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POLITICAL PARTIES IN A CHANGING EUROPE

Kurt Richard Luther and Ferdinand Müller-Rommel

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Editor: Professor Thomas Poguntke (t.poguntke@keele.ac.uk)

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Launched in September 2000, the Keele European Parties Research Unit (KEPRU) was the first research grouping of its kind in the UK. It brings together the hitherto largely independent work of Keele researchers focusing on European political parties, and aims:

- to facilitate its members' engagement in high-quality academic research, individually, collectively in the Unit and in collaboration with cognate research groups and individuals in the UK and abroad;
- to hold regular conferences, workshops, seminars and guest lectures on topics related to European political parties;
- to publish a series of parties-related research papers by scholars from Keele and elsewhere;
- to expand postgraduate training in the study of political parties, principally through Keele's MA in Parties and Elections and the multinational PhD summer school, with which its members are closely involved;
- to constitute a source of expertise on European parties and party politics for media and other interests.

The Unit shares the broader aims of the Keele European Research Centre, of which it is a part. KERC comprises staff and postgraduates at Keele who are actively conducting research into the politics of remaking and integrating Europe.

Convenor KEPRU: Dr Kurt Richard Luther (r.luther@keele.ac.uk)

Dr Luther is a senior lecturer in politics at Keele University.
Professor Müller-Rommel is professor of comparative politics at Heinrich-Heine University, Düsseldorf, Germany

1.1 Introduction*

The analysis of political parties constitutes one of the most important sub-fields of comparative political science and dates back at least as far as the contributions of Ostrogorski (1903, 1964) and Michels (1911). One of the main reasons for this enduring interest in political parties is that they have been widely regarded as playing a central role in both the theory and the practice of modern liberal democracy, constituting a vital link between the sovereign people and the politicians to whom the exercise of the affairs of the state is temporarily entrusted. Put another way, political parties can be regarded as perhaps the most important structures by means of which it is possible to bridge the inherent tension within all modern democracies between the authorising *demos* on the one hand and the authorised politicians on the other (the 'principal-agent relationship') (Müller 2000). This is one of the main reasons why some observers (e.g. Schattschneider 1942) consider political parties a virtually indispensable feature of modern democratic governance. Furthermore, few would deny that a full appreciation of the operation of modern liberal democracy requires an understanding of the political challenges facing political parties and how successfully they deal with them. The dimensions of political parties upon which empirical political science has tended to concentrate have of course closely mirrored the evolution of political parties

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* This constitutes an early draft of the introductory chapter of the following publication: Kurt Richard Luther and Ferdinand Müller-Rommel (eds) *Political Parties in the New Europe: Political and Analytical Challenges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, forthcoming).

themselves.[1] In most western European countries, political parties first emerged during the latter half of the nineteenth and/or the first decades of the twentieth century. As Duverger (1964) famously noted, they tended to be either 'internally created' (i.e. were the product of existing elite groups responding to suffrage extension by building electoral machines that would help them maintain their hold on political power), or 'externally created' (i.e. had their origins in social mobilisation by hitherto under-represented groups seeking access to political power).

The organisational forms they adopted were those of the 'cadre' and 'mass' parties respectively. Despite its democratic deficits (cf Michels 1911 and his 'iron law of oligarchy'), it appeared to many observers that the competitive advantages of the latter type would result in its organizational form being emulated by other party-political entrepreneurs. Thus western Europe would undergo a 'contagion from the left' (Duverger 1964). Moreover, within the party literature itself, the sectional 'party of mass integration' (Neumann 1956) virtually assumed the status of a model, or archetypical party.

The systemic crises of the inter-war period saw not only the first 'failure' of social-democratic parties, but also the emergence of highly ideological parties of the extreme left and the extreme right. Understandably, the party literature of the immediate post-war period thus tended to dichotomise parties into totalitarian and democratic (Duverger 1964). The predominant social-determinist paradigm of post-war approaches – including those of Almond and Verba (1963 and 1980) and the cleavage theory of Lipset and Rokkan (1967) – emphasised political parties as agents of social representation and thus stressed the societal origins and embededness of western European parties. Yet as the sectionalism, social

[1] It would exceed the scope of this chapter to attempt to engage in a detailed discussion of the development of western European parties and of party research. Most of the relevant key texts are listed in the bibliography of

rootedness and ideological intensity of 'democratic' mass parties declined and they adopted more inclusive mobilisational strategies, the empirical party literature soon came to be pre-occupied with two closely related aspects. The first related to party modernisation. Whilst, Kirchheimer (1966) focused on the modernisation of the mass party towards the so-called 'catch-all party', Epstein (1967) was making a seminal contribution in respect of the development of (bourgeois) cadre parties. Epstein highlighted how these parties were using new communication technologies to try to make up for their relative lack of organisational density. This organizational adaptation was in due course to be mirrored by competitor parties and thus might be considered to have constituted a 'contagion from the right'. The second preoccupation of the empirical party literature related to the processes and consequences of partisan de-alignment (e.g. Dalton, Flanagan and Beck 1984; Crewe and Denver 1985).

In 1988, Panebianco posited the development of the 'electoral-professional party', the internal dynamics of which were characterised *inter alia* by a further emancipation of the party leadership from its grass roots and a professionalisation of the party apparatus. From the 1990s, the emphasis of empirical party research shifted again, this time to a concern with the extent to which, partly in response to the withering of their social roots, many established political parties have allegedly 'migrated' towards the state. The characteristics attributed to these 'cartel' parties (Katz and Mair 1995) included not only the kinds of internal processes detailed by Panebianco, but also that cartel parties allegedly collude to utilise state resources in support of their individual activities.[2] Furthermore, it was argued that these parties seek to maintain the structure of competition in favour of established, or 'insider' parties and against the challenges posed by 'outsider' parties.

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this volume. Moreover, the individual chapters of the latter also review the development of party research in respect of the particular aspects of party behaviour they examine.

Virtually since its inception, one remarkably constant feature of the party literature has been a largely unquestioning acceptance of two closely related propositions. The first is that political parties be studied by reference to their role within the nation state. The second is that they and their political role might best be conceptualised by reference to theories that posit parties as institutions of popular representation which play a key role in the democratic legitimation of the sovereign nation state. The predominance of this state-centric paradigm is of course hardly surprising, since the main arena of party behaviour has indeed been within the nation state, which in turn has constituted the core focus of democratic theory. At the latest by the 1990s (but arguably from as early as the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979), however, the situation 'on the ground' started to change. The 'remaking' of European politics – and particularly the emergence of a supranational level of decision-making – constitutes a fundamental change to the operational context of political parties. Such changes imply not only political challenges for parties and the political systems in which they operate, but also analytical challenges for empirical political science. We shall return to these issues in the concluding chapter of this volume.

To date, empirical political science has concerned itself with above all four key dimensions of political parties.[3] First, political parties exercise a range of important mobilisation and linkage functions vis-à-vis society (Lawson 1980). This often implies a range of formal and semi-formal links with societal organisations. It also means that as vote-seeking organisations, parties participate in public elections, where they present candidates and conduct campaigns (Farrell and Schmitt-Beck 2002). Indeed, some political scientists

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[2] Other recent characterisations of contemporary party types include Ruud Koole's notion of the 'modern cadre party' (Koole 1996). The modern cadre party shares some of the organisational features of the cartel party, Koole conceives of its relationship to the state very differently.

[3] The following list deliberately excludes the literature on party systems. Though some systemic dimensions are alluded to in this volume (especially, in Chapters 7 and 11), our prime focus is upon political parties as such,

(e.g. Panebianco 1988) consider parties' participation in the electoral market as the distinguishing feature of political parties.

Second, both the early political science work on political parties (Ostrogorski 1903, Michels 1911, but also Duverger 1964) and a significant proportion of recent empirical research (Katz and Mair 1992, 1993 and 1994; Panebianco 1988) stresses the importance of looking inside the 'black box' of party organisation. These authors typically suggest one needs to investigate how parties structure and organise themselves, how they acquire and utilise resources, how they mobilise and retain support, but also how they recruit political elites, or potential holders of public office. A closely related concern of empirical party research has been motivated by the fact that parties are a particular kind of organization, namely, one that is politically purposive. In other words, an essential feature of political parties as organizations 'with attitude' is that they typically embody ideological values. The latter significantly determine their political identity and thereby shapes their relationship with both their supporters (Budge, Crewe and Farlie 1976) and each other (Sartori 1976). Moreover, those values are in turn reflected in parties' selection and marketing of policy preferences (Budge, Robertson and Hearl 1987).

Third, it is widely accepted that in order to realise their policy preferences, but also as a consequence of their desire to exercise political power, political parties (and above all their elites) are office-seeking. The empirical study of political parties and government has concerned itself with above all two dimensions of parties and government. The first of these is party behaviour related to the formation and maintenance of government (coalitions) (Laver and Schofield 1990; Laver and Shepsle 1996; Müller and Strøm 1999 and 2000). The second pertains to the extent to which, once in government, political parties not only demonstrate

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rather than upon the competitive relations between parties predominantly conceived of as unitary actors (Sartori

effective policy-making capacity, but pursue policies that reflect their pre-electoral pledges (Budge and Keman 1990; Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge 1994).

Finally, a number of political scientists have focused their attention upon the relationship between political parties and the institutional environment of the country in which they operate, focusing above all on aspects such as state organisation, the electoral system, party law and the media (Rae 1971; Müller 1993; Tsebelis 1995; Lijphart 1999). That this relationship is not univocal is clear, for unlike most other political actors, political parties (especially once in office) are in the fortunate position of being able to shape at least some of the institutional parameters within which they operate.

Two central aims of this volume are to evaluate the empirical findings of the most contemporary analyses of political parties in western Europe and to consider how that research might usefully be developed further. We shall do so by using up-to-date research and a wide range of theoretical, methodological and empirical approaches. The various contributions will be organised into four sections, each of which will be devoted to one of the four major themes of the comparative empirical analysis of political parties identified in the preceding paragraphs: 'Parties and Society'; 'Parties and Purposive Organisations'; 'Parties and National Government' and 'Parties, the Nation State and Beyond'.

Our underlying assumption is that political science has not yet produced a ‘party theory’ which would be able to generalise party development or party behaviour and which would be able to predict party failure and/or success. Instead, we view political parties as institutions subject to constant change. As indicated above, the speed and the direction of party change is, however, inescapably related to changes within liberal democracies. Accordingly, the next section of this chapter will identify the main dimensions of recent

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1976).

change within (and between) western European polities. Thereafter, we shall discuss the challenges those changes pose for the functioning of western European political parties.

1.2 Dimensions of a Changing Europe

We are not alone in asserting that political parties are facing challenges. For example, both Dalton and Wattenberg (2000) and Strøm and Svåsand (1997) have recently also identified changes at the macro level of the political system that challenge the traditional behaviour of political parties. We argue that western European party politics at the start of the 21st century is faced with at least six clusters of change.

Western Europe has for decades been experiencing substantial *socio-economic change*, the collective impact of which has been characterised by some authors as amounting to a move towards a post-industrial and post-modernised society (Bell 1973; Klingemann and Fuchs 1995; Inglehart 1997). With regard to the social structure and the economy we can observe several major changes (Lane and Ersson 1996). For one, the population growth in western Europe is declining, in spite of heavy immigration of citizens from former communist countries in eastern Europe. In addition, the relative size of young cohorts is decreasing, while the size of older age cohorts is increasing in virtually all western European countries. With regard to the occupational structure we can observe increasing numbers of unemployed and at the same time we find the hitherto highest rates of female participation in the labour force. While industrial employment is in decline throughout western Europe, the size of the service employment in both the private and public sector is on the increase. Economic development data also indicate that over the past twenty years, western Europeans have experienced significant economic growth and a steady increase in their quality of life.

Closely related to these socio-economic changes have been in part profound alterations to the *political values* and behaviour of individual citizens and in due course also to *national political cultures* (van Deth and Scarborough 1995). Indicators of a general

process of value change are the fading away of religious orientations, the weakening social basis of left-right conflicts, the emergence of new social movements such as the environmental, anti-nuclear power, and feminists groups, as well as the electoral success of Green parties (Müller-Rommel 2002). Furthermore, a new style of political action has developed. Citizens have moved away from traditional forms of political participation to a more participatory style (Dalton and Küchler 1990). However, in spite of these developments, and notwithstanding the recent rise of protest sentiment and right-wing populist parties, the level of satisfaction with democracy has remained fairly high in all western European democracies (except in Italy and Northern Ireland). This indicates that western European the liberal democracies remain highly legitimised. Empirical research has also predicted that there will be no legitimation crisis in the foreseeable future (Fuchs et al. 1995).

Furthermore, Western Europe has also witnessed a radical transformation in the *structure of political communication*. In part, this has been the result of accelerating technological innovation. The major impact of the introduction of television upon social, cultural and political communication has been well documented. Since then, however, the pace of technological change and the breadth of it impact has been even more profound. Key milestones include the development of satellite communication, as well as the digital revolution and concomitant explosion in the number of channels available to the consumer. Even more significant has been the advent of the internet, the fastest expanding communication technology of all time. It not only enables rapid access to an enormous amount of information, but also provides individuals who were hitherto largely passive consumers of communication with the opportunity of creating their own communications and communication networks (Norris 2001). Yet this technological transformation has also been underpinned by (contradictory) change in the ownership and control of communication technologies, with on the one hand a growing internationalisation and diversification of

channels of communication, but on the other hand a concentration of suppliers (Humphreys 1996).

Western Europe has also experienced significant change in respect of the *political issues and policy agendas* shaping political discourse (Klingemann, Hofferbert, Budge et al. 1994). On the one hand, there has been evidence of a continuing decline in the depth and intensity of ideological divisions around traditional issues such as conflicts between labour and capital, over defence and security issues and regarding public ownership. On the other hand, there has been a (albeit more-or-less pronounced) paradigm shift in political economic discourse, with a move towards more market-orientated economic principles. This has been accompanied by declining emphasis upon state provision in favour of private provision, notably in areas such as health and pensions. Moreover, western Europe has witnessed the (re-)emergence of 'new' policy areas, including those pertaining to environmentalism and ecology (Holzinger and Knoepfle 2000), as well as to immigration and asylum-seekers (Koopmans and Stratham 2000), in some of which there has been a clear trend towards greater state (or latterly EU) intervention. However, the policy agendas of western European states have altered not only with respect to expectations and evaluations of the outputs provided by their political systems. Another significant development has been an increased questioning of matters that could be characterised as relating to democratic quality (Pharr and Putnam 2000).

Many of the economic problems which western European states have been grappling with derive from their growing interdependence and from globalisation. Though *European integration* can be regarded as an example of globalisation, it can also be seen as an attempt by European states to resist the negative consequences of the latter. According to this second interpretation, European states mindful of the need to reach common solutions to common problems have strengthened common structures, speeding up the process of European

integration. The growing importance of the European Union is visible in at least two respects. The first comprises a growing centralisation of decision-making through bodies such as the European Parliament, the European Court, the European Commission, but above all the Council of Ministers. The decision-making scope of the European Union was greatly enhanced by the terms of the Single European Act (SEA) and the single market, though it was arguably not until the Treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice that the significance of these developments became the subject of widespread political debate. The development of a European political space with, for example, open borders, an open labour market and trans-European educational programmes and fostering of exchanges, has been accompanied by the growth of a common European political identity.

European integration has bought about fundamental change to the politics of western European states in a second manner: sub-state units have recently become incorporated into the European project, *inter alia* via the Committee of the Regions. In sum, as political authority has migrated to supranational and sub-national levels, so Western Europe has witnessed a concomitant 'hollowing out' of the nation state, a growth of multiple political identities and a clear trend towards multi-level governance. As long as the outputs of this system of co-operation were largely positive, the predominantly intergovernmental manner in which it operated was the subject of a 'permissive consensus'. Yet since the Maastricht Treaty, growing scepticism of the conduct of politicians is arguably nowhere more evident than in respect of European integration. Though this may well be related to a general decline in economic outputs (not necessarily related to actions of the EU as such), it may also be connected to a growing awareness of the implications for democratic transparency and accountability of changes - such as those embodied in the SEA – to the European integration process.

Finally, many European states have in recent decades reformed (or are indeed still reforming) fundamental aspects of their *constitutional systems*. Examples of wholesale regime transition include Spain, Portugal and Greece in the 1970s. Less thoroughgoing changes have involved a growth in the importance of regional, or decentralised political power and identities in western Europe. Thus states have introduced 'federalist' or 'regionalist' elements (e.g. Belgium, Spain and the United Kingdom). Other examples of system level change would include changes to the structure of the legislature (e.g. Sweden in 1970 and the United Kingdom, where House of Lords reform is still in progress); changes to the bureaucracy or the judiciary and in the realm of direct democracy (e.g. Italy). There is also a significant amount of change at a level below that of systemic change. These include the reform of rules governing regarding the operation of electoral law (e.g. France and Italy, but latterly also in the United Kingdom), laws directly governing parties and/or their finance (e.g. Germany and Austria), media law (e.g. Italy, Austria and France), interest group regulation (e.g. the United Kingdom) and parliamentary rules of procedure.

1.3 Challenges for Political Parties

These changes constitute challenges to all four of the dimensions of political parties we have identified above.

1.3.1 Parties and Society

Parties' relations to society comprise at least three core elements. One is predicated upon the ideological, or partisan attachment between parties and their publics. Another relates to their organizational penetration of society, whilst the third has to do with parties' efforts to mobilise the public's support directly, particularly at elections. The changes in European societies summarised above have had a significant impact upon all three of these dimensions. Higher levels of education and the process of cognitive mobilization have lessened the functional value of party cues to voters, whilst new issue concerns and weakening group ties

have attenuated the long-term bonds between the parties and their electorates. The challenges for parties' relations to their publics include declining party identification and electoral turnout; as well as increasing electoral volatility. The reduced societal rootedness may also be expected to impact (at least in the long term) upon parties organizational entrenchment in society. Finally, these changes present parties with an urgent need to review their strategies of electoral mobilization, in order to ensure that they can maximise their vote-winning potential. These aspects are discussed in the three contributions of Section II of this volume.

The contribution by Russell Dalton, Ian McAllister and Martin Wattenberg examines the changing relationship between parties and their publics. It argues that on the one hand, parties need voters to achieve political power and to legitimate both them as political actors and the political system as a whole. On the other hand, it appears from a large number of individual studies that the relations between European parties and their voters have in recent decades undergone profound change in recent decades. Using a longitudinal design covering the second half of the 20th century, their chapter first undertakes a comprehensive assessment of whether such change is systematic throughout Europe. It then tests alternative theses advanced to explain such change and finally considers the consequences of partisan decline for political parties and their relationship to their electorates.

Thomas Poguntke focuses on parties' anchorage in the social arena. He identifies two ways parties can establish stable organisational linkage: directly, through their own membership organisation and indirectly, through organisational co-operation with interest organisations, or various kinds of 'collateral' organisations. The first aspect will be addressed in Katz' contribution to this volume (chapter 5), so Poguntke concentrates upon an empirical examination of trends in organizational interconnectedness between parties and other social organizations. Drawing on change for 78 parties in 11 western European democracies, he seeks to assess whether parties' hitherto stable anchorage in society can still be taken for

granted. He then discusses the practical and theoretical implications of parties' changing organisational anchorage upon their capacity to aggregating interests and deliver votes, as well as upon parties' freedom of manoeuvre.

The third chapter on the theme of parties and society could be regarded as an investigation of the changing patters of electoral mobilization adopted by political parties in the face of the declining social rootedness documented in the two preceding contributions. In it, David Farrell argues that west European parties are manifesting all the familiar signs of professionalisation and campaign modernisation. While some scholars see in these trends the signs of a process of 'Americanization' of campaign practices, others maintain that the filtering role of the western European party and campaign environment places limitations on western European parties' capacity to adopt 'full-blown' US campaign techniques. Farrell uses empirical evidence to review these two perspectives, which he maintains reflect in-built tensions in the campaign environment, where the technologically-driven pressures for change have to adapt to varying environmental and institutional circumstances. He focuses on explaining how campaigns have been changing, how and why this has varied across the different western European systems, and what consequences these developments have had for western European parties.

1.3.2 Parties as Purposive Organisations

The multifaceted impact of the changes discussed above upon political parties as purposive organisations can be summarised under two headings, the first of which pertains to party organisation. One example of organisational challenge relates to party membership, the density of which has been undermined by the reduced (organisational) cohesiveness and organisational density of the social segments hitherto mobilised by political parties. Thus the expansion of tertiary sector and the contraction of secondary sector employment has resulted in a concomitant reduction in trade unionisation, which in turn has undermined one of the

bases of the political mobilisation of the working classes. For their part, educational expansion and cognitive mobilisation have impacted upon party membership, not least by virtue of increasing party members' participatory expectations. This has resulted in some members opting out of party membership altogether; in others abandoning traditional parties for those that place a greater premium upon member participation (e.g. the Greens), whilst a further group has remained within its respective parties, where it might be expected to challenge traditionally hierarchical intra-party power relations and seek to limit the autonomy of party leaderships. Political parties' weakening interest groups ties and their declining memberships in turn imply a reduced significance for the overall income of political parties of internally generated financial resources such as party membership dues and contributions from collateral organisations. Changes in the structure of communication have also had important implications for parties. First, they have resulted in a decline of the hitherto often significant role of the party press in mobilising and retaining political support. Second, the internationalisation of the increasingly influential electronic media has lessened (national) party elites' capacity to control political communication. Third, parties have felt they they need to respond to the new communication technologies and to incorporate them into processes of internal and external communication. The comparatively expensive nature of these technologies – together with the atrophying of internally generated resources – has of course placed burdens upon parties to raise additional resources, which in turn has often meant greater dependence on state funding. Finally, the emergence of new political issues has in a number of countries led to the emergence of new parties (or the growth in hitherto minor

parties), which in turn has frequently confronted parties with the need to adapt their internal organisation in order to respond more effectively to these new challenges.[4]

The second broad type of impact that party-exogenous change has had upon parties as purposive organisations relates to their programmatic, or ideological dimension. Socio-structural and socio-cultural change (including secularisation, educational expansion, but also greater social and geographical mobility, etc.) have resulted in a decline in the mobilisational capacity of parties' traditional ideological platforms, which were often defined above all in terms of the traditional left-right cleavage. On the other hand, new ideological tensions (e.g. those related to postmaterialism, right-wing populism and ethno-regionalism) have become more salient. There have been changes to the relative strength of party families and to the ideological distance and/or intensity between parties. Moreover, parties have started to utilise new and different political issues to mobilise and retain their supporters.

The three chapters in Section III of this volume are devoted to examining the challenges these developments pose to 'Parties as Purposive Organisations'. Richard Katz' contribution identifies three competing conceptions, or models, of the role that parties as corporate actors play in democratic governance and highlights how these conceptions relate to three substantive aspects of party organisation. The first is the basic morphology of parties as organisations, which involves him looking in particular at the relative merits of approaches focusing on 'three faces of party organisation', as opposed to those stressing the importance of geographic and hierarchical differentiation. The second aspect is party membership, his discussion of which covers membership recruitment and numerical trends, as well as the particular place of membership in the internal politics of parties. Finally, Katz considers the

[4] Though the growth in the number of parties might technically be regarded as a party systemic aspect – and as thus pertaining to an aspect deliberately excluded from this volume – it also pertains to parties as purposive

challenges faced by parties as consumers of resources, concentrating in particular on the size of party expenditure and the sources of party funding.

The second chapter of the section on parties as purposive organisations is devoted to competing explanations of party organizational change and/or adaptation. In it, Robert Harmel identifies two dominant strains within the literature: the one stressing gradual societal 'trends' which result in new and different party 'types', and the other attempting to explain discrete changes in parties' organisations and issue profiles on the basis of short-term changes in party performance, personnel, etc.. He then assesses the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, providing illustrative examples from the literature. He details both the major party 'types' developed over time in this literature and some of the major hypotheses relevant to explaining change in particular party attributes, before concluding by identifying some hitherto insufficiently explored related avenues for party research.

The final chapter in Section III is by Andrea Volkens and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, whose concern is to establish the changing pattern of parties' ideological positioning in western Europe. After reviewing the approaches of the empirical party literature, they proceed to an empirical examination of stability and change in 15 western European party systems between 1945 and 1998, using data from all the party manifestos of this period. One specific question they seek to answer is how distinguishable party policy packages (and thus by implication the range of voter choice and party responsiveness) has been. Another concerns (changes to) the degree of ideological polarisation and the persistence (or otherwise) of parties' core ideological identities – and thus by implication that of the historical cleavages underpinning them. Finally, they seek to establish the degree of policy divergence within party families, the persistence of which would tend to suggest that – notwithstanding

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organisations. For example, it requires different internal organisational and programmatic responses by those

globalisation effects such as shared issues and the impact of party co-operation in the European Union – parties' ideological positioning is still predominantly determined by national contexts.

1.3.3 Parties and National Government

There are two main ways in which the changes outlined in the preceding section of this chapter have impacted upon the role of political parties in national government**.** For one, political parties have shifted their primary role from being agents of the citizenry (society), towards being agents of the state (government). This development has led to more governmental participation by ever more political parties. Indeed, nearly all established parties in contemporary western European party systems have now been in government at one point or other in their history. In other words, the major established parties are either in government, or perceive themselves as temporarily displaced from government. The traditional role of opposition party lacking 'governing potential' (Sartori 1976), tends in the main to be confined only to small parties such as right-wing populists, and to (most) Green and ethno-regionalist parties. However, the existence of many coalitionable political parties might be expected to the formation and maintenance of government more difficult. Second, changes in macro-economic priorities (e.g. 'neo-liberalism') and the problems states face in managing their economies (e.g. by virtue of globalisation) might adversely effect the policy-making capacity of western European party government. In order to survive in government, political parties are thus under increasingly pressure to demonstrate the compatibility between their ideological positions and their policy stance in government. Moreover, the challenge nowadays facing most western European governing parties wishing to retain their political

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parties to the change in their external competitive environment.

credibility amongst voters is to ensure that the substantive policy outputs they generate in the major areas of political controversy are in accordance with their own manifesto commitments.

Section IV of this volume comprises one contribution on each of these two dimensions of 'Parties and National Government'. In the first, Lieven De Winter argues parties are crucial in deciding both who gets into national government, as well as how such governments operate. Moreover, whilst the formation and conduct of government is difficult enough when the number and policy preferences of party actors is stable, it becomes even more challenging when such stability erodes. De Winter first evaluates the utility of extant theory for explaining the coalition formation process. Thereafter, he considers the state of empirical research on two other key sets of decisions that need to be made by parties entering governments, namely, those relating to portfolio allocation and to the determination of the government's policy intentions.

Hans Keman's contribution offers a detailed assessment of the policy-making capacities (i.e. outputs) of governments and considers the implications thereof in respect of the accountability and responsiveness of European party government. He first evaluates the ongoing debate since the 1960s within the comparative politics community regarding the role which political parties can and do play (whether in or out of government), in shaping public policy. He also shows how the comparative and empirical evidence to analyse this relationship has often employed socio-economic policy as the dependent variable. Keman then presents the development and results of this debate by focusing on the role of party government with respect to economic policy and welfare statism, and by assessing the theoretical and methodological progress made by this type of research.

1.3.4 Parties, the Nation State and Beyond

The changes in respect of the constitutional and institutional context within which parties operate apply not only to the nation state, but extend considerably beyond the latter. The

implications for political parties are manifold. First, though political parties (and in particular those that hold political office) are involved in such institutional engineering, the consequences thereof are inadequately understood by both them and by political scientists. Second, the implications of these changes for political parties vary considerably as between established, or 'insider' parties with 'governing potential' and those that are 'outsiders' and have at best 'blackmail potential' (Sartori 1976). Indeed, if the cartel thesis is to be believed, a fundamental logic of such changes may well be motivated by a desire on the part of 'insider' parties to mould the opportunity structures of the system in their own favour and against the interests of 'outsiders'. Third, the emergence of a supranational level of governance in the form of the European Union – and the introduction in 1979 of direct elections to the European Parliament – has promoted transnational party interaction and provided a new and in future presumably increasingly decisive 'site of political encounters' (Dahl 1966). As organisations motivated by the pursuit of votes, office and policy, parties naturally have a considerable incentive to extend the scope of their activities to embrace this new arena.

Section V of this volume ('Parties, the Nation State and Beyond') commences with a contribution by Wolfgang C. Müller on parties and the legal-institutional framework (of the nation state). He investigates above all two key questions. The first is the extent to which specific institutional configurations are likely to impact upon each of the three main goals rational choice theory ascribes to political parties: vote-seeking, policy-seeking and office-seeking. The second pertains to the issue of the circumstances in which political parties might be considered the architects – rather than merely the objects – of their institutional environment. Müller thus provides an overview of the opportunity structures for institutional engineering that exist in western European states, before proceeding to illustrate how parties have used those opportunities, not least with a view to ensuring that the more established

parties have enhanced prospects of winning and holding on to political power in their national political arenas.

Luciano Bardi's chapter commences with a review of the political science literature on EU-specific parties, which comprise both EP party groups and transnational party federations and concludes that the study of the former provides the greatest insight into the development of 'Europarty' activity within the European Union. Bardi then identifies the EU-specific opportunity structures that impact upon the development of Europarties and specifies indicators that could be used to assess the development of Europarties and a Europarty system. The empirical part of his chapter is devoted to an assessment of three matters: the institutionalisation of Europarties; the institutionalisation of a Europarty system and the impact upon these two developments of elections to the European Parliament.

The final chapter of this volume will first summarise the main empirical trends in the development of western European parties that this volume has identified and discuss areas in which empirical party research might usefully be extended Thereafter, it will offer some reflections on the implications of the range and intensity of the challenges faced by political parties for the future of political parties party research in the 'new Europe'.

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