



Party Formation at Supranational Level: the Case of Radical Left Parties

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Introduction

The European Left (EL) was formed in 2004, over 30 years later than the European People's Party (EPP) or the Party of European Socialist (PES). The first communist group appeared within the European Parliament (EP) in 1973 but it has taken 20 years to become a stable form of cooperation, whereas socialist, liberal and popular parties cooperate from the foundation of the EP. How can we explain these different steps forward in transnational cooperation of party families¹? In literature, foundation and development of party politics at European level are shaped by institutional factors – *i.e.* electoral system, EP regulation, EU decision-making – (Delwit et al. 2004; Hix and Lord 1997; Gagatek 2008; Kreppel 2002). Certainly, European political institutions affect parties by constraining their range of strategic options, but why do we encounter different level of development among party families if they operate within the same institutional environment? Why have Socialists and Conservatives improved much more advanced party organizations at the EU level in comparison with Greens or Extreme Right? In this article we argue that to understand the variegated world of party organizations at the EU level it is necessary to look at resistances of or impulses by national parties to the creation of supranational party structures. The EU integration forces national parties to cooperate but “if” and “how” they cooperate depends on national party strategies. The timing and the organizational structure of both the European Parliamentary Groups (EPGs) and Political Parties at European Level (PPELs) are, in this perspective, political products of bargaining among national parties sharing similar ideological positions: they are “negotiated political order” (Daudi 1986). Certainly, institutional environment matters but it explains the direction of organizational changes, while specific answers to institutional pressures derive from negotiations among national parties.

In particular, this article maps the formation of radical left party structures both within and outside the EP by a combination of institutional and actor-centred analyses: on the one hand, institutional analysis posits that national

parties have to adapt to the EU and organise themselves for participation in its institutions and rule-making if they are to maintain their influence over all the political process (Hix and Lord 1997: 5);

on the other hand, actor-centred analysis argues that how parties organize do not just happen but it is determined by bargaining and power struggle among national parties². When used in combination these approaches predict that organizational changes occur when external (environmental) transformations permit or require them, and that they reflect the preferences of those actors able to control reforms. Environmental analysis combined with a focus on national parties' interests and motivations explain the differences in party adaptation to the EU integration process.

In the next section we present the analytical framework to analyse party formation at European level. In the second and third parts we investigate radical left parties' cooperation in the European Parliament (European United Left/ Nordic Green Left – EUL/NGL) and within the PPEL (European Left –EL).

The choice of “radical left parties”³ is twofold. First of all, this party family has received little attention by academic researches especially at the EU level (Bell 1996, 1998; Hanley 2008; Dunphy 2004; Dunphy and March 2010; March 2011; March and Keith 2016). Secondly, as March (2011: 21) pointed out: “the left is back”. Especially after the economic crisis and the advent of extensive “austerity policies” in Europe, radical left parties have begun to improve their electoral performance and to increase their governmental opportunities (Bale and Dunphy 2011). In other words, they are stable and significant political realities in many European countries and within the European institutions.

Party formation at European level

Political parties are first of all organizations (Panebianco 1988), then the environment in which they operate is one of the most important factors that influence party organization and party change (Harmel and Janda 1982, 1994): political parties modify their organizational structures or political strategies as response to external stimuli and reflect the institutional environment in their organization (Panebianco 1988). In organizational theory the environmental imperative is quite axiomatic: “either organizations [parties] *adapt* to new conditions in the environment, or they ‘perish’” (Appleton and Ward 1997: 341). Why is environment so determinant for party organizations? Because it is *from* the environment that organizations extract primary resources for their survival and functioning; it is *on* the environment that political parties exercise their organizational actions and it is “within” it that they pursue their goals. Moreover, significant challenges able to threaten the party's dominant coalition and, sometimes, the survival of party itself might come from the external environment (see for example communist parties after the collapse of Soviet Union). Therefore, if environment shifts, political parties must adapt to survive within the new institutional framework.

Clearly, not all the environmental changes affect party organization. According to Harmel and Janda (1994), we can consider as relevant those external stimuli able

² A similar approach has been used by Kreppel (2002) to analyze EPGs development and by Ladrech (2000) to explain PES formation.

³ The term “radical left parties” derives from March (2011) and March and Mudde (2005).

to affect party's primary goals: "offices", "votes" or "policies". In more general terms, political institutions affect parties by constraining their range of strategic options: institutions rule out some types of behaviour and make others more or less likely by influencing the costs and benefits that a party can expect when takes a certain course of action (Müller 2002).

There is also one more organizational imperative that political parties have to deal with: they need to persist and survive as organization, to preserve structures, staff and label in order to achieve offices, votes or policies goals. If a party doesn't exist as organization it can not seek political power at all. As a consequence, political parties have also to consider shifts in rules and opportunities to obtain organizational resources otherwise they can not persist as organization.

So far, we have considered why party changes in presence of an environmental shift. But what does it mean party change? Do different types of party changes exist? Harmel and Janda (1994: 277) help us to answer these questions. First of all, they suggest to consider as party change the "self-imposed changes in party rules, structures, policies, strategies, or tactics" and to exclude events beyond the direct control of organization, *i.e.* an increase in the number of votes or the death of a leader. Party change is, therefore, something under the direct control of and intentionally implemented by the dominant coalition.

In this article we concentrate on a particular form of intentional change: *innovation* (Appleton and Ward 1997). This kind of adaptation to the environment may be seen as the effort to introduce new organizational forms and practices without precedent that supplement what already exist. Organizations (political parties) create specific structures, staff and functions, supplementing what already exists, in order to control as efficiently as possible new resources or to reduce environmental turbulences from new external arenas. The innovation parallels the creation and the institutionalization of new environments where parties have to compete in order to achieve their goals⁴.

The concept of organizational innovation provides a useful analytical tool to understand origin of political parties at European level. In fact, we consider the EPGs and the PPELs as the organizational innovation experimented by national parties in order to control resources and constrains produced by the EU. This is because, from the perspective of national parties, "the addition of a further level of political activity represents an environmental change to which they need to adapt" (Von dem Berge and Poguntke 2013). The process of European integration has modified the environment where national parties operate, affecting their capacity to achieve classic goals of offices, votes and policies. National parties are not completely free to set out and pursue their policy position in the domestic arena irrespective of what happens at EU level (Hix 2008) and, at the same time, the scope of EU legislation has greatly expanded in the last twenty years and an increasing portion of national policies is now shaped in Brussels (Börzel and Risse 2000: 3). As a result, national parties have great incentives to lead the EU *policy* outcomes in the direction they prefer and, in order to do so, they

⁴ For example, internet-based party branches can be considered as a party innovation implemented in order to take advantage from web resources (Heidar and Saglie 2003).

need to organize with like-minded parties from other member-States. Nonetheless, inside the European Parliament the most important agenda-setter “offices” (President and vice-Presidents of the EP, President of parliamentary committees and rapporteurs) are distributed in proportion to the size of political groups (Corbett et al., 2005), giving greater incentives to national parties to cooperate within the EP.

In literature we can find three different explanation of group formation at the EU level, each of them directly linked to political goals of parties (policies, offices, and votes). The first one advances a “policy-oriented” explanation (McElroy and Benoit, 2010), where national party delegations affiliate with closest groups to their policy positions. The second one proposes an “office-oriented” theory (Bressanelli 2012) and argues that national delegations join political groups for pragmatic reasons. By joining an existing group, parties have a large bureaucratic apparatus at their disposal, with experienced staff, substantial financial resources and the opportunity to obtain influential legislative positions in the EP. Whitaker and Lynch (2014), in particular, show that pragmatic reasons mean publicity and information about EU policies for Eurosceptic and niche parties. The third one, finally, suggests a “vote-oriented” approach (Maurer et al. 2008: 249) “in the unlikely case that a party’s membership is of salience for the electorate”. In this case, a party might be obliged to join a group that symbolically reflects its policy positions even if this should mean losing power to directly influence the policy-making process.

Outside the EP, catalysts for the formation of extra-parliamentary structures were the decision to hold *elections* to the EP (Hix 1996) and, especially, the introduction of “Party Statute” in 2004 (Hanley 2008). While European elections still have a “second-order” character, the Party Statute creates real (financial) opportunities of development for PPELs.

The Statute, in particular, provides a series of requirements for a party to be qualified as “Political Party at European Level”. The party must: 1) have legal personality in one of the Member States; 2) be represented in at least in a quarter of the Member States, by members of the EP (or in the national or regional parliaments); or it must have received (at least in a quarter of the Member States) at least 3% of the votes cast; 3) observe the founding principles of the EU in its programs and activities; 4) have participated in elections to the EP or have expressed the intention to do so⁵.

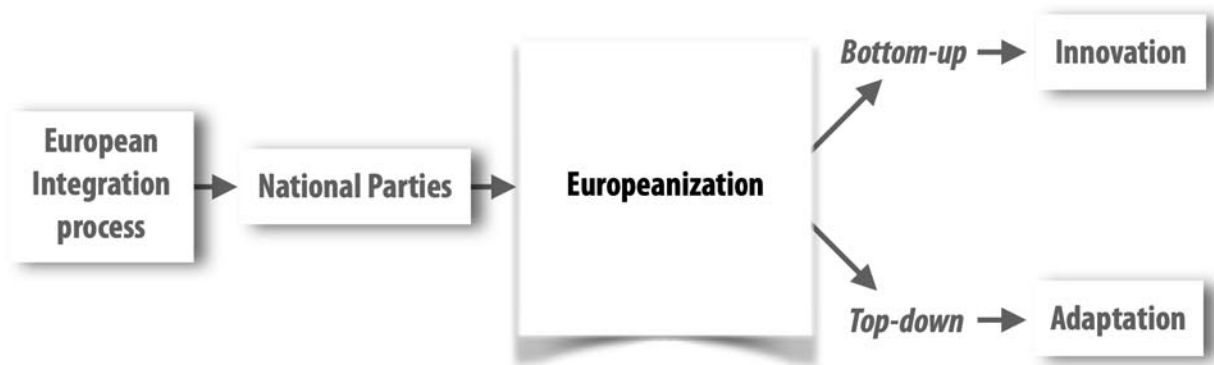
Those parties that accomplish these prerequisites are able to receive annual funding from the EP. The funding takes the form of an operating grant and it covers up to 85% of the party expenditure, while own resources such as membership fees and donations cover the rest.

Moreover, the concept of party innovation allows us to make a distinction between two different types of party response to the process of European integration: the first one is the “adaptation” to pressures coming from external environment and manifests itself (mostly) by organizational, ideological, programmatic and strategic changes of parties at national level⁶; the second one concerns “party aggregation” (innovation)

⁵ For a detailed analysis of the Party Statute and its consequences for PPEL see Bardi *et al.* (2010).

⁶ An increasing number of researches focuses on this topic and it define this kind of adaptation with the term “Europeanization”. See Poguntke *et al.* (2007).

experienced by national parties at supranational level and consists in the creation at EU level of party structures aimed to control benefits from the new institutional arena. Party adaptation describes how national parties change their organizational structures to fit environmental transformations at domestic level. Party aggregation refers to the process of linkage under a unique structure of like-minded parties at the EU level.



Models of national party changes: adaptation and innovation

However, “party change does not ‘just happen’” (Harmel and Janda 1994). It is an intentional effort and the political product of power struggle among factions and sub-units within it (Panebianco 1988). The environmental theory is worthless to fully understand the process leading to a certain type of organization or to explain (possible) delay in party response as well. While the environmental approach posits that the internal development is a (possible) reaction to changing external demands and pressures, it lacks analytical tools to understand the specific character of reforms. In most cases (if not all) the reactions (or not) to environmental challenges are products of political conflicts among party members at all levels. Hence, to explain party formation at supranational level we need to observe bargaining and power struggle among pivotal actors in this organizational game: “national political parties”. In fact, party formation at the EU level (both within and outside the EP) is the outcome of a “party aggregation” process where national parties aggregate their structures across national borders to create a supranational form of cooperation. On this point, Kreppel (2002: 187) suggested that if we want to understand the internal organization of the party groups we must look at the role played by national delegations.

Institutional incentives create the (necessary) environmental conditions for national parties to cooperate at supranational level even if they are not enough. Attempts of party aggregation at supranational level had first to overcome a broad constellation of national party interests and, whether and how the party will be formed at the EU level are products of negotiations among national parties with their own organizational, cultural, historical and ideological baggage (Harmel and Janda 1994; Panebianco 1988). Hence, it cannot be assumed that external stimuli will necessarily produce an organizational change or that they will generate the same reactions in all parties.

Institutionalized parties sit at negotiation table for the formation of supranational parties with their own organization, membership and political identity and they are particularly reluctant to lose organizational authority and/or to dilute their political identities. If they don't reach an agreement about the necessity for a supranational party structure and about the form it should take, the process of party aggregation is paralysed⁷. In any case, party innovation is expected only if the supplementary resources from the EU (the opportunity to achieve party goals) exceeded the cost of innovation, otherwise it is very unlikely (Harmel and Janda 1994; Von dem Berge and Poguntke 2013). All attempts to forming parties at the EU level had first to make the party acceptable to a broad constellation of more or less independent local interests. Moreover, the relationship among national parties affect not only the foundation of party structures at EU level but also how they organize, their future development and political strategies within and outside the EP.

In sum, we consider party formation at EU level – both within and outside the EP – a reaction of national parties to pressures from institutional environment at EU level. In particular, we argue that the environmental approach alone is not able to explain the specific “character” of innovation because it doesn't take into account the behaviour of pivotal actors in this game: “national parties”. So, if we want to understand “why” and “how” national parties adapt to the environment, we need to consider bargaining and political conflicts among them⁸.

In the next paragraphs, we investigate the party aggregation process of radical left parties and, in particular, we find in the relationship between PCI and PCF, the two most important Western European communist parties until 1989, the reason behind the intricate parties cooperation both within and outside the EP. Especially, the ideological disagreement between PCI and PCF about the necessity for a supranational party structure and the configuration it should have taken, paralyzed the nascent transnational party federation and tangled cooperation in the EP.

The long march to the EUL/NGL

The first Communist group in the EP – *Communists and Allies* – was created in 1973 when 3 French MPs – belonging to the PCF – joined the Italian Communist deputies (9 MPs) and one member from Danish Socialist People's Party (SF)⁹. In that time the EP was “in all sense a consultative body” (Kreppel 2002:1): it had no effective powers to influence policy-making outcomes and it had no direct popular legitimacy. The only environmental incentive to form a (unitary) group was linked to offices and

⁷ In a similar vein, Panebianco (1988) argued that parties could be originated by “territorial diffusion” where local (national) élites construct party associations that are only later integrated into national (supranational) organization.

⁸ An additional level of analysis should focus on relationship and power struggle of factions within national parties. National parties are composed by political groups and how they adapt to the EU integration depends on power games among factions (Panebianco 1988).

⁹ The PCI obtained parliamentary representation in March 1969, but it was not large enough to be formally recognized as EPG, remaining excluded from office and administrative distributions.

administrative resources. National parties were not pressed to cooperate permanently and effectively at EU level and being a very weak group produced just limited political consequences. The ideological divisions within the group were greater than incentives and, hence, the pluralistic nature of the radical left parties prevailed on institutional incentives to form a unitary actor in the EP. In particular, the PCI and the PCF presented a profound division over the EU project making unlikely the development of a stable and effective political group. The PCI looked at the process of economic integration as an irreversible mechanism and considered an own duty to steer this process towards more positive outcomes for the “working class” and towards a more democratic and accountable EC as well. Since the late Sixties, the PCI believed that, in an era of growing economic interdependence, the “Italian road to socialism” (Dunphy 2004) could be pursued only within a broader context of “European way to socialism” by a transnational cooperation of communist actors¹⁰. The PCF, in contrast, adopted a strongly critical strategy against the EC. It considered the EC a “Trojan horse” of the United States and West Germany in order to institutionalize their control over West European economies. Moreover, PCF expressed a strong reluctance against the EC from a normative point of view contesting the idea to delegate authority to European institutions¹¹.

These deep ideological divisions have influenced the effectiveness and credibility of the group. Communist MEPs “never operated as a Group, met infrequently and were fragmented into national delegations” (Bell 1996:138). Moreover, two spokesmen often represented them in the EP, one for each ideological faction within it. The condition of internal division is well summarized by the words of Giorgio Amendola: “each Communist party follows an independent [political] line, depending on how it views the interests of its own country”. Therefore, the main reason behind the group formation in the EP can be identified in the willingness of Communist leaders to increase available resources, in particular in terms of “offices”. They regarded group organization as a “vehicle for achieving financial and administrative privileges in the Parliament” (Pridham and Pridham 1979:263) and not as an opportunity to defend common political positions. The resulting constellation was “hardly a group, let alone a party” (Sweeney 1984: 175) and the group was characterized by a level of cooperation that did not go beyond the formal criteria required to become an official group.

The condition of instability and internal division between the PCI and the PCF persisted until 1994 and achieved its peak in 1989 when they decide to constitute two separate political groups: the *European United Left* (EUL) and the *Left Unity* (LU). Anti-integrationist parties (i.e. KKE¹² and PCF) composed the LU, while the EUL expressed critical pro-integrationist positions (as PCI and PCE¹³) (March 2011).

¹⁰ The PCI development in the direction of a «pro-integrationist» position is the result of an “office-seeking” strategy at national level started in the early 1970s and that took the form of the «Historic Compromise» with Christian Democracy (DC) in the late 1970s (Benedetto and Quaglia 2007; Dunphy 2004).

¹¹ In the words of Taggart and Sczerbiak (2008), we can classify the PCI as a soft-eurosceptic party and the PCF as a hard-eurosceptic party.

¹² Communist Party of Greece.

¹³ Communist Party of Spain.

At the beginning of 1990s two important factors fostered the establishment of a more stable form of cooperation among radical left parties in the EP. The first one was the historical and ideological review of communist parties after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Dunphy 2004; March and Mudde 2005). In particular, the PCF has mitigated its position against Europe and now evaluates European institutions not a monster to fight but rather an opportunity to exploit. At the same time, anti-integration parties (KKE, PCE and V¹⁴) are now in minority, whereas many propose a renovation of the EU institutions from within. However, policy and ideological divergences do not disappear at all. The EPG remains divided on many issues and breaks in party unity are always an opportunity during plenary sessions in Brussels or in Strasbourg. Within the radical left family, we can find at least four main sub-groups according to ideological position (March 2011): communist, democratic socialist, populist socialists and social populists. While all of them accept democracy (verbally at least) and propose radical and profound reforms of democratic institutions from the political and economic point of view, radical left parties show a large number of ideological positions on social and economic issues. Some, such as the KSCM, posit significant criticisms towards the market economy and define themselves as Marxist-Leninist parties; others present a “new left agenda” (feminism, environmentalism, grass-roots democracy and a “moral finance”); finally, some parties combine social-democratic positions with strong anti-elite and anti-establishment stances¹⁵.

The second one was the introduction with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 of the co-decision procedure. This new practice gave to the EP the opportunity to impact directly and effectively on policy outcomes at EU level. The new policy opportunities produced significant influences on national parties for (at least) two reasons. First of all, the potential to achieve “policy-goals” has provided instrumental incentives for national parties to act together in the supranational assembly, otherwise they would have risked to become politically irrelevant in the EP. Secondly, internal competition for agenda-power offices became much more intense and relevant to control policy decisions. A divided group risked to obtain few “mega-seats” and, therefore, to decrease its ability to influence policy-making. Once the potential for the EP to directly shape legislative outcomes was achieved, national parties had to change organizational structures at EU level to best pursue their policy objectives. However, it is from bargaining among radical left parties that new party organization stands out in the EP.

Both preferences and institutional changes create conditions for radical left parties to form a new party structure in the EP in 1994-5: the *European United Left/Nordic Green Left* (EUL/NGL). After the 1994 European elections, radical left parties from the LU and the EUL merged into a renewed group (the EUL) and, after the accession of Sweden and Finland in 1995, several parties from the Nordic countries joined the group, establishing the *Nordic Green Left* (NGL) sub-group in the EP. The admission of NGL parties increased the size group but, at the same time, complicated party cooperation in the EP. NGL parties show a specific identity distinguishing them from the other

¹⁴ Swedish Left Party.

¹⁵ For a more in depth analysis of the ideological positions of radical left parties see March (2011) and March and Keith (2016)

parties within the EUL and from Socialist or Green families (March 2011): they advance heavy critics towards the EU, up to the withdrawal (“hard Euroscepticism”), and they are strongly embedded in the “Nordic exceptionalism” (Browning 2007).

A central point in the EUL/NGL formation was the desire of national parties to maintain full independence from the EPG both in organizational and ideological terms. If, on the one hand, there was the awareness and the need to form a single parliamentary group, on the other, national parties sought to protect their political identity. Therefore, the adoption of a “confederal” structure was the only organizational response to achieve the two contrasting purposes of stable cooperation and national independence. A confederal group means a decentralized organizational structure without a central political authority and, mainly, the real power is (yet) in the hand of national party delegations. The most important political and administrative body within the radical left group is the “Bureau” but it is relatively weak (related to PES or EPP¹⁶): it is composed by one member from each national party delegations and decides in administrative and political matters but, at the same time, it is unable to sanction (or to reward) rebel (loyal) members or delegations. Another important organizational aspect helping us to understand the “loosing couplings” among radical left parties at EU level is the absence of “Internal Rules” formally recognized by national parties¹⁷. The contrast over the form of cooperation and the fear to lose behavioural autonomy within the EP made the formalization of “internal rules” far more complicated.

For the same reasons, the ideological platform of the EUL remained mainly vague. First of all, the main objective was to encourage inclusiveness in the political system of the EU and an enforcement of human rights:

We see as our mission to make the European Union more human, more transparent and more tangible. We want more direct democracy and active participation by citizens. The European Union must become a project of its people and cannot remain a project of the elites. We want equal rights for women and men, civil rights and liberties and the enforcement of human rights (EUL/NGL 1994).

Secondly, the EUL proposed a new model of development supporting fair trade and policies against ultra-liberalistic strategies:

policy is too frequently based on a radically market-oriented logic of competition both within the EU and towards third countries. The European Union is not the victim of the current economic, financial, environmental and global food crisis but one of its motors (EUL/NGL 1994).

The language chosen to define group aims is indicative of how the EUL is linked to national parties: various party leaders are free to interpret these aims according to their own national situations and needs.

¹⁶ See Lindberg (2008) and Gagatsek (2008).

¹⁷ Other EPGs like PES, EPP and ALDE have formal and developed “Internal Rules” (Gagatsek 2008; Kreppel 2002). Wellhofer (1972) argued that party development reflects “a growing elaboration of rules governing the internal policies of party”, so the absence of internal rules shows a low level of party development, at least in this perspective.

This confederal nature of the group can be still observed in current debates within the EUL and in particular in reactions after the financial crisis in 2008. Radical left parties have responded primarily with a common defensive approach but what is missing in their statements is the promotion of alternative policies at European level (Holmes and Lightfoot 2016). “Stop austerity plans”, “not to privatisation” and “regain power over finance” are just some examples of common slogans used by radical left parties, but there is no agreement on concrete plans about financial, economic, social and EU institutional reforms¹⁸. National interests and ideological divisions avoid compromises on policies devoted to reform economy, finance and the EU institutions.

The foundation of the European Left (EL)

PPELs were launched just before the first EP elections in 1979 and their primary goals were the coordination of European electoral campaigns and the adoption of a common political programme. Moreover, the founding fathers of PPELs sought (and hoped) that they would have operated as “extra-parliamentary arm of the EP groups in terms of support, control and influence” (Pridham and Pridham 1981). The first two PPELs were the Confederation of Socialist Parties (CSP) in 1974 and the European People’s Party (EPP) in 1976¹⁹, while green parties established extra-parliamentarian organizations only after the introduction of the so-called “Party Article” in the Maastricht Treaty (Article 191) in 1992²⁰. Other party families – like communist and ethno-regionalist – created a PPEL after the “Party Statute” in 2004. Why did not communist parties set up a PPEL in 1970s or following the “Party Article”? The answer to this question recalls, once again, the ideological (dis)agreement among the main communist parties and the real gain in terms of political resources from party cooperation at the EU level. In that time, ideological discrepancies among national parties and their different purposes to create a party structure at the EU level were more profound than incentives coming from the European electoral arena.

In particular, four reasons made problematic and unlikely the formation of a communist party federation (Pridham and Pridham 1979; Hanley, 2008). First, Communist parties were fundamentally divided over the European integration issue. Especially, these differences emerged in relation to the EP direct elections: during Sixties, the PCF openly opposed against it whereas the PCI viewed direct elections as a first step towards the democratization of the EC. Second, the international inspiration of Communist parties was not confined to the European borders. Their political and ideological strategies had a broader scope seeking to capture communist parties from non-EC member states. Third, the experience of communist parties within the “Comintern”. This organization was strictly hierarchical, based on “democratic

¹⁸ A similar attitude among radical left parties can be see in the opposition to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

¹⁹ For a detailed reconstruction of party formation at European level outside the EP see Hix and Lord (1997), Hix (1996), Delwit et al. (2004) and Hanley (2008).

²⁰ The European Federation of Green Parties (EFGP) and the European Liberal, Democratic and Reform Party (ELDRP) were set-up in 1993.

centralism” and dominated by one country (the Soviet Union) and one party (the Communist Party of the Soviet Union). This experience generated in European communist parties a sort of aversion towards constraining international organizations. Thus, in addition to ideological difficulties they met also what Hanley (2008: 152) defined as “psychological obstruction”.

Finally, the institutional environment did not press national parties to aggregate across borders in order to increase votes in European elections. This is because EP elections were (are still) fought as “second-order national competitions”: as Reif and Schmitt (1980) pointed out, EP elections tended to be about national political issues and political parties competed over national government performance and not to elect the EU executive. For these reasons national parties did not have enough incentives from the electoral arena to aggregate at supranational level. They get better in terms of votes if they run European elections with national label.

As in the case of the EUL, three factors fostered communist parties to overcome these hurdles towards the formation of the EL. First, the ideological review of communist parties since early 1990s has reduced the differences over the EU integration process facilitating an agreement among national parties, even if ideological differences still persist (see discussion in the previous section). Second, the implementation of the so-called “Party Statute” in 2004²¹ gave the decisive incentive, guaranteeing to national parties important organizational resources (Bardi et al 2010). Party Statute did not affect policy, offices, or votes goals of national parties. It provided opportunities to obtain important organizational resources to national parties from the EU level. For national cartel parties

survival is an organizational imperative: developing supranational organizations could be seen as a relevant element in their strategy aimed [...] at obtaining the necessary resources for their survival from all state-like structures at all levels. (Bardi et al. 20110: 93)

Therefore, Party Statute provided the disciplining force to unite national radical left parties formerly hostile to a supranational party structure. Finally, the globalist movement, especially after the 1999 Seattle G8 summit, has created conditions for radical left parties to mobilise and to react against neo-liberalism around the world and, in particular, in Europe²². It was in this period of “social movements” that the idea and the need to create a party structure at European level become relevant among radical left parties. In this perspective, the foundation of the PEL was the logical continuity of the “movements of the movements” within the European context.

Clearly, the ideological review and the Party Statute did not completely cancel differences among national parties. In fact, the founding Congress of the EL in Rome (8-9 May 2004) started with deep organizational and ideological strains among founding-parties. About organization, there were two different issues in agenda. The first one concerned party configuration: some parties – including PRC and PDS²³ – supported

²¹ Regulation (EC) n. 2004/2003.

²² I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this relevant point for our discussion.

²³ Party of Democratic Socialism in Germany.

the creation of a genuine party, organized following national party structures; others – including PCP²⁴, KKE and KSCM²⁵ – proposed the formation of a weak organization without any kind of limitation in national party autonomy and identity. The second one regarded the financing method of party members, following the rules provided by the “Party Statute”.

About ideological aspects, the main point of contention concerned the judgment of the past socialist experiences. First of all, the PRC and the PDS claimed for a clear opposition against Stalinist period and a catch-all parties strategy. Fausto Bertinotti, leader of the PRC and the first President of the EL, considered an ideological and historical imperative to remove all explicit references to real communism and, above all, to censure Stalinism:

we come from a great and terrible history, we can not go into the future without a clear and irrevocable condemnation of what prohibited to our history to be a story of freedom.

In particular, the PRC and the PDS were oriented to embrace non-communist parties within the EL. The connection to the Communism as leading ideology was not in the purposes of party-founders. A clear mention communist principles and values might have closed doors to political parties with no communist tradition but with an anti-liberal, anti-monetarist and anti-militarist approach.

On the opposite side we find traditional parties like KKE and KSCM. These “neo-Marxists” parties (March 2011) argued that an explicit reference to Communism was not indispensable in Party Statute, while the censure against Stalinism should have been eliminated. The KSCM proposed a compromise replacing, in the preamble of the Statute, the terms “Stalinist practice and crimes” with a more general sentence like “condemnation of all anti-democratic practices and crime”. The Congress decided to maintain a clear condemnation of Stalinism²⁶ creating a division within radical left parties: the KSCM decided to join the EL as observer member; the KKE and the PCP did not adhere at all. The same NGL parties are not members of the EL. They created an informal transnational network (the Nordic Green Left Alliance – NGLA) in 2004, even if they continue to be part of the EUL and sent observers to the EL events.

From the Congress it emerged a party structured around three organs – *Congress, Council and Presidency* – and opened to “socialist, communist, red-green and other democratic left parties of the member States and associated States of the EU” (art.2). More in general, the EL statute reflected the dominant role of national parties: decisions within main political organs are made by unanimity and they are not binding for national party members. The EL took up a flexible organizational structure, open to external political actors (citizens, organizations and social movements) and organized around working groups specialized in specific issues as trade union, gender, Latin America, Middle East and civil rights. This particular organizational nature is well described in articles 1 and 6.2 of the EL Statute:

²⁴ Portuguese Communist Party.

²⁵ Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia in Czech Republic.

²⁶ In the Preamble of the Statute it is argued: “we do this in unreserved disputation with undemocratic, Stalinist practices and crimes, which were in absolute contradiction to socialist and communist ideals”.

the EL is a flexible, decentralized association of independent and sovereign European left-wing parties and political organizations which works together on the basis of consensus [...]. The structure of the EL allows political organizations which are politically close to the EL to take part in its activities in a flexible manner.

The choice to organize the party in thematic groups is threefold. First, this organizational structure allows more flexibility and the opportunity for like-minded political and social organizations to cooperate with the EL (Heidar and Saglie 2003). Secondly, it guarantees both a greater elaboration on specific topics and a specialization of members' group. Finally, it permits to open the party's doors to citizens and civil society. In this way national parties can use the EL as a supranational *think tank* and, at the same time, as a vehicle for policy actions at transnational level: not only to manifest their own ideological position outside the EP but also to implement a truly "European opposition" to national and EU policies. The protests against employment policies implemented by Schroeder government in Germany in 2004 (the so-called "Monday demonstrations") or, more recently, against "austerity policies" in Europe are two examples of the organizational role played by the EL.

Conclusion

Existing researches theorize a key role for environmental changes in explaining party formation at EU level (Bartolini 2005; Hix and Lord 1997). The empowerment of the EP and the increasing scope of the EU legislation provide incentives to national parties to develop party structures at supranational level in order to maximize their input into EU policy-making. As Bartolini (2005) wrote

Europarties are the product of the institutional environment of the EU and have no hope of survival outside it. Their future development will be shaped by the EU institutional development.

Such well-established perspective of enquiry, however, is not able to explain different responses provided by party families at the EU level. For example, the Socialist group is more institutionalized than radical left group and the PES was created earlier than EL. How can we explain these differences if institutional setting is the only explicative variable? This study suggests focusing on national party relationships and, in particular, on ideological disagreement among them. Party formation at EU level is the intentional product of bargaining and struggle among national parties over the necessity of party structures at the EU level and how they should be organized.

The empirical focus of this research was on the formation of two radical left party faces (Katz and Mair 1993) at the EU level: the parliamentary group in the EP ("party in the public office") and the PPEL ("party in the central office")²⁷. Party formation is a response of radical left parties to environmental changes produced by the EU integration process, but it is conditioned by the ideological heterogeneity of radical

²⁷ For an application of the Katz and Mair's analytical model (1993) to the EU case see Bardi (2002) and Sozzi (2013).

left parties. Two factors seem to have played a leading role in party formation: 1) institutional incentives affecting “offices, policies and pragmatic” goals of national political parties and 2) the ideological transformation of national parties, especially of those with an “anti-EU” vision. On the one hand, institutional incentives pressed national parties to a more stable form of cooperation at supranational level and, on the other hand, national parties were much more convinced (strategically and ideologically) about the necessity of transnational party structures within the EP. At the same time, the rational agreement is echoed in three organizational and strategic aspects of the radical left group: 1) the confederal structure; 2) the absence of a formal “internal rules” and 3) a general and vague ideological platform.

In a similar way, the origin of the EL can be traced in the ideological review of communist parties after the collapse of the Soviet Union and, in particular, in their reassessment of the EU integration process. At the same time, however, the introduction of the *Party Statute* provided the key support towards the EL formation, dismantling the last resistances within radical left parties. Some parties saw in the EL a supplementary organizational resource; others considered the EL as a source of legitimacy – especially parties from Eastern and Central Europe (Van dem Berge and Poguntke 2013); finally, the EL represents, for some parties, the opportunity to coordinate political actions against neo-liberalist and neo-monetarist policies at European level (Dunphy and March 2010). Obviously, the building of the EL is not only a consequence of Europarty regulation but certainly it gave a fundamental impulse to national parties to overcome ideological divergences over the EU integration process. The EL was formed largely on the basis of distinctive practical advantages, such as publicity and resources for political campaigns²⁸.

Moreover, the EUL and the EL are completely unconnected (Sozzi 2013): members of the political group in the EP are represented (without voting rights) in the Congress of the EL but they are not in the other executive organs (Council and Executive Board); no members of the EL participate in group’s meeting; finally, in the Statute of the EL, there is no direct mention of the EUL as parliamentary branch of the party. The two faces are (still) “separate tables” of an embryonic “Europarty” and this division reflects the constellation of variegated ideological positions represented within the radical left parties in Europe. The institutional environment is an important factor in shaping party structures at EU level, but alone it is not able to create a real fusion among parties with still very different positions.

²⁸ Whitaker and Lynch (2014) suggest a similar conclusion for the formation of Eurosceptic groups in the EP.

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