
Original Article

The role of Europarties in EU treaty reform: Theory and practice

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Abstract This article examines the role of Europarties in the European Union (EU) institutional and constitutional or treaty reform, in decisions and negotiations leading to the adoption of treaties in the 1980s and 1990s. The existing literature on such reform in the EU largely overlooks the role of Europarties in the making of new treaties. Research on EU treaty reform usually operates within a state-centric ontology and framework for analysis. Challenging previous analyses and moving beyond state-centrism and inter-governmentalism, strictly inter-state bargaining, this article offers a complementary transnationalist account of what is happening in the drama of grand bargains or history-making treaty negotiations in the EU. There is a transnational dimension to such treaty reform; there is Europarty mobilization and influence. In conclusion, Europarties matter when they are in numerical ascendance, relatively cohesive and able to mobilize their networks of political parties and leaders.

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Introduction

In this article, I claim that an important part of the explanation for treaty reform in the European Union (EU) is Europarty input.¹ Among these, the centre-right European People's Party (EPP) is the dominant one along with the centre-left Party of European Socialists (PES). Key players in and across these two Europarties have contributed to the fundamental change in the EU political and institutional environment, in which the Europarties themselves exist.

There has been a resurgence of interest in Europarties, as they have become increasingly institutionalized and sought to raise their profile within the institutional framework of the EU (e.g., Day and Shaw, 2006; Hanley, 2008; Kūlahci,



2010; Lindberg *et al.*, 2010; Van Hecke, 2010, 2012; Poguntke *et al.*, 2013; Stetter *et al.*, 2013; Acta Politica, 2014). But despite their organizational development and role in EU politics, Europarties remain under-researched and underestimated.

What role do Europarties play in EU treaty reform? This question is applicable to the role of Europarties in the context of EU Intergovernmental Conferences (IGCs), which have resulted in wide-ranging constitutional and institutional changes since the mid-1980s and in an extensive literature (e.g., De Ruyt, 1989; Laursen and Vanhoonaeker, 1992; Edwards and Pijpers, 1997; Monar and Wessels, 2001; Laursen, 2002; Smith, 2002; Christiansen and Reh, 2009; Thurner and Pappi, 2009; Crum, 2012; Laursen, 2012b).

The existing literature on treaty reform in the EU largely overlooks the role of Europarties, only rarely addressing their role or the party political dimension more broadly in successive treaty reforms or negotiations (for rare contributions, see Budden, 1994, 2002; Johansson, 1999, 2002a, b, 2015, 2016; Lightfoot, 2005; Van Hecke, 2012). My complementary transnational approach holds that not only state governments, or supranational institutions for that matter, are important players in the making of successive treaties in the EU, but also non-state actors such as political parties, national or transnational. More broadly, transnationalism denotes cross-national contacts found, if one relaxes the assumption that states are the only units or actors interacting across national boundaries (Keohane and Nye, 1977; see also, e.g., Risse-Kappen, 1995).

This article conclusively confirms my hypothesis that a Europarty such as the EPP can be and has been influential and instrumental in EU treaty reform. The evidence reveals that there is Europarty mobilization and influence. Yet, there is also evidence of limits to such influence. I have chosen to look at two examples where there is evidence of Europarty influence – the EPP and the Single European Act (SEA) and the Treaty on European Union (TEU) or Maastricht Treaty – and another where there was less evidence of such influence – the EPP and the Treaty of Amsterdam (ToA), when instead the PES was in numerical ascendance. Serving as empirical or illustrative cases, examples to illustrate the point, I highlight in particular activities within the EPP prior to and during the IGCs – in 1985, 1991, and 1996–1997, respectively – and negotiations that led to the adoption of these treaties.² These are historical stages of European integration.

The article adopts a case-study approach designed to examine and assess Europarty influence by identifying key actors and driving forces, seeking to draw generalizations and to contribute to theory development for future research. It might be called an analytic narrative (Bates *et al.*, 1998). Such analysis seeks to draw broad, applicable theoretical generalizations from specific historical examples or particular cases, from explanations of political outcomes in case studies. It uses close analysis of cases to illuminate important general issues. The article can be read as a counter-narrative to intergovernmentalism in particular.



The article outlines the importance of key (Euro-) party players in developing successive treaties. The analysis looks to examine whether transnational influences act through these key players. In order to explore this, the research draws on many interviews and conversations with people with extensive experience of these processes – including leaders or heavyweights, among them eight prime ministers – as well as other historical evidence to examine Europarty influence on the new treaties.³ This primary evidence mainly consists of documents, official and unofficial and mainly relating to EPP summits. Archival research was undertaken in the archives of the EPP as well as of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the German Christian Democrat party foundation. Moreover, I conducted direct observation at EPP (and EPP group) meetings and EPP congresses over the course of the 1990s and 2000s. Thus, I have been digging for less publicly observable evidence and beyond the secondary evidence to which other researchers usually refer, in particular the vast literature on IGCs and treaty reform. In sum, I rely on complementary forms of primary material and also draw on a combination of primary and secondary evidence.

The article proceeds in three steps and substantive sections. First, it elaborates on the key features and theoretical interpretations of EU treaty reform. Second, it addresses the extent to which Europarties, more specifically the EPP, were able to shape the new treaties. Third, I conclude by summarizing and discussing the argument and key findings as well as the broader implications of this article for existing and future research.

EU Treaty Reform

Treaty reform and negotiations are major events in the EU. When the treaty shall be changed or replaced, the Union to be subjected to a review of its constitutional bases, an IGC is convened. Since the mid-1980s to the late 2000s, the politics of the EC/EU have amounted to a near-permanent IGC. IGCs constitute milestones in the history, process and long-term patterns of European integration. They have resulted in wide-ranging treaty changes, considered to be ‘history-making’ decisions. Some of the most important decisions affecting the EU have been taken by IGCs, and that has set a pattern. IGCs do structure the institutional environment of the EU and the whole frame of reference for decision-making. The series of major treaty reforms that began with the SEA in the mid-1980s have fundamentally changed the EU, extended its scope, and altered its decision-making dynamics.

No IGC starts from a *tabula rasa*. What has already been achieved amount to an *acquis conférénciel* (Christiansen and Jørgensen, 1999). The IGC has become institutionalized as an institution in its own right. Treaty changes in the EU involve ‘a complicated and protracted interplay among member states, institutions, issues,



interests and individuals' (Dinan, 1999, p. 290). At the same time, as Dinan (1999, p. 292) notes, the 'complexity of IGCs also reflects the complexity of the broader EU system. Although unique in many respects, IGCs are characteristic of general EU bargaining and decision-making.' Therefore, analyses of IGCs serve to improve our knowledge of European integration and the EU more generally.

Theoretically, rival standpoints go in different directions, offering competing expectations and interpretations. Through different theoretical perspectives or lenses, we see different reflections and explanations regarding essential causal mechanisms and which units of analysis – states, non-state actors, supranational institutions – should figure most prominently in our understanding of European integration and treaty reform. The dominant paradigms of European integration theory and treaty reform disagree in their analysis, where the central debate pits intergovernmentalism against supranationalism and institutionalism (see e.g., Moravcsik, 1998; *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2002; Slapin, 2008; Finke, 2009; Franchino, 2013).

Trying to summarize what we know about IGCs and EU treaty reform, and theoretical interpretations of these phenomena, Laursen (2012a, p. 269) points out that 'important disagreements remain among scholars, partly based on different ontologies and epistemologies.' The main dividing line runs between essentially state-centric and rationalist 'intergovernmentalists,' who maintain that all major agreements in the EU are decided by member states, especially through the power of the largest ones, and 'constructivists' who emphasize the participation of other actors and influences in these processes. This division reflects contrasting views of what is 'reality' in this connection, and how preferences are formed and may converge. Overall, existing research is predominantly state-centric, where the member states, 'masters of the treaties' at least legally speaking, are the principal actors and their interest superior to any ideas, ideational or normative factors, such as ideas concerning the future of Europe, including pro-integration federalist ideas. The constructivist argument – along with institutional thinking – suggests that interests and preferences are not exogenously given but instead endogenous, that is, stem from participation in the processes, which could have a transformative impact also on identity formation (e.g., Christiansen *et al*, 2001). (For contributions on preference formation and EU treaty reform, see *Comparative European Politics*, 2004.) Constructivism thus captures the socialization effects on preferences and identities, as well as interests. Laursen (2012a, p. 280) further notes: 'At the theoretical level the debate between rationalists and social constructivists is a challenge. Do we have to choose one or the other position? It can be argued that a full understanding of European integration require a dialogue between or a combination of the two.' Alone, each position oversimplifies 'reality,' is too 'parsimonious.'

By definition, IGCs are 'intergovernmental' events. On closer inspection, however, actors other than national governments are involved. Usually, the actors



are divided into the broad, distinct, categories of ‘intergovernmental’ and ‘supranational.’ In reality, however, they are interconnected and these two categories not so easily distinguished from each other. In addition, there are the ‘non-state’ actors that we call ‘transnational’ and which are highlighted in the European integration theory of neofunctionalism, in which such actors contribute to process dynamics and ‘spill-over’ within and across policy areas. Transnationalism and neofunctionalism bear a close resemblance to each other. Disaggregating states into components, such as political parties, transnationalism, just like neofunctionalism, turns attention to their cross-border operations. So-called ‘transnationalists’ emphasize the participation of other actors than states and governments in these processes and look at transnational policy contributions.

The dominant theoretical approaches of intergovernmentalism, supranationalism, and institutionalism largely fail to account for the role and influence (at least potential) of such transnational non-state actors. Indeed, if we revisit empirical analyses of IGCs based on these approaches during the last 30 years, we find that the truly transnational efforts and policy contributions of such actors are largely overlooked. In the intergovernmentalist account, these actors are subordinated to states or governments and rather peripheral in IGCs. Intergovernmentalism has little to say about transnational players and politics.

Reflecting the real-life complexity, supranationalism affords close attention to supranational institutions, downplayed by intergovernmentalists. We know that other actors than member state governments are involved and intervene in the process of constitutionalization outside IGCs, including other state actors such as parliaments, national courts, national central banks, regional governments (especially in Germany) as well as non-state actors such as domestic interest groups. Christiansen and Jørgensen (1999) note: ‘A focus on the procedural nature of treaty reform has brought into view a much wider range of actors than is traditionally studied in state-centric analyses. The significance of their role in the treaty reform process is a matter of empirical research...’

Christiansen and Reh (2009, p. 83) differentiate into three groups of actors: (1) national players and representatives, as well as the presidency; (2) supranational actors, namely the Commission, the Council Secretariat, the European Parliament (EP), and the European Court of Justice (ECJ); and (3) non-state actors, in particular civil society, NGOs, and organized business interests. Their aim is not to take a specific position on whether one or other set of actors has been the main driving force in EU reform, but instead to offer ‘a set of heuristic tools and a comprehensive empirical introduction to the various actors involved in IGCs, of use in future research on the role of agency in constitutional politics’ (Christiansen and Reh, 2009, p. 84). Yet, it is clear that non-state actors are downplayed here as well.

Out of these groups of actors, the existing literature on IGCs covers in particular the national players and representatives and the presidency. The member state holding the EU presidency during an IGC can shape its agenda and prospective



outcome and make its mark on EU development more broadly. The presidency is confronted with the challenge of identifying and capturing the ‘zone of agreement,’ trying to find out about the ‘bottom lines’ of negotiating positions and to avoid a ‘negotiation deadlock’ (Tallberg, 2006, pp. 63–64). For example, the contributions of the Irish and Dutch presidencies in the 1996–1997 IGC resulting in the ToA ‘composed consecutive draft treaties, designed to capture the zone of agreement’ (Tallberg, 2006, p. 220). In this connection, including in IGCs, the European Council, the highest political organ in the EU, has a key role in ‘stitching together package agreements on policy reform or institutional reform’ and has ‘constituted the designated bargaining arena for the final negotiations on new treaties,’ where each IGC since the adoption of the SEA in 1986 has been ‘concluded through intense bargaining between the heads of state and government at a European Council summit’ (Tallberg, 2006, p. 63).

The European Council is the supreme decision-making body of the EU and the highest level involved in the decision-making process of an IGC. In his insider’s account of an IGC and treaty negotiations – on the ToA – McDonagh (1998, p. 95) notes that the heads of state or government in the European Council have ‘the authority within national Governments to arbitrate between conflicting views. Theirs is the scope at European level to move towards compromise on key issues.’ They effectively establish the agenda and priorities of the Union for the following 6 months and, in the negotiations, strike the key deals where necessary, cutting the final deals (McDonagh, 1998, pp. 18–19).

Negotiations involve people. European Council participants are (party) politicians, but also individual human beings. Recalling a few of the key features of European Council meetings, McDonagh (1998, p. 19) observes that the personalities of individual prime minister or heads of state ‘matter very significantly at European Council level’ and that ‘the performance of individual members of the European Council impacts directly on the outcome. The relationship between individual members of the European Council – reflecting sympathy or irritation or friendship – can be crucial.’ Therefore, we need to account for the human factor. Politicians at this level are conscious of personal and informal contacts, and the personal chemistry between them seems to matter. As Garret FitzGerald, a former prime minister of Ireland, said in an author interview, personal relationships could ‘mitigate’ relationships between governments, where for him the Christian Democrat grouping offered an ‘extra chance’ to shape policies in a way ‘helpful to you.’ Inasmuch as personalities and personal relations are identified as pivotal for the conclusion of agreements, these observations should be integrated into a theoretically coherent argument about formal leadership and decision-making in processes of European integration and treaty reform.

We now proceed to test the core hypothesis that Europarties have contributed to EU treaty reform.



Europarties in EU Treaty Reform

As we shall see, party political mobilization through Europarties has been decisive for decision-making on EU treaties. In particular, the EPP was significant in the processes preceding the adoption of the Single European Act (SEA) and the Treaty on European Union (TEU) or Maastricht Treaty. The EPP mobilized the network and was a cohesive family of mainly Christian Democrats. Yet, there is also evidence that internal fissure and limits in the ambition and capacity to co-ordinate positions may reduce Europarty influence in processes of treaty reform as well. Below, I present empirical evidence of Europarty influence as well as of limits thereof in the context of EU treaty negotiations and reform.

The EPP and the SEA

What was to become the Single European Act (SEA) was the result of an IGC convened after an unprecedented vote (thereby invoking Article 236 in the treaty) at the June 1985 Milan European Council. The vote held on the proposal to convene an IGC was against the opposition of the prime ministers of Britain, Denmark, and Greece. In his account of informal politics in European integration, Middlemas (1995, p. 144) recalls this European Council summit, which decided to call a conference on treaty reform, with the British premier Margaret Thatcher ‘manoeuvred into opposition at Milan; she seems not to have been aware until too late that Kohl had also concerted his tactics before the Summit with fellow Christian Democrats in Rome...’ She had no access to the Christian Democrat network, where the pressure for an IGC was built up. An IGC is necessary to negotiate a new treaty.

The Belgian Christian Democrat premier at that time Wilfried Martens (2008, p. 92) recalls the ‘heated discussion’ about holding an IGC. ‘You cannot decide that,’ shouted Thatcher, ‘because I oppose it.’ Many years later Martens (2008, p. 93) reminded her that she had agreed to the SEA: ‘Yes,’ she said, ‘and it was my greatest political mistake!’

In her memoirs Thatcher (1993, p. 550) writes that she found herself ‘being bulldozed by a majority...’ Thatcher (1993, p. 549) further notes: ‘It is also possible that some kind of secret agreement had been reached on this before the Council began.’ Garret FitzGerald (1991, p. 596), who was present in Milan as the prime minister of Ireland, writes in his memoirs that it was clear to him that Thatcher ‘in particular had been in no way prepared for this development, and felt that she had been tricked and trapped, as to some extent she had been.’ ‘Why did it happen?’ asks FitzGerald (1991, p. 595), noting that they ‘were told subsequently that when Kohl returned from the European Christian Democrat conference in Rome he had decided, for party political reasons, to push after all for a qualitative



change in Europe.’ FitzGerald (1991, p. 596) further notes: ‘It has been suggested that this was decided only at the last moment, following pressure from the Italian Foreign Minister, Andreotti.’ However, this push and decision was not so hastily arrived at. It had been prepared in the EPP where Kohl and others were already determined to push for ‘a qualitative change’ in Europe. As a matter of fact, the pressure for an IGC and a major treaty reform in federalist direction was built up in the EPP and its networks.

The conclave of Christian Democrat leaders in Rome in June 1985 had been proposed and prepared in the EPP from late 1984 (EPP, 1984a, b; EPP, 1985a, b, e). The meeting of Christian Democrat leaders was held one week before the subsequent Milan European Council (EPP, 1985f, g, h). The EPP conference was unequivocal about its priorities for the further development of European integration. There must be a new treaty, and for this reason, an IGC must be convened, and it should be concluded before the end of the year. In the declaration, the Christian Democrats, meeting as the EPP, confirmed their desire to pursue the development of the Community towards a political union.

The SEA was negotiated in an IGC during the second half of 1985. During the time of the IGC, the Christian Democrat parties continued their policy coordination with a view to shaping the detailed agenda of the IGC in the lead-up to the Luxembourg European Council in December 1985. There, the heads of government would go through the draft treaty that would become the SEA. There were clear indications that the IGC was able to make progress on substantial issues as a direct result of the Christian Democrats’ contacts. The acting president of the European Council during the second half of 1985 was a Christian Democrat, Jacques Santer, prime minister of Luxembourg.

Christian Democrats were concerned about the pace and progress of the IGC. This mood was evident when the EPP bureau met on 5 November 1985 (EPP, 1985d). This meeting drafted a declaration that in most respects would be endorsed by the EPP conference of party leaders and heads of government, meeting in Brussels on 9 November 1985 (EPP, 1985c). As Budden (1994, p. 304) has commented, the EPP was ‘displeased with the lowest common denominator bargaining’:

The conference was intended to mobilize the EPP’s transnational networks of heads of government, Commissioners, MEPs and national parliamentarians to boost the maximalist cause within the IGC. As with all EPP meetings, neither the minimalist British Government nor its Conservatives in the EP would be privy to these deliberations. As such, the EPP conference would be able to adopt a common denominator higher than the one emerging in the IGC itself.

The EPP conference in Brussels aimed at ‘elaborating a common position’ for their governments and to advance progress in the IGC (Budden, 1994, p. 341). The declaration contained a list of priorities, aiming at the further development of the EC towards a European union.



At the Luxembourg European Council of 2–3 December 1985, there was progress on a number of issues, such as the environment and decision-making procedures. By adopting the SEA, the governments had achieved the objective of setting a deadline for completing the internal market on the basis of the Commission's White Book. For the time being, they left the question of a single currency hanging in the air. Monetary union, including a single currency, required further treaty amendments and thus another IGC.

The convergence of preferences over the policy priorities that led to the SEA was, at least partly, the product of learning and socialization through transnational party organizations, particularly the EPP, which arranged caucus meetings and sustained the networks. At the time, the EPP conference brought together some 30 persons. They included five heads of government, the deputy prime minister and foreign minister of Italy (Arnaldo Forlani and Giulio Andreotti, respectively) and the foreign minister of Belgium (Leo Tindemans), the chairmen of the ten EPP member parties, and the chairmen of national parliamentary groups. The presidencies of the EPP and of the EPP group were represented, along with commissioners and leading politicians from the EP. In 1985, Christian Democrats were heads of the German, Irish, and three Benelux governments. Of the original six member states, Christian Democrats were still in leading positions in five and out of altogether ten governments, EPP member parties were represented in six.

The vote at the June 1985 Milan European Council was not hastily and unexpectedly arrived at (cf., e.g., De Ruyt, 1989, p. 62; Moravcsik, 1991, p. 81). It had been prepared and was a matter of great priority within the Christian Democrat party networks. So it is wrong to argue, as do Sandholtz and Zysman (1989, p. 100), that political parties 'were not involved in the discussions and bargains that started the process.' As Budden (1994, p. 390) has put it, previous 'studies have missed one of the most important questions of the period, namely why there was an IGC at all.'

It can be shown that the SEA was shaped through transnational party elite networking and that socialization and ideational aspects mattered. In sum, the treaty reform of the SEA was to a large extent a transnational policy contribution, by the EPP and the circle of Christian Democrats. Once again, they had taken the lead in driving the process of European integration forward. However, for most federalist elements, including the EPP, what was agreed was deemed as limited modifications and they therefore looked forward to another and more fundamental treaty review; a review transforming the Community to a genuine Union.

The EPP and the TEU

The EPP continued to push for a major treaty reform. In the interval between the adoption of the SEA in December 1985 and the launch in December 1990 of the two IGCs on Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and European Political Union



(EPU), respectively, the EPP set out its objectives and federalist blueprint for a true Union. In November 1990, the EPP adopted a congress document calling for a federal constitution.

During the 1991 parallel IGCs, six out of 12 heads of government in the EC met in the EPP.⁴ In 1991, these six men met three times – in April, June, and December – in the EPP’s conference of party and government leaders. In addition, they maintained informal contact, as did their closest political advisers. Leading representatives of other national parties and of the EPP group as well as commissioners were also involved. Christian Democrats dominated the three presidencies charged with the task of initiating and completing the two IGCs. During the second half of 1990, Italy held the presidency, followed by Luxembourg and the Netherlands. To the extent that the Christian Democrat coalition could act cohesively, they had the power to make or break key decisions and to build the consensus necessary to achieve a new treaty.

The third (formal) EPP conference meeting in 1991 held in The Hague on 6 December, prior to the Maastricht summit, was preceded by an informal get-together of the prime ministers on the fringes of the NATO summit in Rome on 8 November and at Stuyvenberg Castle in Brussels on 26 November.⁵ The aim was to agree on common positions among the Christian Democrat heads of government who would be present in Maastricht. At the Brussels meeting, Martens introduced the discussions by referring to the overall directions of a document (EPP, 1991b). Kohl, like Andreotti, emphasized the federal vocation. There was agreement on another treaty review due to start in 1996 (see further below).

The EPP conference, including party leaders and senior party officials, met on 6 December in The Hague under the presidency of Martens (EPP, 1991c). European Council president Lubbers was also present. In agreement with Lubbers, who would chair the summit in Maastricht, Martens had drawn up a list of the most important demands. According to Jansen (2006, p. 111), the ‘EPP heads of government were committed to a man to defending these.’ The EPP conference decided on a number of objectives for the European Council at Maastricht. The six heads of government present undertook to defend in unison a determined, ambitious vision of the European union. In a brief communiqué released, the EPP (1991a) particularly emphasized that there was to be no compromise on the ‘democratic and federal development’ of the future union, as well as the extension of the EP’s co-decision powers.

Typically, Dyson and Featherstone (1999, p. 442) omit the EPP conference meetings in connection with the Maastricht summit and instead draw attention to bilateral meetings, such as a breakfast between Kohl and Lubbers in Bonn on 28 November.

In an author interview, Lubbers said that although he ‘contested’ Kohl from time to time, they as Christian Democrats were ‘still a team in Maastricht’ and agreed on the single currency, which was ‘key’ for Kohl. At the time of Maastricht they ‘did a lot as Christian Democrats together’ and were ‘a strong family.’



But was there an EPP position? Since some of the prime ministers were in coalition governments there were no ‘purely EPP attitudes,’ Martens said in an author interview, emphasizing that the positions were ‘strongly inspired by the EPP programme.’ Looking back, Martens (2008, pp. 104–105) writes that the EPP ‘drove the outcome of the IGCs’ and that ‘the EPP summits really did make a difference.’ He was pleased about the EMU but not about the EPU, ‘even though significant successes were achieved.’ But the combined goal of a European political and monetary union was not yet fulfilled.

Hix and Lord (1997, p. 189) have observed that ‘the outcome of the Maastricht European Council was very close to the EPP position...’ On most points the outcome was close to the EPP’s demands, and what was achieved on further points ‘left open the hope of a breakthrough at the conference to revise Maastricht, pencilled in for 1996’ (Jansen, 2006, p. 112). The Christian Democrats remained a driving force behind unification.

The EPP and the ToA

The Maastricht treaty or Treaty on European Union (TEU) provided that a further IGC should be convened in 1996 to review the treaty, thereby already identifying some specific issues for consideration and possible reforms (e.g., Vanhoonaeker, 2012, pp. 183–184). As we have seen, that another IGC should be convened was something the EPP pushed for (EPP, 1991a, b; see also Laursen *et al.*, 1992, p. 20). The idea of a treaty commitment to a review conference in 1996 would keep ‘alive the notion of parallel progress in EMU and in political union’ (Dyson and Featherstone, 1999, p. 442). Looking to 1996, there was hope of a final breakthrough in the quest for a truly federal Union. The new IGC offered an opportunity to shape the EU in a federalist direction. In the intervening period between the adoption of the TEU in Maastricht in December 1991 and the final round of treaty negotiations in Amsterdam in June 1997, the EPP and its networks were instrumental in raising the stakes in the game of EU treaty reform.

The new treaty had barely been adopted when the preparations for the next IGC were taking off in the EPP. In February 1992, both the EPP bureau and the EPP conference met to assess Maastricht and to brainstorm about the IGC agenda, the issues and priorities (EPP 1992a, b, c, d, e; see also *EPP Bulletin*, Nr. 2 April/May 1992). Although self-congratulatory and considering Maastricht largely a success, it was emphasized in both fora that not all demands were satisfactorily met, particularly in the institutional field. In view of the EPP conference meeting, a note, an evaluation, was prepared on the results of the Maastricht treaty, whether the outcome met the EPP’s demands, in which it was concluded ‘that the results of the Maastricht Conference owe a great deal to concerted action among the Christian



Democrats' (EPP, 1992b, e). However, more was to be done to advance towards federal Union.

Successive EPP congresses reiterated the demand for a federal European Union. In November 1992, the EPP Congress in Athens adopted a new program. At the December 1993 Congress in Brussels, the EPP adopted its 1994–1999 action programme. These programs pushed for a federalist solution, just like the EPP manifesto for the June 1994 European elections. The Madrid November 1995 EPP Congress adopted the document or position paper 'Ability to Act, Democracy and Transparency – the European Union on the Road to a United Europe' (EPP, 1995). It advocated a federal EU and served as the EPP's contribution to the debate on the forthcoming IGC, with a particular emphasis on institutional reform in the EU (Jansen, 2006, p. 200).

Before and over the course of the IGC, which was officially opened at the Turin European Council in March 1996, the EPP made concerted efforts to muster a consensus around its priorities, concerning institutions as well as issues, and for a substantial treaty reform. EPP bodies convened and set out their views on the IGC – the bureau, the council, and the summit, the highest level.⁶ The EPP (mini-) summit met three times during 1996 – in June, July, and December. In the run-up to the June 1997 Amsterdam European Council, the EPP summit convened three times – in March, May, and June – with the purpose of trying to work out compromises and reach agreement on the issues in order to strengthen the position in the IGC negotiations (EPP, 1997a, b; EPP News, various; EPP, 1998). The relative numerical weakness in the European Council made it even more important for the EPP to mobilize its heads of government. There was significant activity in the EPP. And during the second half of 1996, the EPP had one in its ranks as president of the European Council, the prime minister of Ireland John Bruton. At EPP summit meetings and on other occasions, he met with chancellor Kohl, who, according to Bruton, 'tended to lead the discussions within the EPP.'⁷

There was a broad but not a complete consensus within the EPP. Still, however, it was and is not clear to what extent there actually was a common, co-ordinated, EPP position, as inquired into in interviews and conversations. According to Klaus Welle, then EPP secretary-general, there was an EPP position with the consensus in the EPP reflected in Martens' speech held in Lisbon in late May (author interview). Positions outlined in this speech had been cleared with Bonn. In his speech, Martens (1997) said the EPP already at its Madrid congress in 1995 achieved a 'consensus' on detailed proposals on reforming the EU. He referred to a number of meetings, most recently the one on 21 May arriving at a common position (*position commune*) among the heads of government, who again would meet on 10 June.

In the author interview, Martens, when asked about the EPP position and co-ordination, said there was a consensus within the EPP, with reference to the meeting of 21 May, with a common position among the heads of government, and to the meeting on 10 June in Strasbourg. The purpose of the EPP summit was to



identify common positions on current political issues. Yet, the Amsterdam outcome was a disappointment to him, especially as demands in the institutional fields were abandoned. Martens said it was not a big result on institutional reform, that Kohl 'was not willing' to agree to a 'decision' or 'solution' in this field, because of problems in Germany (see e.g., Beuter, 2002). Martens said that Kok, the Dutch social democrat prime minister, confirmed to him that Kohl in Amsterdam was not willing to reform. This was 'very different' from the 1980s and from Maastricht, when the six EPP heads of government were 'very closely' co-ordinated. Maastricht reflected a strong 'political will' to reform the Union; that will 'no longer existed' due to governments, whose efforts concerned the single currency and the stability (and growth) pact, which was Kohl's main priority. Whereas several of the demands were satisfactorily met, the Amsterdam outcome was thus a disappointment to the EPP president. 'Amsterdam was not of the same calibre as Maastricht,' writes Martens (2008, p. 137).

The talk about consensus and common position cannot conceal a dissonance at the heart of the EPP. The numerical weakness in the European Council and internal ideological divisions within the EPP weakened its capacity to play a true policy-seeking role (Van Hecke, 2004, p. 50; Tallberg and Johansson, 2008). Governments had their particular concerns and faced domestic constraints. Yet, the EPP reached a common position on many of the issues and was able to influence the agenda during the IGC, directly or indirectly. And more was achieved at Amsterdam than has generally been recognized. What was achieved kept up a momentum and alive the hope among federalists of another breakthrough in the EU integration process. Specifically, a moment was building for yet another EU treaty reform, seeking solutions to the so-called Amsterdam left overs. The extent to which Europarties played a role in this and subsequent treaty reforms must, however, remain a matter for future analysis.

Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to explain why and how the treaties came about and in particular to illuminate the role of Europarties in the treaty reforms, accounting for the process and outcome of the IGCs, subjecting the explanation to empirical testing, and drawing broader theoretical implications. In the article, I move beyond the dominant theoretical approaches, especially intergovernmentalism and the state-centrism present in much of the writings on these phenomena. I view it from a different angle. I advanced the argument that there is a transnational dimension to such treaty reform and that Europarties, examples of non-state transnational actors, can have a direct input into the policy process. The article suggests that an important contributing factor to the treaty reforms in the EU is the input of



Europarty transnational networks. It suggests that there was transnational influence. This challenges most existing research on how successive EU treaties were negotiated that has, overall, overlooked an important form of interaction and trend in EU politics as well as modern party politics: transnational relations and influence.

The results are both empirically and theoretically relevant. My interpretation of the findings is essentially the following. The transnational Europarty networks served to facilitate personal relations, collective agreements, and as clearing houses for the development of joint policies. The actors involved and at the center of attention were able to shape and influence events on certain issues in the IGCs and in decisions and negotiations leading to the adoption of these historic treaties. I also find heavy transnational input in treaty reform preparations.

The article conclusively confirms my hypothesis that the agenda and outcomes of the treaty negotiations were to a large extent shaped through transnational (Euro-) party networks. These proved useful in the search for consensus and convergence of preferences over a new treaty. Yet, there is also evidence of the limits to Europarty effectiveness and influence, as shown in the case of the EPP and the ToA. While the EPP reached a common position on many of the issues and was able to influence the agenda of the IGC, directly or indirectly, in 1996/1997, the EPP was clearly not the formidable political force it had been at the time of the 1985 IGC resulting in the SEA and the 1991 IGCs ending at Maastricht. The EPP failed to influence the Amsterdam process and outcome more significantly, first and most important, because it lacked the relative majority from which it had profited before and, second, because the EPP suffered from internal ideological divisions among its national parties and leaders. Hence, the extent to which Europarties are able to influence EU politics depends on incumbency, as well as on their cohesion and capacity for mobilization. In particular, the domestic political context of party and government leaders conditions the scope for Europarty influence.

In light of these findings, my argument should not be misunderstood as an unconditional claim about the effects of Europarties on policy and institutional reform in the EU. Rather, my argument is subject to two important caveats. First, the sheer numbers, the numerical strength, it is only where a Europarty is in numerical ascendance that we would expect them to generate such influence. Second, such effects are conditioned on cohesion on the internal arena and capacity for mobilization.

Moreover, my argument comes with one methodological reservation. While we are dealing here with transnational parties and networks within and around them, it remains difficult to separate the 'transnational' and the 'intergovernmental' from each other, especially when the key players are party as well as government leaders. They could – and sometimes have to – put nation before party. In short, the precise influence of Europarties on policy formulation and output is, of course, difficult in practice to isolate.



This article moves beyond the state of the art in two prominent ways, making two main contributions. First, since the literature on Europarties is rather sparse and existing work has mainly analyzed their organizational development, paying less attention to their role and influence, the article adds to the existing literature in this field. Second, to document Europarty mobilization and influence in EU treaty reform, thereby providing knowledge and understanding, of such reform and of EU decision-making more generally.

Moving beyond intergovernmentalism, we must take non-state actors such as political parties and their transnational federations into account. Likewise, more complete and historically accurate answers must also pay attention to early and preparatory stages. In addition to the preference-convergence thesis, the transnational dimension, and informal politics, must be included in the answer, like the effects of personal relations, socialization, and the role of ideas or ideational factors.

In conclusion, the article carries two broader implications. First, it suggests and documents that EU treaty or constitutional reform has a transnational dimension, in the process of making changes to the treaty, that there is Europarty activity and influence. Whilst the extent of this differed across time and issues, in all cases, there was transnational influence. Parties at all levels have incentives to team up and form alliances with like-minded actors to gain strength. Europarties offer special channels of communication to and between European leaders to ensure that they are informed of negotiations and are able to talk to their partners, to be kept briefed on developments. Europarties provide a co-ordination mechanism that serves to reduce the transactions costs of decision-making in the EU. Second, therefore, this article suggests a need to take Europarties seriously. They merit greater attention. Their role, how they matter and wield influence upon policy decisions, is a field to pursue further. My argument and findings in this article serve to advance this research agenda.

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Notes

- 1 By 'Europarties' I mean the extra-parliamentary organizations in the EU outside the European Parliament (EP), rather than the political groups therein. It bears noting, however, that the Europarties emerged from the EP groups.
- 2 These treaties were signed in 1986, 1992, and 1998, respectively, and entered into effect, following domestic ratification, in 1987, 1993, and 1999, respectively.
- 3 The eight heads of government interviewed are: John Bruton, Ingvar Carlsson, Garret FitzGerald, Jean-Claude Juncker, Ruud Lubbers, Wilfried Martens, Jacques Santer, and Leo Tindemans.
- 4 Four of those heads of government had been members of the European Council during the 1985 IGC that resulted in the SEA. They were Kohl, Lubbers, Martens, and Santer. Andreotti, who served as minister of foreign affairs in 1985, had once again become Italian prime minister. In spring 1990, Konstantin Mitsotakis replaced Andreas Papandreou as head of the Greek government.
- 5 The meetings in Rome and Brussels were not formally of the EPP Conference of Party Leaders and Heads of Government or the 'EPP Summit,' as Martens (2008, p. 104) writes, but informal. See Jansen (2006, p. 115, n. 4).
- 6 Following the statutory changes agreed at the EPP congress in Madrid in November 1995, the Conference of Party Leaders and Heads of Government was replaced by the EPP Summit or 'mini-summit,' restricted to the EPP heads of government, the party leaders in coalition governments, the EPP presidency, and the Commission president. In addition, the chancellor continued to invite, from time to time, a small group of trusted people of the EPP and member parties to bungalow/chancellor talks in Bonn.
- 7 Personal letter to the author, 14 August 1997.

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