

The hypothesis developed earlier ultimately rests on the assumption that a party's EU affiliations and joint activity are used instrumentally to transmit at the domestic level instrumental signals of ideological change. (It is worth repeating, that) while transnational affiliations will change, or at the least, be utilised, in the sense of being used instrumentally[3], the final outcome will be a party's manoeuvre to shape its profile in accordance to its interests at the domestic level. In other words, transnational affiliations are a tool of adjustment, having a mediating effect between an EU cause or reality and a domestic result, and should ultimately be treated not as the object of Europeanisation but as its intermediary.

This brings us to the second question that needs to be answered: why would European integration, affect parties' ideological profiles through their transnational affiliations? Let us briefly discuss the underpinnings of the instrumentality assumption, in order to establish the possibility of transnational affiliations being used for transmitting ideological signals. The instrumentality assumption is mostly a child of the rationalist logic which stresses the institutional impact on the strategies and exogenous preferences of political parties, as opposed to the social·constructivist logic, that is, the logic of choosing the appropriate institutional link to shape existing preferences (see Börzel 2010). Through this lens, the instrumentality of transnational affiliations as transmitters of ideological signals may have various objectives, within the context of either EU-induced or EU-related change and whether parties are under pressure from the EU level or simply exploit it. Ideological signals may be motivated by changes in ideological sympathies or even as a primary, testing or consolidating sign of broader ideological renewal. Alternatively, parties may simply attempt to exploit the structural opportunities offered by specific networking practices at the EU level in order to attain a successful domestic status overall, or to promote a policy outcome (Lefkofridi 2010: 4) and concurrently to project their policy contribution accordingly. In this respect, change in a party's patterns of transnational

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[3] And in this sense the argument fits into Ladrech's general framework of Europeanisation affecting basic party functions.

affiliations can be expected to ensue, except when the advantages of continuing an existing relationship (tactical support, financial assistance, programmatic expertise, etc.) are perceived to outweigh those of leaving or pursuing another.

Given that the above advantages will not be seriously affected or that they can be easily restored in alternative networking settings, a third possibility is that it may be essential for these ideological signals to be transmitted, in order to appease moderate or radical supporters; perhaps, because of a new policy direction taken by the EU. Although, it has been generally thought that a party's transnational affiliations (and more specifically EP group membership) are most of the time not of worry for national electorates (see Maurer *et al.* 2008: 249), ideological signals stemming from parties' transnational affiliations can be thought to substantively affect leadership cohesion or the loyalty of parties' core voters or members only, rather than their overall goal of vote-seeking. In those few cases where the electorate is more aware of developments and cooperation at the EU level, these ideological signals may feed directly into the vote-seeking or office-seeking goals of national parties, especially when party system realignment and newly emerging gaps make it opportune to change or adjust one's profile. For instance, while Ladrech (2008: 145) argues that in Western Europe, voters are most of the time not even aware of EP groups and party federations, he also acknowledges that in Eastern Europe, the latter have played an important part in developing ideology and in advice on party campaigns (also see later). Especially office-seeking explains in the largest part, according to some scholars, national parties' desires to pursue transnational cooperation (see Hanley 2008).

Yet, what is the rationale of arguing that a party' affiliations and networking activities at the EU level, transmit an instrumental ideological message, which is potentially salient enough to have a bearing on the profile of a party in its domestic electoral arena, in terms of any particular strategic goal(s)? Evidence from the existing literature attests to the existence of a valid rational. Firstly, beyond the generally accepted claim that the visibility of European affairs in the mass media has increased (see Risse and Van de Steeg 2003), a substantial amount of resources and publicising is spent on transnational networking by national political parties themselves. National political parties have developed departments of European affairs and other mechanisms (websites, booklets, bulletins, newsletters, etc.) that contribute to the consistent projection of their linkages to and activities at the EU level. The fact that these mechanisms are mobilised mostly during (European) election time may indeed be taken to constitute proof that parties' transnational affiliations are used as necessary strategic weapons for vote-seeking - when party competition and voters' information collection around the EU issue are at their fullest.

In addition, the literature overall tells us that parliamentary groups and especially EPFs have grown "timidly" in terms of size, visibility, professionalisation and resources, exactly because the national components of Europarties "often seem to be concerned with justifying their actions at the national level" (Bardi 2004: 20). Hence, national parties seem to prioritise the implications of their transnational activity on their domestic requisites, rather than the advancement of the transnational project in which they engage. Indeed, the intra-party significance of transnational networking lies at the core of such behaviour. The issue of EPFs, particularly, has been a cause of "inflaming intra-party dissent", internal divisions or debate, to the extent that it encloses and partly conditions the party's – projected or substantive – ideological orientation (see Johansson 2004: 30-31)[4].

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[4] Indicatively, for the European Left Party (ELP), see March and Dunphy (2010); Lightfoot (2010); for the European Green Party Federation, see Bomberg (2002); for the European People's Party and the Party of European Socialists, see Hanley (2010: chapters 4 and 5); for the extreme right, see Mares (2006).

Lastly, the labels and ideological images distinguishing the EPFs and party groups at the EU level and hence also the labels and ideological images of individual parties that participate in different EPFs and party groups are antagonistic along competing policy agendas. Since the late 1970s, the European level political parties have been increasingly behaving in an organised, relatively cohesive (and objectively cohesive for the larger EP groups) and competitive fashion. Not so much along national loyalties but along European transnational interests and ideas and more specifically on a left-right axis (indicatively see Hix and Noury 2009; Hix 2002; Kreppel 2000)[5]. At the outset, each party group and/or party federation espouses one or more labels-values. For instance, the groups of the radical left champion opposition to neo-liberalism and project common positions on a number of other wide-ranging policy areas (Dunphy 2004: 169-73), while the ultimate "litmus test" for joining the European People's Party (EPP) would be the acceptance of federalism (Hanley 2002: 469). Movement between party groups or federations would therefore clearly signal some form of ideological change or adjustment to those aware of the party political set-up at the EU level, not only in terms of the policy dimension but perhaps also in terms of the teleological one. In support of this argument, recent Eurobarometer data show that voters' perceptions of the EP seem to increasingly reflect the latter's competition-based, ideological demarcations (European Parliament 2010: 13).

In all, core issues are at stake within the microcosm of EU-level networking and these are dealt with through specific ideological choices that signify sensitivity to conditions on the ground. They are also transmitted to national arenas with effort and attention and deciding on them has often caused internal friction. The above points indicate a logic in the assumption of a link between the domestic party organisation's overall strategy and that part of its strategy that materialises at the transnational level. To assume then that parties are ideologically instrumental in the affiliations they pursue at the supranational level is no more illogical than to assume they are ideologically instrumental in other areas of activity[6].

This of course does not imply that the party literature, which refers to the historical and ideological embedding of parties (*e.g.* Marks and Wilson 2000), should be ignored. Let us briefly consider the argument. Marks and Wilson (2000: 459) argue that

> political parties have significantly more in common with parties in the same party family than they do with other parties in the same country. The reason for this is that parties are shaped by their distinctive historical experiences, the most influential elements of which are the ideological propensities and constituency links that arise out of the basic cleavages that structure contention in a society. The thesis of this article is that if one wishes to know how a political party will respond to a new issue like European integration, one must pay close attention to these historically embedded predispositions.

Nevertheless, this is exactly the reason why changes in the ideological profiles of parties must be conceptualised separately from wholesale ideological redefinitions of certain parties that constitute movement across party families. Put simply, instrumental, ideological signalling is not the same as an overall re-evaluation of the integration process, in the sense that the former is centered on the framing of a party's ideology and is instrumentally used to satisfy one or more out of a variety of domestic goals, while the latter has been found to be mainly cleavage-based and historically rooted, and thus be less susceptible to change (although not completely resistant). Retrospectively, this is also the reason, that changes in the EPF and parliamentary group affiliations of national political

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[5] For a challenge to the above see Gabel and Carrubba (2004).
[6] What remains more fluid is the specific party goal that changing one's transnational affiliations aims at. What exactly different parties seek and manage to achieve through changing their transnational affiliations will highly likely depend on the contingencies of domestic and partisan contexts.

parties, mostly occur between ideologically neighbouring networks and rarely, if ever, involve travelling great distance across the EU-level ideological spectrum. Also, cleavage theory tends to fail in those cases [not only in CEE] where political competition is more fluid and party systems less stable (see Neumeyer 2008: 155).

Conceptualising and measuring change

Having discussed the instrumentality assumption that underpins our focus on transnational affiliations, let us now turn to the possible manifestations of changes in transnational affiliations, within the context of party-based Europeanisation. What are transnational affiliations? And what kind of transnational affiliations are likely to be affected in cases of party-based Europeanisation? The existing literature on EU politics has mainly referred to national parties' transnational affiliations, as a progressive inter-connection between these parties and their respective EPF or parliamentary group. There is scarce if any mention of transnational or international networking in its broader, bi-lateral, as well as multi-lateral sense. This may partly have been the result of omitting the issue of profile change, since bi-lateral and other forms and signs of affiliation do not usually involve concrete organisational, educational and financial incentives. On the other hand, bilateral and other forms of affiliations may be consequential in assimilating or socialising some parties, especially new entrants, into western patterns and EPFs (Enyedi 2007: 70) and thus in projecting a specific profile. Beyond this, since in other areas of party activity, Europeanisation research is centered on uncovering indirect effects, there is no good reason to limit a priori the various manifestations of Europeanisation, through changes in transnational affiliations. European integration may condition much more than a party's links to its respective EPF. The following possibilities are still unconsidered, for when the EU level is used towards shaping a different ideological profile for a party:

> 1) A party will rethink its overall affiliations within the EU and European sphere;

> 2) A party will alter the levels of its activity and mobilisation at the EU level, be it within the EP or outside, in so far as these are altered in pursuit of less or more identification with its existing partners;

> 3) A party will divert attention and resources from non-EU groups and parties towards EU-related groups and parties, or vice-versa;

> 4) A party will alter, emphasise or de-emphasise those of its bi-lateral affiliations which relate to the transnational level (possibly as a first step towards 1) and 3)).

Indirectness again seems to be a key consideration. While in terms of programmatic change, for instance, change resulting from Europeanisation is traced and measured by focusing on the policy proposals a party puts forward in national congresses and electoral manifestos, here what is of essence is the ideological message transmitted by alteration in patterns of transnational affiliations. This ideological message can in turn be traced and measured only indirectly and by approximation. Let us first deal with change in the choices parties make about partners and networks. The choice of affiliations that the party pursues at the transnational level, indicate among other things, the type of partners and joint activities it wishes to engage with. Given that other actors, be they national parties, federations of parties or groups, have average ideologies that are an aggregation of separate ideological fabrics and in so far as joint activities can be ascribed an ideological connotation then interaction at the transnational level can be assumed to get across an ideological signal that is derived from the aforementioned, average ideology or ideological connotation, of the objects of socialisation. Pitched at the summative level, activities, affiliations, parties, EP groups and EPFs have to be ascribed a position, for example, on the pro-European integration-anti-European integration axis or on the left-right axis, before moving on to trace the position of the actor that engages in or affiliates

with them. Secondly, profile change can be inferred and measured only when considering the potential de-socialisation object(s) as well. In order to do so, one must consider any potential difference between the ideological profile of those activities and actors that are left behind, substituted or downplayed and those that are given precedence or absolute attention.

In its most basic form, the effect of European integration on the ideological profiles of political parties, through change in these parties' transnational affiliations can take one of three directions, as in the areas of programmatic change and patterns of party competition. Employing either a left-right or a pro-EU-anti-EU axis, these are:

> 1) Europeanised parties will engage in such activities, relate to such parties and party groups, or give such emphasis to them in such a way that shows they have become more moderate and accepting of a wider spectrum of opinions.

> 2) Through the same mechanisms, Europeanised parties can appear as more radical or rejectionist than before.

> 3) Through the same mechanisms, Europeanised parties can appear to reconfirm and establish further their existing ideological profile.

Concurrently, studies of specific party families or parties may be better posited in considering the more historically specific intra-party family issues and axes of diachronic disagreement, rather than aggregately employing given axes. For instance, stronger bi-lateral affiliations or joint activity within the EP, with a market-liberal party on behalf of a social-liberal one can be assumed to point directly towards change in the socio-economic dimension of the liberal ideology. An opening up by a Marxist-Leninist party to the northern European radical left, within or outside the EP, may likewise enclose more attention to post-materialist values. A historical review that distills specific changing points for parties is also a useful way whereby the link between the EU and parties' ideological profiles, as well as any resulting changes, can be specified with accuracy, since change in one's transnational affiliations, - let alone one that is important enough to reverberate within and outside the party - is unlikely to occur frequently or even linearly.

Networking with other actors is, however, not epitomised only by choice of partners and shifts between them (*i.e.* realignment), since each choice is pursued to a certain extent (*i.e.* entrenchment). As noted throughout, it is also a matter of emphasis or the downplaying of - that is, more or less passive behaviour regarding - specific transnational links. This caveat is best exemplified by the question, how closely a member party identifies with its respective party federation – *e.g.* as a participant or as an observer – party group or, other affiliate parties? Or, why do different national parties choose to integrate themselves into an EPF and other transnational groupings and activities at different times, speeds and degrees, in spite of common accession trajectories and the common benefits (*e.g.* information) that accrue from EPF membership? As contented earlier, the degree of cooperation, in other words the degree of organisational entrenchment, as well as the salience in party discourse placed on specific modes of transnational affiliations, may also be used as indicators by themselves of the intensity of ideological identification with the objects of cooperation.

Other indicators of salience and organisational entrenchment, may include the activity of parties and party leaders and personnel within and outside the EP - in terms of the EP's legislative and other instruments of intervention and in terms of the frequency of meetings, joint declarations and common initiative building – 'recruitment into appointive and elective offices' (Ladrech 2002: 399) and any signs and reports of internal reorganisation aimed at supporting, enhancing or changing the above. Such institutional activities may be thought to depict willingness or the need to emphasise and/or integrate

oneself into particular transnational networking patterns that arise, either due to changes in EU rules or policies, or because of the increasing importance ascribed by fellow actors to an already established transnational network, itself arising from EU rules at a previous time, or because of the EU-related opportunity to capitalise on the issue domestically.

Empirical pointers from the literature

Let us consider some practical examples from both sides of the ideological spectrum. For instance, the Italian Alleanza Nazionale (AN), whose MEPs joined the conservatives in 2009, is a case in point, where an ongoing attempt to project a more moderate and pro-federalist image (Huysseune 2002), within the newly emerging bi-polarity of the Italian party system, existed. As Huysseune (2002) argues, the party's discourse "reflects widely voiced opinions on the necessity of reforming the Italian state, making it more democratic, and creating institutions that would be able to integrate the country in the European Union and its developing system of multi-level governance". Surely, joining the conservatives cannot by itself explain AN's change, especially since a pro-federalist conversion started much earlier than 2009 and therefore one should also look at the domestic scene to get a full picture of party behaviour. In the case of AN, such a look tells us that joining the EPP was the natural evolution of the party's behaviour in the past decade, as well as that it reflects more its new voters-centered ideological profile and less its 'inside' or rank and file ideology. Describing this situation, Huysseuene (2002) writes that

> it is difficult to categorize AN straightforwardly. In its public discourse and official statements, it is very careful to avoid extremist and racist language, and its statements on national and European identity are difficult to distinguish from conservative or moderate mainstream opinions. Within the present centre-right government, it often tends to defend more moderate positions than the Lega or even Berlusconi. At the European level, it maintains its distance from extreme right parties, and prefers to cooperate with French Gaullists. At the local level and within its rank-and-file, however, more extremist tendencies and nostalgia for fascism are clearly still present.

Indeed, Italy, as a fluid electoral and partisan arena, provides examples of a number of parties that seem to confirm this article's core argument. The former Italian Communist Party (PCI) is another case in point, for when ideological change is on the way. Its move from the group of the Unitary European Left to the Socialists group in the European Parliament was completed months before the official announcement of party leader Achille Ochietto's '*svolta*' into the social democratic left. Important may also be the party's extensive socialisation (joint conventions, exchanges, congress invitations, bi-lateral relations) with social democratic and green parties, in France and Germany especially, years before its eventual transformation (see Dunphy 2004: 47- 8).

In an analogous manner, there are already cases, which show that parties' transnational affiliations may be partly responsive to the changing parameters of competition in their respective party systems. The case of the Portuguese Partido Social Democrata (PSD) is telling of this. Its affiliation to the Liberal International and the ELDR (European Liberal Democrats) until 1996 can be ascribed less to its true (inside) ideology and more to the occupation of the conservative ideological space in the Portuguese party system by the Centro Democrático e Social - Partido Popular (CDS-PP). The subsequent entrance of the PSD into the EPP followed shortly after the CDS-PP was expulsed from the EPP (Freire 2006). Likewise, the Romanian Democratic Party (PD), took advantage of the political vacuum on the non-nationalist right of the political spectrum in the post-2000 period (Pop-Eleches 2008: 476) and (is one of those rare cases to have) transformed from a centre-left to a centre-right party. In so doing, it joined the EPP less than six months after the 2004

elections, at which time it was still a member of the Socialist International (Pop-Eleches 2008: 471).

On other occasions, EU- level developments may be provide a stimulus for implementing previously contemplated change in transnational affiliations. The most prominent and discussed example of such a case is that of the British Conservative party's abandonment of the EPP. Ideological discomfort with the EPP's policies and character existed on the part of the Conservatives for some time. As Lynch and Whitaker (2007: 33) argue, "domestic concern at the EPP link grew as the Conservatives became a more Eurosceptic party both at Westminster and at grassroots level. Considerations of party unity and ideological consistency became more prominent for Conservative leaders when addressing the issue". During his leadership campaign of 2005, soon-to-be party leader David Cameron pledged to leave the EEP. Once sufficient alliances to form an alternative group were secured by the Conservatives, an exit from the EPP was completed in 2009 and a new group, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), emerged in the EP. Essentially enlargement had made more parties available, especially at the 2009 European elections and two parties left the Alliance for Nations group (UEN) and joined the ECR, making the materialisation of the Conservative's plan practically possible. The party rationalised its choice, not only on the basis of its many long-term disagreements with EPP policies, but also the culmination of these in the divergences on the Lisbon Treaty.

For the parties of new member states and their transnational affiliations, the Europeanisation effect is also a question of first choice. The other parties, the EPF, the parliamentary group and more broadly the networking patterns, which a new entrant initially approaches or is influenced by, can by definition be translated into an ideological move, resultant of European integration and more specifically EU enlargement. Therefore, although most of the examples from Western Europe given in this article appear to be mostly cases of opportunity-related Europeanisation, it may be that in the case of CEE parties, Europeanisation translates also, if not more tangibly, into a constraint; since these parties are presented with the 'perceived adaptational pressure' of having to project their belonging to Europe and having to choose quickly the most beneficial for them identity.

Europeanisation in the case of CEE parties also encompasses a certain degree of directness. Timus (2009) acknowledges the instrumentality implicit in domestic actors' interests, while also stressing the direct channel of change in the EU's impact on CEE parties. According to Timus (2009: 5), parties engage with EPFs voluntarily, in accordance to "perceived political legitimacy benefits" but once on the road to membership, face direct pressure, since they have to comply with EPF's requirements. How they respond to this direct pressure, whether for example they do all necessary to speed up their full identification with an EPF or simply suffice to an associate status and then hold back and not seriously project and entrench their EU level affiliation, is again a matter of strategic interests; hence, the case for instrumentality still being a strong theoretical possibility.

Scholars have also registered that the relations of CEE national parties with various EPFs (especially the two main ones) have been largely speeded up and taken shape by the latter's initiative to expand to new member states (see Holmes and Lightfoot 2011: 38; Delsoldato 2002; Pridham 2001). Therefore, phenomena of initiative on behalf of EU-level actors remind that, as Mendez *et al.* (2008: 294-95, cited in Ladrech 2010: 41-42) suggest, any attempt at tracing a link between the EU and domestic level, would also have to take under consideration possible variation in the motivation of particular EU actors. Put differently, certain parties or party systems (even among CEE countries themselves) receive more pressure or more specific ideological gestures of welcome from above, than others. Pridham (2001, 1996), for example, evoked early on the crucial contribution of transnational parties to the development of CEE parties, in terms of policy programmes, campaigning and ideological profiles. Apparently, a different constellation of contextual

factors than in the case of west European parties, has led to a more profound impact on CEE parties' ideologies. Where pressure from above, in combination with unclear or nuanced ideological profiles and unconsolidated organizational structures exist – choosing, socializing with and accepting assistance and influence from a parliamentary group or an EPF has also acted as a catalyst to ideological "crystalisation" or reorientation (Spirova 2008; see also Delsoldato 2002; Pridham 2001, 1996) and not simply profile adjustment. It remains to be seen whether affiliations of CEE parties that do not necessarily or directly involve an EPF, have led to similar outcomes or are underpinned by similar motives as EPF links.

Turning to levels of emphasis and more broadly entrenchment, existing empirical pointers may be more limited but they do exist. For instance, regarding the far left of the political spectrum, there is evidence to suggest that parties which project a deeply sceptical or rejectionist view of European integration in terms of the latter's core values (such as the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and the Dutch Socialist Party (SP)), systematically stress the rational of their refusal to join their party family's newly formed federation and avert bi-lateral affiliations with actors that were among the main initiators of this EU-induced federation (see March and Dunphy 2010; Charalambous 2011). In contrast, parties such as Die Linke, Synaspismos and Rifondazione Communista, which have been sceptical of the EU but more open to the integration process and inter-ideological cooperation, have responded differently to the EU's opportunities of organising with other like-minded parties at the transnational level and therefore have invested much rhetoric and resources in creating and projecting an EPF of those to the left of social democracy (the European Left Party – ELP) (see March and Dunphy 2010; Charalambous 2011).

Especially Rifondazione's case bears solid signs of entrenchment/emphasis on the European dimension in terms of transnational affiliations. Rifondazione's general secretary served twice as an MEP, thus increasing the liaison between national party and EP delegation, and was later also elected to the presidency of the ELP (Charalambous 2011). Rifondazione's EP activity is much higher than both the Italian and the United European Left's (GUE/NGL) average. And, the 6th Congress of the party passed the proposal to use as a symbol of the party that used in European elections (Sinistra Europea), in an attempt 'to put in the forefront the strategic choice of the ELP' (Charalambous 2011). These moves appear to be linked to the then party leadership's strategy of opening up and consolidating its influence in the movements (Charalambous 2011).

As a last note, mainstream parties that project a public enthusiasm over their connection to their EPF and wish to exercise a dominant role, such as the Spanish Partido Popular (PP), have also undergone some solid organisational changes which were aimed at supporting or enhancing their transnational links and which echoed their leaders' explicit identification with the party's respective EPF (see Van Hecke 2009).

Conclusion

The literature has told us little about the relation between European integration and the function of political parties to network at the transnational level. Surely, what has been projected so far by the literature as a possible manifestation of party-based Europeanisation through changes in parties' transnational affiliations is of undisputed value. Parties organise themselves at the transnational level and incorporate the European dimension of political competition and/or policy-making into their networking practices, by building links to other transnational actors and verbally supporting them. However, this approach leads to a narrow conceptual and empirical focus since it ignores the instrumentality of the role of transnational affiliations in changing a party's ideological

profile, and therefore treats parties' transnational affiliations only as objects and not as intermediaries of change.

This article has sought to extend previous discussions on party-based Europeanisation by incorporating the extant argument about instrumentality into the analysis of parties' transnational affiliations. The central plunk of its perspective is based on the hypothesis that, in the presence of European integration's opportunities and/or constraints, parties will seek to reconfirm or change their image, partly via, emphasising, downplaying, or changing their transnational affiliations. The link that runs between European integration to change in the ideological profiles of parties, through change or adjustment in parties' transnational affiliations, seems to be theoretically validated and rationalised, as well as supported by a bulk of empirical pointers from the literature. Much remains to be done, however, at the empirical level. For example, questions oriented towards elaborate empirical testing could focus on: the empirical grounding of the phenomenon across time and space; any visible patterns with regard to party family, party system position, duration of membership, and so forth; the most common national level objective pursued by parties, which fit this theoretical argument.

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