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# 1

## Parties, Nation States and Beyond: Some General Considerations

National parties enfeeble themselves, and they will begin to understand that, I hope. They are not able to tackle the European dimension on their own.

Liberal MEP, 2006.

### **Internationalism and transnationalism**

If we are to treat our subject of transnational activity adequately, we need to define our terms initially. Scholars of international relations and historians of ideas have of late shown much interest in internationalism and related ideas. This development is clearly linked to changes in political, economic and social structures across the world, which are often summated roughly under the heading globalisation. The literature on internationalism is vast, and its angle of approach varies considerably, in particular depending on whether the author is a philosopher or a specialist in the relationships between states. The aim of this section is not to study such differences in depth, but rather to map out a conceptual basis for looking at political parties and their operations outside their own territory.

To this end, two brief observations about the existing body of work can be offered. The first is that much of it is, whether explicitly or implicitly, highly normative in character. Many writers, particularly those from Anglo-Saxon backgrounds with an underlying tendency to look at politics primarily from a moral standpoint, come to questions of international relations with an agenda: it is usually about recognizing or strengthening moral communities, however, they might be envisaged. For such approaches, which stem mainly from Kant, politics is based on the 'rational individual as carrier of a universal moral agency'

(Colas, 1994: 513). Secondly, perhaps as a consequence of this moralising approach, such work is usually set at quite an abstract level and pays little attention to the actual machinery of international politics. World politics is often portrayed as a process in which ideas and principles contend, 'nationalism versus internationalism' or 'cosmopolitanism versus communitarianism', for instance. In one recent study, for example, 'internationalism' had already enjoyed its heyday by 1789 and has been 'betrayed' (essentially by the governments of nation states) ever since (Ishay, 1995). Even a rare piece of work that, to its credit, attempts to root internationalism in the world of political action finds it hard to escape this tendency (Colas, 1994). Missing from such analyses is, invariably, any detailed focus on the agents of international politics, specially parties.

Such approaches are very different from the approach to parties that informs this book and that is concerned not with the realisation of universal justice or the development of a global democracy, but with self-seeking actors, preoccupied with more mundane issues of self-preservation or aggrandisement, of adaptation to changing circumstances that they may not be able to control. In terms of international relations theories, it would be located firmly at the 'realist' end of the spectrum.

Bearing this in mind, we can now set out our terminology. Our concern is with the operations of (national) political parties outside their own territory. To describe this field, we will renounce the word 'internationalism'. In the first place, it has too often been loaded with normative implications, as stated above. This does not just refer to the type of moralising philosophy concerned to attack nationalism but also refers to the use of the term made by political families, particularly socialists and communists, for whom it came to embody both a mode of political action and the goal towards which such action was intended, namely a socialist commonwealth. More importantly, however, the real meaning of the term has shifted hugely over time, as Anderson shows in an incisive and persuasive analysis (2002). Today, its most frequent meaning is in fact US hegemony and capacity for unilateral worldwide action on a scale never seen before (hence the title of Anderson's piece, which is a 'breviary' for internationalism). But at four different times in the past, at least, the content of internationalism has varied according to the structures of the capitalist economy, the geographical zone in question, the dominant ideological paradigms and the operative definition of nation and its relationship to the subordinate classes. For this reason alone, we prefer to avoid such a polysemic term and adopt the more

neutral and descriptive 'transnationalism'. The term 'supranational' will be avoided for reasons of semantic clarity also; although it is the standard term in discussions of European integration, even here it can imply the superiority of the non-national over the national, in a clear hierarchical relationship. This is completely inapplicable to the transnational activities of political parties, as the one thing that can be safely said at the outset is that national parties are always extremely careful not to put themselves in a subordinate position to any outside body. We will continue therefore with 'transnational'.

Transnational activity has recently seized the attention of international relations scholars after what some perceive as an overemphasis on states as actors in the international system. Petersen (1992: 376) urges us to think in terms of 'an international civil society of various types of societal actors operating across the boundaries of variously structured countries' and gives a political point to this view by reminding us that many of these organisations strive 'to create, maintain and change the rules of interaction in the public sphere'. Work on transnationalism is mostly focused on the problem of civil society, which is seen as a rich political resource, whose importance is growing. Civil society is the source of many transnational links, whose relationship to the state, domestic and foreign needs to be clarified. Petersen (1992: 381) distinguishes three broad types of transnational link. The first involves linkages among similar groups already active in different countries; Petersen cites such organisations as banks, companies or even international associations of trade unions, but not, interestingly, political parties. His second type is the cross-border spread of organisations initially established in one country, typical of which are churches. His final type involves linkages between different types of groups to further some common purpose; here he cites such movements as family planning, involving numerous organisations such as pressure groups, charities, private foundations and so on. Other examples that he cites include peace, environmentalist and feminist movements, which sociologists usually construe as 'social movements'.

Clearly, political parties fit most neatly into the first category. Perhaps Petersen was wary of including parties because of his civil-society approach, which necessarily involves taking distance from state actors. Yet the problem with political parties is that they are both state actors and forces within civil society; one of their prime functions is invariably considered to be the linking of the state and society. We may therefore be justified in seeing the transnational operations of parties in a similar light to the way we might look at associations of independent firms

across various countries. If we follow this route, we promptly encounter Petersen's claim (p. 381) that 'such ties are likely to be organised as arms' length transactions or loose associations that leave national components considerable autonomy'.

We need however to go beyond the concept of 'loose association', if only because some of the historical variants of association between national parties and transnational organisations have been anything but loose (e.g., the Comintern). One way of doing this might be to use a theory that attempts to study the type of delegation of authority that organisations make when they agree to invest in some kind of transnational body. Principal/agent (henceforth P/A) theory has hitherto been used to examine relations between national governments and supranational bodies in a highly systematic way. We believe that using it in an attenuated form can help make sense of our overriding problematic, which is how to conceptualise investment by bodies that are heavily national in character into organisations that are transnational. We can say at the start that P/A theory is not a perfect fit for the cases with which we are dealing; but it does offer a general overall perspective on our problem. The alternative would be to make do with some loose theory of pooling authority or delegation on an ad hoc basis, which would not address the persistent underlying nature of the relationship between national and transnational instances.

We need first to establish, however, the peculiarly national basis of modern parties.

### **Parties and their nations: a common genesis**

Sartori provided probably the most useful definition of a party when he saw it as an organisation seeking to place candidates in office via elections (1976: 63). Janda's often quoted version, which essentially replaces 'office' with 'government' (1980: 4), reminds us of a crucial fact, the national dimension of parties as we know them; governments are formed in nation states, which they then attempt to manage. Our understanding of party, nourished by the models of Rokkan (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Flora et al., 1999) and later developments of these such as Seiler (1980, 2000, 2003a, 2004), has proceeded very much on the basis of understanding these organisms within the context of their own national state. Parties arose out of the famous cleavages, moments of high tension within European societies, as they began to modernise economically and politically. They reflected the social interests of groups polarised on to either side of these cleavages. Thus, to take the socio-economic or class

cleavage first, property-owners developed liberal or conservative parties to defend their interests in a political process that was becoming more open and competitive as the suffrage began to widen; but these parties would soon be confronted by socialist and later communist parties purporting to represent the propertyless workers. Another axis of conflict was cultural rather than class-based. As modernising, centralising states encountered resistance from the catholic church, in states with a sizeable catholic population, political leaders would develop liberal, anti-clerical parties to help them mobilise against the 'clericals'; the latter, feeling under attack, would mobilise their followers in parties of religious defence, of which modern Christian-democrat parties are typical descendants. A further fault-line in modern societies, the territorial cleavage associated with state-building, would pit centralising parties against parties that defended the periphery, those outlying parts of the newly consolidated states, often with cultures or languages of their own, who resisted being drawn into the modernising orbit of strangers in the capital. The cleavage between sovereignists and European integrationists, heavily discussed in work on European Parliament (EP) groups, can be seen as a contemporary reworking of the centre-periphery split. Integration has meant the displacement of what were traditionally regarded as 'centres' and the possible promotion of former 'peripheries'; this has been a source of particular difficulty for older centralist parties with strong national culture (Chapter 8). Finally, the modernisation of agriculture, with its consequent urbanisation, would pit town against country, parties of the urban interest, be they liberal or conservative, against agrarian or peasant parties. The recent development of parties in Eastern Europe following the collapse of Stalinism is seen by some scholars as reflecting the presence of fundamental cleavages (Dewaele, 2004: 145–60; Seiler, 2002; van Biezen, 2003: 35–43).<sup>1</sup>

This highly condensed version of party development, familiar from any comparative politics textbook, is recalled here in order to underline the paradoxical nature of the topic studied in this book. For parties have been, are and will for a very long time remain supremely national organisations, rooted in the history and culture of their nation state, and as much a part of the familiar institutions as the national museum, broadcasting service or football team. Parties as we know them could only take root in a 'Westphalian' nation state which had developed a certain level of economic, political and cultural cohesion or which, as Bartolini insists (2001), had managed to mark off its *boundaries* clearly. Within such states, new centres were created (the word is to be taken in the widest sense) that overrode previous modes of representation and

around which politics would be structured. Yet we are about to study the phenomenon of transnational parties (henceforth TNP), which seems a contradiction in terms. Parties are about gaining office, it will be recalled; what kind of offices are there at transnational level that parties might seek to fill? It would be easy to answer that there were in reality none, except those of Member of the EP (MEP), and that MEPs represent not TNP but their own national parties who put them on the list and gave them their own party label. Therefore, those organisations that claim to be TNP should not even be dignified with the title of party. Some distinguished scholars come close to this view; Seiler (2003a: 62–3) speaks of ‘agglomerations’ or ‘opportunistic, and in any case heteroclitic, groupings’. It is true indeed that when an organisation has acquired the title of party, this has never happened spontaneously. There has invariably been some interest or coalition of interests involved, which have awarded themselves the label (Offerlé, 1997: 40; Gaxie, 1996: 97–100); it behoves us therefore to keep a wary eye on who sets up and names TNP. Yet this was true even of the national parties when they were created.

Perhaps a better approach to the problem is not to view parties rigorously and solely as machines that capture office directly, but to focus on them as living organisms with needs of their own. Office may well be the most important of these needs, but there are others.

Panebianco (1988) has drawn our attention to the material basis of party, which the above approach implies. His focus on the survivalist, if not to say egotistical, dimension of party activity is a necessary corrective to much writing that takes party ideology or self-description at face value. We know that parties tend, if successful, to institutionalise (to use his terminology), that is to say that they build up an organisational infrastructure and resources of their own. This then becomes a stake in the calculations of political actors, as the party can now offer careers (administrative and representative), honours, prestige and so on. This coexists with the elaboration of programmes, manifestoes and the development of a distinct party subculture. Leaving aside the question of how adequately the party represents particular social groups, which is usually assumed to be its main *raison d’être*, the party now exists as an actor in its own right, with interests of its own, which it will obviously seek to enhance. In particular, it will look, as Panebianco reminds us (1988: 53) to control its environment, that is, to remain as autonomous as possible, with regard both to other groups with which it must interact within the political system and to subgroups within its own walls. Pedersen puts this brutally but accurately when he says that parties are ‘organisations

that try to control the relations between the citizens and the political régime' (1996: 28).

One consequence of this is that a party must be constantly on the lookout for new opportunities to extend its influence, both to enhance its own base and the better to satisfy its voters. The life of modern parties can therefore be understood as a continuing search for sources of influence, in the widest sense. As the field of possible influence expands, so the party must spread into it; parties follow opportunities as trade was once said to follow the flag. Every new arena that opens up within the field of politics sets a new challenge to parties: How are they to respond to it in a way that enables them to keep control of the agenda, the voters and if possible the decisions? Long before the concept of 'multi-level governance' came into vogue, parties have been operating at many different levels, or, to use a word currently in vogue, in different arenas, with varying degrees of commitment. If with Duverger (1981: 24–31) we trace the beginnings of modern parties to cliques of notables in parliamentary bodies, whose party organisation was little more than a local committee of worthies, active long enough only to get its man elected, we see that the field of action of the early 'party' was small. It was restricted to the locality and consisted in choosing a man to represent that locality within the capital, which was at this time the only real locus of decision-making. Yet as the scope of politics expanded beyond the capital, and in particular as institutions of local government grew, a new area emerged in which the nascent parties dare not fail to get involved. It was an uneven process across Europe (Caramani, 2004), but the subnational area was vital in building the institutional base of those mass parties, which, beginning with the socialists, followed on the heels of the cadre parties, according to the classic views of party history (Katz and Mair, 1995).

If party spread easily enough to subnational levels, filling the elective bodies, there should be no reason why it might not spread outside national frontiers, if the occasion arose. Parties have their roots in their own state, but there is nothing unconditional about their link to this state. They are, we must remember, organisations devoted to preserving themselves and representing their supporters, and these two processes are intimately connected. If it appeared to parties that their two main tasks might need, to an extent, to be carried out beyond the national territory, then they should not, as rational, self-preserving actors, have difficulty with this notion. All this very much depends, obviously, on precisely what opportunities or pressure for transnational action might arise, and to this we now turn.



## **Party extra muros: an overview of transnationalism**

Historically, parties have been interested in transnational activity of some kind almost from their inception. Even if we discount the experience of the International Working Men's Association or First International (1864–1876) as a grouping of intellectuals, isolated artisans or professional groups and not of parties *stricto sensu*, then the Socialist International or Second International (1889–1914) is a much weightier event. This grouping was launched at a time when socialist parties in European states were, with the exception of the German SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands), in their infancy. In other words, socialist parties understood that their work entailed a transnational dimension, however small, even as they began to build up their strength at home. The two dimensions of their activity were thus inseparable, though obviously not equal.

Since the socialist Internationals, other party families have equipped themselves with transnational organisations, in a process of mimetism that clearly suggests that there is nothing unique about the socialists' desire for organisation beyond the frontiers.<sup>2</sup> As well as transnationalism spreading across all party families, the form of such organisation has also changed and indeed deepened. The advent of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952, followed by the European Economic Community (EEC) (1958), gave party families a new arena in which to become active. The ECSC Assembly, which became the European Assembly then Parliament, was a unique transnational forum, consisting of representatives of the member states (initially nominated, later elected). Since the beginning (Kreppel, 2002; Murray, 2004), national parties have organised their representatives along transnational lines, according to party family, within these bodies. A similar procedure has been followed in other transnational assemblies such as the Council of Europe or more recently the Committee of the Regions. Within the EP, the parliamentary groups that were the initial focus of transnational activity have retained their importance, but the party families have developed closer links of an extra-parliamentary nature. By the 1970s (Table 1.1), most of the families had confederal structures grouping the various national member parties. With the agreement to hold direct elections to the EP in 1979, the organisational framework tightened further, and various incipient 'Euro-parties' or TNP emerged. By November 2003, the European institutions had agreed a thoroughgoing Regulation for the supervision and financial support of these TNP (OJ L297/1, 15 November 2003)

Table 1.1 Party families and their roads to transnationalism

	1864	1889– 1914	1919–1939	1945–1958	1958...	1970s	1990s/ 2000
Socialists	1st Inter	2nd Inter	LSI-SI				
Christian Democrats			SIPDIC	Soc group in ECSC NEI-EUCD	Soc group in EP CDI	CESP	PES
Liberals			Entente	CD group in ECSC Liberal International	CD group in EP	EPP	
Communists			Third International (Comintern)	Lib group in ECSC Cominform	Lib group in EP EP groups	ELDR	GUE/NGL PEL
Greens						EGC	EFGP, EGP

(Schmidt, 2004), which has been operating since 2004 (Day and Shaw, 2006).<sup>3</sup> This development took the history of TNP co-operation into a new, more institutionalised phase, but the movement did not stop there.

Two years into the new TNP regime, advocates of stronger TNP were busy pushing their case further. Jo Leinen, a Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SDP) MEP known for his federalist opinions, reported to the EP Committee on Constitutional Affairs and tabled a motion to the Parliament on 27 February 2006 [motion 2005/2224(INI)]. Reviewing progress to date, Leinen noted the need for a definitive Statute for the TNP, as opposed to the present Regulation, citing in support the views of most of the leaders of the TNP and a report from the EP Secretary General. His main criticisms concerned finance, particularly the short-termism of current arrangements, whereby TNP are financed only on an annual basis; the grant is determined every year and can change in function of the number of parties (and the last 2 years have seen a number of new entrants). TNP cannot roll over budget surpluses to the following year and can only vire small percentages from one of their tightly drawn budget lines to another. All in all, such a system discourages forward planning and sound financial management. By way of improvement, the motion suggested paying out more of the funds up front (up to 80%),

agreeing on funding for the 5-year cycle of parliament, allowing TNP to build up surpluses and have more flexibility in using funds. At the end of the motion, some bold non-financial measures were advocated; the Commission should be asked to submit proposals for the European political foundations to assist TNP directly. The motion also urged further debate on issues such as whether TNP should be encouraged to draw up European-wide lists for EP elections and have a role in referenda and the election of the Commission President.

In short, the Leinen motion concentrated mainly on strengthening the TNPs' financial base but tried to open the door to the adding-on of some real political powers. These latter proposals in particular represented a weakening of the hold of national parties, and it remained to be seen how much of the motion would be accepted. In the event, the EP approved the motion on 23 March, and it now resides with the Commission and Council for consideration. There is ample opportunity in these instances for the recommendations to be amended, watered down or simply refused, possibly even by ministers from some parties whose MEPs had voted for them. Our guess would be that the financial provisions will be approved more easily than the political suggestions but that remains to be seen. If this were to be the case, then we would be left with a situation where the advocates of integration had gained a further inch in the face of some stern national resistance and where the struggle would simply go on. Such has been the history of integration from the beginning.

This recent, acute change in the transnational activity of parties needs to be explained. The postwar world has clearly asked some hard questions, both of parties and of the nation states that are their natural habitat. There are lengthy and specialised debates about how the modern state is being reconfigured, or 'hollowed out' in more drastic versions, as it struggles to discharge its functions in a changing world.<sup>4</sup> Suffice it to say here that modern states have been subjected to a two-way squeeze; on the one hand, they have found it advisable to hive off various functions to subnational level, whereas on the other, they have pooled part of their powers 'upwards', at the level of the European Union (EU), in what is termed the integration process. There is no reason to see this in apocalyptic terms as the 'end of the state', as some sovereignists are prone to do. States have not been simple victims of wider trends, such as economic integration or the meshing of various pressures – economic, societal, cultural, technological – which we summate under the term of globalisation. They have, however, been aware of such pressures and sought strategies to adapt to them; these can vary

according to state traditions and particular historical experiences. The upshot is that states are nowadays involved in complex, multi-layered processes of government, or as analysts increasingly term it, governance (Kohler-Koch, 1996); these involve the state in relationships with a whole series of actors – public, private, supranational – which are in constant flux. All this is a far cry from the era of relatively self-sufficient and self-governing states in which parties grew and prospered. Just as governments have had to make adjustments and innovations at sub- and supra-national levels, so have parties. Changes in party development at subnational level are beyond the scope of this work, though they have been vigorous and are ongoing. Changes at the level above the nation state have, however, been just as strong, and we would argue that the move towards European integration has taken party transnationalism into new waters. Never previously was there an institution such as the EP, where parties were virtually forced to structure themselves in new ways so as to obtain influence; nor was there ever a development from the detailed and specific type of collaboration involved in EP work to the creation of actual TNP with a role and ambitions beyond the hemicycle of Strasbourg or Brussels. This is why we regard the period since 1979 particularly as something of a quantum leap in TNP activity.

This rapid overview of more than a century of TNP activity compresses into the same descriptive framework a number of different situations and a range of relationships between national parties and their transnational instances, which vary both in intensity and in quality. It can be easily objected for instance that a party International is not the same as a TNP; if it were, why should the two continue to coexist as they do? It might also be suggested that the relationship between national and transnational instances could vary according to family. To take the most obvious instance, the Third International or Comintern enjoyed, at the height of the Stalinist era, a radically different position with regard to the national communist parties than did the SI with regard to its constituents. Such objections are valid and must be addressed, but they should not detract from one common thread that runs through the last century and a quarter, namely the pursuit of their interests by national parties via a transnational framework. The way in which they define these interests can vary across time and place; so can the organisational structures to which they are prepared to agree. Yet there is a consistent pattern of extending or at least protecting interests via transnational mechanisms. We need now to try and elaborate a theory of national party/transnational organisation relationships that might fit all the situations that have occurred in the course of recent history. It would need

a central, explanatory core while retaining sufficient flexibility to cover the wide variety of situation evoked above.

### **Current approaches to the national/transnational dimension of party**

Existing scholarship has of course attempted to come to grips with the phenomenon of TNP, and there is considerable variation in the way in which they are approached in the literature. At one extreme is the casual language of party professionals, who use the term party to describe almost any type of organisation. Thus, Schoettli, a former secretary general of the Liberal International (LI), describes his organisation as a 'truly global transnational party' in the making (1983:173). In similar vein, the website of the Independence and Democracy (ID) group in the 2004 EP invited visitors to read more about 'the Party' in its introduction, a surprising self-description by this sovereigntist organisation, when it has set its face against becoming a europarty and was bitterly opposed to the European Party Regulation.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps such laxity is simply the mark of busy politicians who do not attach as much importance to vocabulary as political scientists; if so, it may say something about the way they regard TNP.

Academics have come to the problem from a number of different angles. One of the most experienced observers of group development in the EP, Luciano Bardi, still sees the party federations (his preferred phrase) as being at a very early stage of development, albeit with some potential, provided that national parties allow this to be released (Bardi, 2002a,b; 2006). This approach is broadly in line with our own. A frequent comparison is with US political parties (Hix, 1998; Raunio, 2002b), the implication being that the TNP are the equivalents of the nationwide Democrat or Republican parties, whereas their constituent national parties are the equivalent of the Democrat or Republican organisations in, say, Texas or Ohio. This comparison is in many ways quite unhelpful, despite superficial similarities. Leaving aside the fact that the US is a state, whereas the EU is a unique non-state political system, there is a big difference in scale between the stakes for which national parties compete in Europe and those on offer in state-level contests in the US; the governorship of Montana is not the same as the chancellorship of Germany. This alone takes away some of the utility of the comparison. Similarly, the national or federal parties in the US, even though they are said to be mere shells outside the periods of electoral campaigns, do actually run candidates for the highest office, the presidency; thus far

the European TNP cannot even agree on a candidate for president of the European commission. Even if they could, it would be irrelevant, as this office is filled by agreement between representatives of states in the European Council and not by a vote of Europe's citizens responding to prompts from the TNP. There is, then, a discrepancy in size and function between these alleged functional equivalents in the two systems.

Related to this approach is the desire to portray the TNP in terms of a more general federalist model (Jansen, 1995; Johansson, 1996; Hrbek, 2004). German scholars in particular are attracted by this approach, reflecting both their experience within their own polity and an enthusiasm to see the EU evolve along similar lines. This approach relies on assuming that the EU as a whole contains enough features of a federalist nature to justify such a tactic, though its protagonists usually stop short of describing the EU as a federation in so many words. Scholars have doubtless been encouraged in this approach by the TNP themselves, who have referred to themselves as 'confederations' in the earlier phase of development and latterly as 'federations' of parties. This approach might convince more, however, if the EU really were an unambiguous federation, with clearly devolved powers to both central and subcentral levels, which the structure of the 'federal' parties could then match. In practice, this type of structure usually involves some kind of central parliament in which federal parties are represented. Below it are the regional assemblies in which local versions of the federal parties (by no means always coterminous with the latter) would be active, and they would usually also be represented in some kind of senate that looked after essentially territorial interests. The EU, with its uniquely complex structure and perpetual triangulation between Commission, Council and Parliament does not fit very closely to existing federal models, however. Again, the federal model is of limited value, though Jansen, to be fair, suggests that only the German and Austrian experiences among viable federal systems are really relevant to the EU (1995: 163). Another approach that probably owes much to the context of German federalism is Oskar Niedermayer's famous triptych. According to this, parties can go from a stage of minimal contact to various degrees of active co-operation (roughly where most TNP are today). The third, highest stage is integration; here national parties would have made substantial powers and resources over to a transnational agent, whose decisions would then be binding on them (see Johansson and Zervakis, 2002).

One reason why scholars persist with this line of enquiry might lie in the way in which the EU itself has talked about TNP. Long reluctant to involve themselves in the question, Council and Commission eventually

agreed, under German prompting (Kulahci, 2005: 8), in the famous Article 138a of the TEU to define TNP functions in what was the beginning of a process to regularise and constitutionalise their status, ending with the party Regulation of 2003. Pedersen is correct to see Article 138a as both 'opaque' and 'high-flown' (1996: 25). The two main identifying features of TNP were, in the drafters' mind, their contribution to raising awareness of Europe and to furthering integration (essentially by reinforcing links between citizens and institutions). TNP thus tend to be thought about as primarily agents of European integration, which may be misleading. In one purely superficial sense, they are obviously agents of integration; simply by existing and co-ordinating activity within the EP, they could be seen as a useful cog in the engine of integration. This description of them, however, also has some normative content; it is assumed, usually implicitly, that TNP are, by virtue of their everyday functions, not just some modest and quite passive part of the integration process, but active and willing protagonists in it, indeed that they were set up for precisely this purpose, presumably by national parties wanting this very objective. If assumptions like this are accepted, then it becomes very easy to start talking in federal terms. We shall see, however, that such blithe assumptions about national parties are in most cases quite unjustified.

Two recent scholars provide further angles on the TNP. Lightfoot's study of the Party of European Socialists (PES) (2005) neatly sidesteps the question of the TNPs' inability to mobilise voters directly (the vote-seeking model of party) or to place candidates directly into office (the office-seeking model); both these failings are of course used by some analysts to deny party status to the TNP. Instead, he suggests pragmatically that we consider the TNP as policy-seeking actors; they operate within a political system, the EU, that is *sui generis*, and within this they may be able to influence the policy process by acting in areas such as the EP or in pre-Council leaders' summits. This approach has the merit of concentrating on the TNP as systemic actors without subjecting them to preconceived tests of 'partyness', which, given the inevitable bias in such academic exercises, they are unlikely to pass.

Day and Shaw bring an approach that reflects their ongoing work on the constitutionalisation of the EU (Day, 2005; Day and Shaw, 2006). They are strongly concerned with issues such as legitimacy of institutions and they see the linkage function between EU-level institutions and citizens as one area where TNP might play a key role. By looking at the internal dynamics of one party, the PES, they detect a pattern of forces at work that we might characterise as a federalist impulse working

against an intergovernmentalist one. Thus far, the latter has prevailed without much difficulty, and the suggestion is that it makes more sense to see the TNP at present as facilitators of relationships between national parties and their leaders rather than as possible direct representatives of European citizens at EU level. So long as there is no European demos, this direct representation cannot be expected to happen. In other words, the development of TNP, if there is to be any, depends on the evolution of EU institutions. Though based on the PES, this approach is intended to be generalisable to other party families, and it has the merit of drawing attention to the continuing dynamic of federalist/intergovernmentalist forces inside the TNP, instead of considering them simply as unitary actors. In particular it stresses how wary national parties still are of the possibility of 'capture' (2006:103) by TNP if they were to strengthen the latter.

One can understand the reluctance of all the above approaches to the development of TNP to make use of the classical instruments of party scholarship. Rokkanian analysis focuses on nation states and the transformations that they have undergone in order to explain the genesis of modern parties. But the latter are single, relatively homogeneous units, not the composites which TNP are. Duverger has a concept of the indirect party (1981: 49–62), which offers some apparent similarity with the case of the TNP, in that he is referring to parties founded by previously existing organisations. Yet on inspection, his examples are all found in single states, and the sponsors or categories of associations that create the parties (trade unions, farmers' associations, catholic groups, etc.) are all actors within civil society, not parties as such. TNP do not fit in to his model because they are transnational and are, uniquely, founded by existing national political parties. Yet the Rokkanian approach is pertinent in that it rests on one feature that is common to all nation states, the cleavage. All the TNP assemble parties from the same family on a transnational basis. These parties owe their identity to a deeply national experience, the cleavage; but they then bring this identity into a transnational arena, the EU. Cleavages and the experience of them cannot be left at home in a cupboard, so to speak; they are part of the fibre of parties. Some scholars mock the notion of party families as unscientific, rather in the way that it was once fashionable to pour scorn on the idea of left and right. Unfortunately for the academics, in both cases, the protagonists on the ground live and breathe by such concepts, crude as they might be. Parties happily admit to belonging to families because they know that they have shared origins. The different kinds of communists and Trotskyists described in



Chapter 6 remember their common origins in the struggle of labour against capital; the liberals of Chapter 5, be they social liberals or pure marketeers, also know that their ancestors fought the same fight against conservative domination. Sometimes there are tensions within a family, but they are usually overridden by underlying affinities. These affinities derive of course from common experience of societal cleavage. We need therefore an approach that takes due account of cleavage analysis but somehow integrates the transnational dimension.

Our way of approaching the TNP is much more bottom-up. We see them very much as creations of national parties, put together in (in most cases) a highly functional way, without necessarily any deep commitment to an integration process. As integration has proceeded piecemeal, often in ways that were not chosen by parties that later on have nevertheless to deal with its consequences, certain functions have emerged that require action at transnational level, mainly but not exclusively within the purview of the EP. National parties have adopted, via successive modifications, the current form of the TNP as the most economic way of discharging these functions. To use Panebianco's categories, this is an instance of institutionalised parties seeking to keep control of their environment. Pedersen would see them as trying to head off another potential threat. If the partisan environment undergoes changes, then the parties have to adjust in consequence; failure to do so means weakening of control. None of these implies any commitment to further integration or a fortiori to outright federalism, though some party families or individual members may be keener than others. As the institutional landscape of the EU evolves, some further changes to the structure and operations of the TNP may become necessary; if so, they will be addressed in their own time by the national parties. Seeing the creation of TNP from this angle as simply the seizing of new institutional opportunities by national parties (and the best way out of a constraint is often said to consist in turning it into an opportunity) takes much of the normative bias out of the question and reduces perhaps some of the emotion or hope that is sometimes invested in these transnational hybrids.

Our bottom-up approach enables us to make cautious use of one general theory to help explain the relationship between national parties and TNPs. We refer to P/A theory, which can be used in a modified way, we feel, to make sense of an ongoing pattern of delegation of authority by national parties (Principals) to transnational Agents (TNP). We do not claim a perfect fit between this theory and the reality of the world

of TNP, but we believe it nevertheless to be capable of shedding light on the problem.

In their recent article on P/A theory as applied to the study of the EU, Kassim and Menon (2003) conclude that this theory is highly promising as an approach to understanding the realities of the EU but that it has perhaps promised more than it has achieved. Certainly, to the scholar interested in political parties, there has been little sign of the P/A approach being used to understand the parties of the EU. The most interesting P/A work remains heavily focused on the state and inter-state level; the concern is with the mechanics of national governments' delegation of functions and resources to supranational bodies such as the EU Commission or European Court of Justice (ECJ) (Pollack, 1997, 2003; Tallberg, 2002). On the intra-state level, much attention is paid to the delegation of authority by national governments to so-called independent regulatory authorities (IRAs) (Thatcher, 2002; Thatcher and Stone Sweet, 2002). In all this work, however, parties scarcely receive a mention.

Yet parties are at the core of the modern state; it is they who form the governments which then delegate to supranational organisms. Moreover, the development of supranational delegation by governments within the EU has gone hand in hand with a similar movement among Europe's main political parties. This parallel or mimetic process has seen the creation in recent years by the national member-parties of the main political families of a series of TNP, based mainly but not exclusively around the EP and spanning all the major families. All these entities involve an amount of delegation to the supranational instances by the national parties that form them. Yet such TNP structures are in our view simply the latest stage in a longstanding phenomenon. Although the mode of operation and the significance of such structures have undoubtedly shifted over time, there remains a clear historical continuity from the early Internationals to today's TNP.

Given this, it is perhaps surprising that a highly adaptable general theory such as P/A has never been applied to the TNP and their predecessors. Certainly, contemporary scholars use P/A theory overwhelmingly to explore interstate dynamics within the regional level that is the EU. But the theory did not originate in international relations, rather in business economics and thereafter in (mainly US-oriented) legislative studies. Clearly P/A theory is a flexible tool, and there seems therefore a case for applying it to transnational relationships between parties, in order to obtain a new understanding of TNP.

The mainsprings of P/A theory are widely understood. Typically, a principal (usually taken to be a national government or another state-level institution) entrusts, alone or in concert with other principals, a function or set of functions to a notionally subordinate actor, the agent. Adequate resources have obviously to be provided for the function to be discharged. The principals may in some cases create this agent directly. This latter, usually an institution in its own right, is expected to carry out these functions to the benefit of the principal(s), or, as the formula has it, to save the principal(s) a number of transaction costs. In Tallberg's words, delegation is explained in terms of the anticipated effects for the delegating party and is likely to take place when the expected benefits outweigh the expected costs (2002: 25). Transposed to the EU framework, this conceptualisation has been used to study the delegation of functions by principals (national governments) to supranational agents (the Commission or ECJ), but also increasingly, as Pollack reminds us, to a host of new, secondary institutions (2003: 402–14). This trend simply reflects developments within nation states, whereby governmental principals have delegated widely to IRAs, typically in the realm of public utilities (gas, water, transport, etc.). Whatever the context of delegation, though, the principal(s) will have clear motives for such delegation and may well vary the type of function delegated according to the importance they attach to a particular policy area.

Principals are aware that agents are not merely passive tools but that they invariably acquire interests and an agenda of their own; in Panebianco's terms, they become institutionalized (Panebianco, 1988: 53). They may well attempt to put their own interpretation on how they carry out their assigned functions and will try to set their own agenda, not that of the principal(s). They can be expected to develop their own autonomy as far as possible. This tendency towards autonomy (referred to unkindly in the literature as 'shirking') is naturally identified as a risk from the start by the principal(s), who usually install structures to ensure compliance of the agent. These can include the initial remit given to the agent, various monitoring and supervisory mechanisms to be applied in the course of the agent's work and the ultimate weapon of sanctions, ranging from the minor (replacement of awkward personnel, say) to the cataclysmic (wholesale Treaty revision, in the case of the ECJ, whose growing autonomy the national governments wished to check). Using this eminently clear and rational framework, analysts such as Pollack have made persuasive P/A models of the relationship between national governments and supranational EU institutions.

Still within the context of the EU, it seems that there is a clear a priori case for applying P/A theory to the TNP of the Union and to their 'parent' national parties. From the time of the Internationals to today's TNP, there has been an ongoing process of delegation by national parties to a transnational organism, which they have created. All the problems associated with P/A relationships have surfaced at various times within the history of the TNP and their predecessors: What benefits are expected from delegation? What functions and resources should be delegated? What mechanisms should be installed to prevent shirking? What sanctions can be applied? Scholars have so far used P/A models to analyse state actors (essentially governments), but there is no reason why P/A analysis should not equally well apply to parties, whether they are in government or not. It is not our claim that P/A analysis will explain perfectly every dynamic of the relationship between transnational and national levels, but we do believe that it can shed light on some important areas. We shall now set out in general terms the applicability of P/A theory to political parties and their TNP agents.

### **Parties as principals: the primary benefits of delegation**

We recalled above how much the modern party is contemporaneous with its nation state (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Flora et al., 1999). Certain types of party, essentially the conservatives and the liberals, probably found identification with the nation state easier. Yet even those families that arose in apparent opposition to the modern nation state (catholic, later Christian democratic parties, or socialists) had to define themselves in terms of a national political system, even if it was largely the creation of their opponents and the latter kept them away from power by various means. As such oppositionist parties built up strength, however, they became in their turn candidates for power (especially in those states with pluralistic party systems requiring high degrees of coalition), gradually becoming system-parties instead of anti-system rebels. In short, with the possible exception of the regionalist or peripheral family (and even it has strong territorial roots, except that its territory does not coincide with that of modern nation states), all major party families had strong roots within their national political system. This was where they grew, campaigned and when possible governed; this was their frame of reference; they became national institutions in their own right. When in government, party leaders might engage with representatives of sister parties serving in the governments of other states, but that would be a relationship between governing elites, not between party leaders as

such; it would be state business, not party work. Given their embedding in the nation state, then, if parties are to subscribe to a transnational structure, or, in the language of this chapter, if such principals are to delegate to agents, there would have to be very powerful incentives.

Contemporary use of P/A theory has identified a number of reasons for delegation. Some of these are to do with fairly visible or concrete benefits, often summated under the heading of transaction costs. Typically, a principal might want from its agent such transaction-cost benefits as policy-relevant information or quick and efficient decision-making (Pollack, 2003: 403). There can be an obverse to this, which is the cost of failing to delegate. Some theorists would apply P/A theory to demonstrate that principals can set objectives but not allow their agents the means to realise these; some recent debates about the EU's Lisbon strategy, which thus far has been less than successful, make use of this technique (Dehousse, 2005). These benefits could be described as relatively 'hard', quite instrumental in character.

Other analysts lay more stress on symbolic benefits: by delegating to an agent, a principal can make a gesture about its objectives or ideology, say, at comparatively little real cost. It can relay a message to a wider public. A more subtle benefit to be had is that of blame-shifting (Thatcher, 2002: 125; 2005); if a policy area is experiencing problems, a principal can find it very useful to point out that it is no longer its responsibility but that of the agent. Rail travellers in the UK, to give one example, are very familiar with this argument. It would, however, need to be established on a case-by-case basis how effective this dumping of responsibility is and how long it can be sustained before voters' anger focuses on the real culprits; but certainly one can imagine its usefulness as a short-term measure.

One benefit of delegation needs to be presented from a rather different angle, and this is the question of credible commitment (Tallberg, 2002; Pollack, 2003: 403; Majone, 2005). By endowing an agent with certain powers, a principal may deliberately put itself in the position of having to accept decisions stemming from use of these powers. Yet by signalling its readiness to do so, the principal sends a very clear signal to partners; they in their turn replicate that commitment by agreeing similarly to commit to the agent. The classic example cited is the European Central Bank (ECB); by making over to it powers to set interest rates, EU governments have shown each other that they are ready to be locked fairly permanently into a monetary policy whose priority is low inflation rather than growth. More importantly perhaps, they have made this commitment to the markets, as well as to each other. One aspect of P/A

relationships that is sometimes forgotten when discussing commitment is this external dimension; commitment can be shown to a number of external actors as well as to other principals in the P/A setup.

Delegation can therefore bring a number of benefits at different levels and in different contexts, and we can now usefully attempt to see how far they might apply to the TNP or their predecessors.

Some of the benefits seem on the face of it more relevant than others. If we attempt to rule out some benefits as irrelevant, one obvious candidate is the blame-shifting function. This is an advantage of delegation that has been discovered more recently and may not always have figured in the calculations of principals when setting up agencies. There has probably never been a situation where a party has been able to lay blame for its shortcomings at the door of a transnational instance. It could be objected that the obvious candidate for such a scenario would be the Comintern; but it was never likely to have blame heaped on it by member parties, because the P/A relationship in that instance was a peculiar one, as will be demonstrated. Most of the other purported benefits of delegation do, however, seem to have some degree of applicability to the case of the TNP.

The sharing of information would seem a high priority for TNP, from the time of the first Internationals even. Speed of decision-making on the other hand, is a more complex question. We would need to investigate just what decisions the transnational instance is able to take and what implications this has for the principals. The symbolic function is, however, of extreme importance for national parties and can in fact be further refined. By joining a transnational family, a party proclaims its adherence to a certain set of values and goals, by implication universal. At the same time, it states something about its identity; it marks itself off from other political currents, which on some levels may seem close, and firms up its own distinct identity. An example of this might be the case of socialist parties, particularly from Southern Europe, in the early days of socialist internationalism. One of the benefits of joining the Socialist International was to make clear the differences between socialism and a number of other 'progressive' political ideologies (republicanism, radicalism, anti-clericalism) which on the domestic scene tended to overlap with it to an extent.

The question of credible commitment is perhaps the most relevant of all. Membership of a transnational organisation can send a signal to like-minded parties that one may be ready to commit to certain common actions or programmes. More importantly, though, it sends signals to the rest of the political community. We would argue for instance that

the Second International was at least as much concerned with establishing itself as a credible actor in international politics as it was with strengthening links between its members in the pursuit of socialism. As such, it had to attempt to commit itself, on behalf of its members, credibly to certain policies of a peace-seeking nature; but this commitment needed to be made in the eyes of bourgeois and aristocratic governments as well as in the eyes of its own members and the class they represented. External commitment is as important as intra-family commitment.

The above discussion has focused on benefits that are clearly foreseeable in advance and can be factored into the rational calculations that precede any decision to delegate. Yet one of the lessons of delegation is that unexpected advantages (or indeed the opposite) may accrue. The controls are usually in place to filter out potential disadvantages, but little attention seems to have been paid to incremental or unexpected benefits. Thatcher makes this point with regard to IRAs (2002: 126). We believe that the whole experience of transnational activity by party has thrown up a number of unforeseen benefits. Our next, historical chapter will explore this phenomenon more fully; suffice it to say for now that these benefits have to do predominantly with the identity dimension of party.

It would seem then that the P/A relationship might offer a useful way of looking at the delegation made by national parties to TNP. There are clear possible benefits, some of them the result of experience rather than of rational calculation at the start. At the same time national parties were and are always free to put in as many controls over their transnational agent as they feel desirable, in order to rule out any agency loss. In such a situation, it would seem that the national parties must be winners all along the line.

## Notes

1. Such accounts suggest indeed using further cleavages such as communists vs. democrats, or maximalists vs. minimalists (Dewaele 2001, 2004).
2. We use mimetism in Radaelli's sense (1999: 44–5), namely attempting to resolve uncertainty by imitating organisations perceived as more legitimate or successful.
3. Kulahci (2005) has an excellent analysis of the debate from the Maastricht Treaty to the eventual approval of the Regulation. Argument within the EU's institutional triad centred inevitably on issues such as: the nature and extent of financing; criteria for party formation (degree of representativeness, democratic credentials) and functions to be fulfilled (should TNP run EP election campaigns?). None of these questions was definitively resolved, and all surface in any debate on TNP.

4. For an excellent introduction to this discussion see Loughlin (2001: 1–29). His focus is on subnational developments but he sets the wider context of state reconfiguration very clearly.
5. Initial hostility notwithstanding, members of ID had by early 2006 filed not one but two applications to register new TNP under the European Party Regulation. This is elegant testimony to the reality of political mimetism; if rival parties are using new opportunities to protect or enhance themselves, how can one afford not to follow? (Interview with ID officials, Brussels, February 2006).



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