

Edited by SVEIN S ANDERSEN
KJELL A ELIASSEN

THE
European
Union:
How
Democratic
Is It?

SAGE

THE EUROPEAN UNION: HOW DEMOCRATIC IS IT?

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*Edited by
Svein S. Andersen and Kjell A. Eliassen*



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Preface

The process of making this book has in many ways had its democratic shortcomings. This has been necessary for reasons of efficiency. As always, it is a question of striking the right balance. However, this book is a collective effort and we hope that the result reflects adequately the views of the authors as well as of the editors. We also hope that this volume can stimulate the ongoing debate on European democracy.

The point of departure for the book is that the problems facing the EU are variations of those imperfections, contradictions and dilemmas that all political systems have to deal with. This perspective is developed in the Introduction and is further pursued in Part IV of the book. Part I deals with the two major challenges of interest articulation in the EU – political parties and lobbying – examines the question of what kind of political system the EU represents. Part II explores the tensions and the different types of relationships that exist between the EU and national political systems. In Part III the focus is on the democratic nature and efficiency of key institutions at the EU level. The final part discusses EU democracies in relation to the ongoing debates and changes in modern societies affecting more traditional concepts of democracy.

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Svein S. Andersen and Kjell A. Eliassen
Oslo, May 1995

Introduction: Dilemmas, Contradictions and the Future of European Democracy

Svein S. Andersen and Kjell A. Eliassen

DEMOCRACY, EFFECTIVENESS AND SOVEREIGNTY

Democracy in the EU is closely linked to two critical aspects of governance, namely effectiveness and sovereignty. EU in this book refers to both the European Union after 1 November 1993 and the previous European Economic Community. Effectiveness is a key argument for increased supranational authority where the EU makes it possible to address problems which cross national boundaries. Along this dimension the problem is that the EU may not be international enough. Another aspect of governance concerns the locus of legitimate authority, or sovereignty. In the European nation states there are historically constructed polities, manifested in parliamentary institutions to which sovereignty has been entrusted. Even a strong European parliament does not recreate the kind of sovereignty associated with the nation state, because there is no encompassing European polity. At most, popular sovereignty could be based on the formal recognition of the rights and obligations of citizens independent of cultural differences.

The debate on democracy in the EU has not received much attention in academic research. In this book we focus primarily on how decisions are made at the national and supranational level. The key issue is how democratic requirements can be handled in a system which is neither federal nor intergovernmental. The EU represents a new type of political system within the tradition of parliamentary democracies. A major challenge for the EU is institutional design, that is, how to establish democratic institutions and procedures for supranational policy-making which take account of the roles of formal and informal actors, asso-

ciations, citizens and societal interests in the decision-making process. The democratic challenges have to do with how authoritative decisions can be made, within a framework of effectiveness and sovereignty.

In the traditional nation state, democratic process and sovereignty were two sides of the same coin. However, the internationalisation of economics and politics gradually undermined efficient problem solving within the boundaries of the nation state. At the same time, the emergence of a supranational authority implies the partial decoupling of democratic process and sovereignty. In the EU sovereignty is transferred to institutions that are not controlled by democratic processes similar to those found in national systems. This development, which most actors have viewed as a sacrifice, has been regarded as necessary to achieve a supranational problem-solving capacity.

However, the EU may in this respect have reached a turning point. Concern for democracy is increasingly placed on an equal footing with effectiveness. This is reflected in the 1996 EU Intergovernmental Conference debate over the need for effectiveness as well as the preservation of member state autonomy within the framework of the EU. This raises two major sets of questions which call for more attention:

1. Western political systems have a common normative underpinning. What are these classical assumptions? And what refinements have been made during the last decades regarding the foundation and the challenges of modern democratic development? What is the relation between the EU institutional development and normative democratic theory?
2. From a strict normative position, all Western systems have democratic deficits. The nature of institutions, processes and the degree of transparency vary considerably across European states. What are the differences and similarities between the EU on the one hand and national political systems on the other?

CORE IDEAS OF DEMOCRACY

Concern with normative democratic issues has a long tradition in political science and sociology (Schumpeter 1942; Dahl 1963; Lindblom 1965; Pitkin 1967; Dahl 1971, 1989; Liphart 1977; Sartori 1987; Held 1991a). Compared to the 1960s and 1970s such issues have received

relatively little attention in the last decade. Lately the development of the EU has put normative democratic issues back on the political agenda, but so far few social scientists have taken up the challenge.

The major themes in the post World War II debate have been power and influence (Dahl 1963), decision-making rules, participation and democracy, equality and democracy, liberty and democracy, elites and democracy and the question of representativity (Pitkin 1967; Held 1991a). A special case of the latter discussion has contrasted functional versus territorial representation (Anderson 1977). The EU represents one of the few attempts at creating a new form of political system within a liberal democratic framework. Despite this, the challenges and problems of the EU as a democratic political system have only been dealt with in a very limited way (although there are exceptions such as Dahl (1989) and Held (1991a), for instance).

An important reason for this is that the incremental development of EU has made it difficult to identify its true nature with regard to democracy at any point of time. The EU has been characterised by continuous change into new and more complex political constructions. The social scientists who have paid most attention to the EU are the integration theorists and in particular the functionalist school which has been more concerned with the possibility of a fully fledged democracy in a federal Europe than the bumpy road towards it. The same has been the case for the founding fathers and the main architects of recent institutional changes.

The core of every representative system is its parliamentary institution. The main challenge for the EU is the current impossibility of creating a true parliamentary basis for democracy because few, if any, member countries accept a federal solution. The paradox is that those who are least content with the present imperfections are also the most hostile to a federal state. In what ways does the EU today represent a challenge for democratic theory? The problem of democratic legitimacy in the EU has two closely linked aspects: the lack of a responsible EU parliament and the lack of a European polity. The problem of the EU parliament is closely linked to the member states' desire that the Council of Ministers should be the main decision-making body.

On the other hand, the lack of clarification when it comes to basic democratic principles in the EU may strangely enough contribute to its success (Moravcsik 1993). Flexibility may enhance effectiveness, and the EU's ability to deliver results is itself seen by the electorates as a major source of legitimacy.

In normative democratic theory effectiveness can, however, not replace representativity as an independent basis of legitimacy (Anderson

1977). On the contrary, democracy and effectiveness are often seen as contradictory concerns. However, the tendency to emphasise effectiveness at the expense of parliamentary control is common also in national political systems in Western Europe. This tendency has been paralleled by the diffusion of decision-making authority from parliamentary bodies to informal groups and networks in society. Thus, we arrive at what has been labelled post-parliamentary or organic democracy (Andersen and Burns 1992a).

Why, then, has the tendency towards organic democracy in national systems – of which corporatism and lobbying is an important part – not been interpreted as a radical deviation from democratic principles? The reason seems to be that national parliaments fulfil the basic requirements of democratic theory. They are formally free to overrule any informal political decision-making processes at any time, and the parliaments represent important symbolic centres of authority. The lack of all such factors in the EU leads to a more critical discussion of the democratic problem of the EU.

Until now the European Union has compensated for the lack of its own parliamentary legitimacy by relying upon the link to the electorate created by the national parliaments and their control of the national representatives in the Council of Ministers (Eliassen 1993). But the indirectness of the link between the individual citizens and the directives approved by the Council of Ministers troubles those who believe that the link between voter and policy-maker should be more direct and more robust (Sbragia 1992). The indirect link is not robust as the national assemblies are not always able to participate in the EU decision-making process prior to a final vote in the Council.

Denmark has established a special parliamentary committee responsible for EU matters. The important difference from other parliamentary committees in EU member countries is that on all major issues there has to be a vote in the 'Markedsutvalget' on the position of the Danish government before they give their vote in the EU Council (Andersen and Eliassen 1992). After the problems of ratifying the Maastricht treaty other states have discussed such an institutional solution. For instance, Germany and Britain have decided to introduce parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs prior to Council voting, although there is not a binding vote.

The procedure is of particular importance in Germany because of public reactions to the Maastricht ratification and the vote of the Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe. As the Judges stated: The democracy principle does not prevent Germany joining a supranationally organised community of states. But a precondition of membership is a guar-

antee that legitimacy and influence by the people are secured within the association of states. If an association of democratic states takes on sovereign tasks and exercises sovereign powers, it is principally the people of the member states who must legitimate this through their national parliaments. Thus, democratic legitimisation ensues from the linking of the actions of European organs back to the parliaments of member states. (Cited in *The European*, 14th–17th October 1993. Their translation.)

There were plans for a more effective parliamentary EC committee in Germany, even before the verdict of the judges. All European countries will have to find workable solutions to this problem of democratic legitimacy in the EU. In the new member countries, as well as in non-member Norway, this issue has been important in the national membership debate.

Below we will discuss how the democratic challenges and problems have been dealt with in the national systems and how the EU creates new challenges.

PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY VERSUS FUNCTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Traditionally, democracy is defined as government by the people through elected representatives with Parliament as the central political institution. Or, put in another way, 'democracy is a regime in which citizens elect their leaders in regular and competitive elections and in which basic civil rights are protected' (Steiner 1991:3). Two other sources of legitimacy have increasingly been of importance. One is the functional and direct articulation of societal interests into the political systems. The other is the increasing weight paid to the ability of political systems to deliver stability and welfare, i.e. effectiveness (Offe 1972). These three sources of legitimacy are partly competing, but also complementary. However, these three factors are all complex and there is considerable empirical variation in how they are expressed institutionally in various political systems (Steiner 1991; Lane and Ersson 1993).

The *parliamentary* dimension is related to several important aspects of democracy: a constitutional basis, parliament as the political centre of the system, the expression of voter preferences through electoral systems, a party system. These aspects form an ideal type referred to as the parliamentary chain of government. Unless a system has a high score on all these dimensions, there is by definition a democratic deficit. Real political systems typically have some deficit on one or more of

these dimensions, and the influence and role of parliaments have always been questionable. The interesting question is the degree of deficit in each country at each point in time.

The backbone of all political systems in Europe with the exception of Britain, is a formal constitution defining the role of the institutions and the role of the citizens. There are, however, substantial differences between the different countries in how specific rules, mandates and rights are defined as well as discrepancies between the letter of the constitution and the institutional set-up in the daily operation of the system. For instance, the Fifth Republic in France gives specific rights to the presidency in relation to Parliament and the government in certain policy areas. And some countries have written parliamentarianism into the constitution (e.g. Sweden), while others have not (in the Norwegian constitution neither parties nor parliamentary government are mentioned).

The EU has no formal constitution, but the constitutional basis is defined in treaties between the member countries which have been subsequently revised. There is an international agreement giving the right of the EU to make supranational decisions. Institutions are well defined, but no formal single centre of power in the system is defined. In the national constitutions Parliaments are the legislative assembly of the state, but not so in EU. Another difference between national constitutions and the EU treaty is that citizenship rights were introduced only recently and remain weakly defined.

Electoral systems in Western Europe vary considerably from single member constituencies with majority voting (as in Britain) to proportional representation with the whole country as the electoral district. The main tendency since World War I until 1990 has been towards more and more mathematically just representation. Thus, in most countries, the concern for a high degree of representativity has been expressed by mechanisms which compensate for the lack of equal mathematical representation of the political parties. The emphasis on strict mathematical representation makes the system more sensitive to minor political changes and differences, which result in a reduced ability to create stable majorities decreasing the governing ability of the system. From the early 1990s, there has been an increased interest in reducing ungovernability, as reflected in proposals for a return to majority voting or more restrictions on the representation of small parties, for instance, as has happened Poland and Italy.

The EU does not have one electoral system for its Parliament. The EP is elected according to twelve different national laws. The same diversity is reflected by the lack of one unified EU polity and the ab-

sence of real European political parties. At the national level, party systems serve as the main aggregator of societal interests into the parliamentary system. There are, however, significant differences with respect to the effectiveness and legitimacy of party systems, both historically and at the present. In Britain, where there is in no constitution, the political system is based on parties and the party system. Even though the state was created several hundred years before the parties. By contrast, the developments in Italy, where the parties created the modern state in 1945, imply an almost a total breakdown of the party system. The impact on the Italian political system reflects the constitutional function of parties in the state – a correspondence to which one can find only in new democracies in Eastern Europe (Hine 1993).

At the EU level the lack of a powerful Parliament and a unified polity makes it difficult to establish strong European political parties. Even the Social Democratic parties, which have a long history of close European co-operation and a strong European Parliament group, have not been able to create an effective transnational party organisation and platform. From a normative democratic point of view the lack of a unified polity is the most serious democratic deficit, since the legitimacy of the parliamentary institution as such is based upon voters having at least a common frame of political reference. The formation of such a common identity is at best a long-term project.

Historically, the formation of a polity is a lengthy process and closely linked to a generalised notion of citizenship. The growth of these ideas in Western Europe coincided with the development of the nation-state (Bendix 1969). The gradual codification of such rights corresponds to the formation of a dominant national political culture. Today the close interrelationship at the national level between rights and identity creates obstacles to the development of a European polity (Meehan 1993).

The parliamentary systems in Europe were developed in the late nineteenth century within a minimalist liberal state model. Political legitimacy was drawn from the individual as a citizen. Since the turn of the century, and particularly since World War II, Western political systems have witnessed the growth of supplementary forms of *functional interest representation*. In Europe most attention has been paid to various forms of corporatism, while in the US lobbying has dominated. There is a literature that studies such functional links as policy networks and comprehensive negotiation processes in Europe (Richardson 1982), while others examine these at the national level (Schmitter 1974, 1977, 1982; Rokkan 1966; Andersen 1989; Heisler 1974; Scandinavian Political Studies 1979); a third group of studies deal with

the meso-level (Cawson 1985) and local politics (Hernes 1974).

Corporatism and lobbying constitute alternative channels of interest articulation. Small countries tend to develop strong corporatist structures, due to less sectoral diversity and cultural homogeneity (Katzenstein 1987). However, in recent years there has also been an increase in the use of lobbying strategies in corporatist regimes (Andersen and Eliassen 1993). There are now fewer limitations to the participation in public decision-making to companies and smaller groups that cannot claim representation as sectoral or territorial units. This development has been encouraged by the growth of lobbying within the EU system (Andersen and Eliassen 1991), but also reflects the insufficient influence given to special interests in corporatist systems.

The strengthening of direct functional interests can be regarded as part of a broader diffusion of decision-making authority from the parliamentary core to affected interests (Andersen and Burns 1992b). A special case is the formation of so-called Quangos where authority is formally transferred to quasi autonomous non-governmental agencies. However, Quangos apart, the diffusion of authority normally has an informal character where affected interests are allowed to provide important inputs and influence before formal parliamentary decisions are made. Interestingly, studies have shown that the more inclusion of interests in the pre-parliamentary phase, the less debate and conflict in parliament (Damgaard and Eliassen 1978). However, to the degree that such informal activities are directed towards Parliament in a lobbying fashion, it tends to increase parliamentary conflict.

Increasingly the players in the political system are not only individual citizens but corporate actors with functional interests. There has taken place over recent decades a diffusion of central decision-making authority to geographical sub-units of the national state, a development of decentralisation which has come under increased scrutiny in the 1990s. The dilemma is that in the national polity the national politicians are responsible, while at the same time they have given up their final authority in many matters. The ongoing debate on the degree of self-government in Scandinavian countries illustrates this as does the case of Belgium, an extreme case of formal decentralisation where a large part of formal parliamentary power is located in local parliaments; this includes the core of the national state's power, such as the ratification of treaties between foreign countries.

On the EU level functional interests have a different role from that in the national systems. Functional representation is the core of a system of interest articulation which is independent of the member states. The EU Parliament is weak while the system as a whole allows open

access for all actors independently of their representational or sector adherence. One important exception is the social dialogue where corporatist patterns develop even on the EU level. Overall, the use of lobbying strategies has been adopted by all participants whether they come from countries with strong corporatist or lobbying traditions.

In member countries, direct interest representation developed as a supplement to strong parliaments and party systems. In the EU the lack of a strong parliament and weak party groups have to a considerable extent decoupled these two channels of influence. Thus, general citizenship rights as the basis for governance are only loosely coupled to the legitimacy of the EU's political institutions themselves. The major source of legitimacy is member state support. On the other hand, the need for lobbying to legitimise individual decisions is higher. This also points to the core reason for the continued development of the EU, namely the need to achieve more efficient solutions to those problems where the nation states fail.

The EU generally lacks the formal authority that the member countries possess. However, there are several examples of authority being passed down from EU institutions to the national level, such as the European Commission's procedure for the implementation of EU policy. Overall, however, the EU lacks formal political authority and legitimacy and has to rely on the national systems. The lack of a strong parliamentary centre, symbolically and in terms of institutional competence, makes the EU democratic deficit a more visible and a more fundamental shortcoming than any of the known democratic problems in national systems.

DEMOCRATIC PROCESS VERSUS EFFECTIVENESS

When viewed from the central EU level the system is characterised by a mix of legal-bureaucratic delegation and attempts to achieve centralisation of political authority in relation to member states. However, when seen from sub-national units both bureaucratic and political authority are transferred from the centre.

In a parliamentary democracy the most important features are representation through elected assemblies, and functionally, the democratic making of policies; also the ability to provide security, welfare and acceptable solutions to political problems are important. This is often discussed as the effectiveness dimension of democracy (Dahl 1963). Effectiveness is the perceived effects of the political decisions, the outcomes of the authoritative decisions (Easton 1965). The legitimacy of political

systems is normally dependent upon an acceptable mixture between representativity and effectiveness. These two dimensions may be mutually supportive, but there are also elements of conflict. In some cases mathematically just representation may undermine the basis for effective government, for example in the Weimar republic in 1920s Germany. In other cases effectiveness may be threatened by too much openness in the public decision-making processes. The paradox is that too much democracy is dangerous for democracy exactly for the reason that it might threaten effectiveness (Huntington 1975).

Often effectiveness presupposes some elements of depoliticisation. In the European tradition, technical competence and professional knowledge are key factors in the creation of a stable framework. Another key factor may be legal constructions. The latter play a more important role in the US than in Europe. Also, legal constructions play a more important role in the EU than in European nation states. Democratic control of technical and professional knowledge may lie in the periodic repoliticisation of the aspects of the national political/administrative system which in a given period may have been taken for granted.

In some cases effectiveness may be the core of democratic legitimacy. In extreme cases the legitimacy of a regime may rest primarily on effectiveness, for instance Mussolini's ability to get the trains to run on schedule. Often effectiveness may appeal to specific segments or sub-groups of the electorate, for example the clientella systems in Italy (Hine 1993).

Again, the EU is a special case. A driving force behind the development of the EU has been the promise of more effective solutions than the member states alone can deliver. Yet no other system has used so many political resources over such a long period trying to find solutions to the fundamental constitutional problems such as the role of member state sovereignty versus EC supranational authority, and the role of parliamentary government in the EU, and so on.

The particular challenge for the EU is that it has to improve both effectiveness and democracy at the same time. Whether both can be achieved simultaneously is problematic. In the national systems, which are both more democratic and more efficient at the outset, politicians are usually confronted with only one of these two problems at any moment. The solution can then allow for some sacrifices on the one dimension to achieve better results on other, at least for a period of time.

Finally, the problems of democracy, legitimacy and effectiveness in the EU can never be solved within the present set of constraints placed upon it by the member states. The only logical solution from a strict democratic point of view is to strengthen the EU Parliament at the

expense of member states, which implies moving towards some form of federal system. The paradox is that those who are most concerned with the democratic deficit are also most strongly against such a development.

Part I
**Numerical Democracy, Corporative
Pluralism and Lobbying in
European Politics**

2

Euro-parties and European Parties: New Arenas, New Challenges and New Strategies

Mogens N. Pedersen

Although it is possible to think of political systems in which political parties do not operate at all – and although such political systems exist in real life – it is commonplace to say that politics cannot be conducted in a modern nation without the assistance of political parties. Parties are even considered functional pre-requisites for a democratic process. Why is this so?

Political parties have developed into organisations that dominate, sometimes even monopolise, an important part of political life, that nuclear part of democratic activities usually named the electoral process. Parties take care of the political mobilisation of the voters; they provide political recruits for the nomination processes, which they also control; they provide ideologies, programmes and platforms; and they attend to conflicting interests in society, trying to integrate these and provide compromises. These tasks are performed by parties that comprise a more or less volatile electorate, plus a national organisation with members, activists, bureaucrats, leaders and apparatus, plus a parliamentary group, which plays a more or less autonomous role vis-à-vis the national organisation. Although, there are differences across parties as well as across national borders within Europe, these are the basic facts about political parties at the national level.

Although it is hard to do without them, parties are not always looked upon with friendly eyes. Since the days of Jean-Jacques Rousseau political parties have also been considered parasites on the body politics, organisations that distort public opinion and make it impossible to find out what the Common Will of the People really is. In modern times,

when political parties and their activities are increasingly becoming financed by the public purse, new forms of criticisms have been raised against these semi-public organisations.

On the supra-national level in Europe, it is also possible to identify party activities. First, and of only minor importance, there are trans-national associations of like-minded national parties, which mainly bring together members for social and cultural purposes. Second, and much more important, Euro-parties exist in a loose and embryonic form within the European Union.

The Euro-parties of the European Parliament are, however, not genuine parties, if by this we mean organisations that span and control the electoral linkage. First, these new parties do not have an electorate. In elections for the European Parliament the voters within each nation vote for their own parties. Few, if any, voters care about 'The Rainbow Group', the 'European Democratic Alliance', or some of the other, more or less, stable groups within the Parliament in Strasbourg, when they go to the poll station. Second, these 'parties' do not have an internal organisation to carry out the policies of the leadership. There may be some kind of executive board that co-ordinates the work of the supra-national group, but the emphasis is just on co-ordination, advice, and on the administration of the considerable funds and other perks provided for the activity by the EU itself. Third, the cohesion of such groups is not comparable to the cohesion of most national parliamentary groups. Group-consciousness is not high, and the same goes for the stability of the group's structures. After each election to the European Parliament new groups have arisen, and older ones have disappeared. Splits and mergers take place now and then, and individual members frequently switch from one group to another.

Critics of the European project, and especially of the extension of the powers of the European Parliament, find this situation understandable and even welcome it. They prefer to see the European Common Will materialise in a process of continuous negotiation, in which only national governments participate – governments which are responsible to national parliaments and to national electorates. Seen from this perspective, present-day Euro-parties operating in the political vacuum of the European Parliament may not be dangerous – but neither are they useful. Rousseau would probably have looked upon these institutional refinements with double contempt, since they are so far removed from the proverbial 'band of peasants regulating the affairs of state under an oak tree, and always acting wisely'.

It may be, however, that this analysis is on its way to becoming obsolete. Proponents and advocates of European integration look toward a

future in which the European Parliament will play an important role. When this change – eventually – takes place, there will also be an important role for the Euro-parties, and – even more important – a need to strike a new balance between the Euro-party system and the national party systems. Some of the problems arising from the present system and the possible future changes are discussed below.

Briefly we may start by stating that the the European Parliament is on its way to becoming a genuine institution of representation, i.e. a parliament. As an integral part of this transformation, a kind of party system is emerging at the European level. This new system of embryonic Euro-parties bears some superficial resemblance to the party systems in the individual parliaments in Western Europe. MEPs from the member states register and affiliate with these political groups, which bear names that give associations to real parties (several political scientists have been discussing this development at length, often in positive value terms; see, for example, Gidlund 1992). Traditional transnational co-operation among parties has existed for decades. Now scholars – and politicians – expect it to develop further, being enhanced by European integration, and, in turn, enhancing that very same integration process. Fewer have argued like this since the traumatic events of 1992–93, but the dream of a Pan-European party system is by no means dead.

The existing ‘party system’ in the European Parliament is, however, still a far cry from being a supra-national structure. The national parties still dominate the scene in the individual nations as well as in the European Union. The traditional parties also largely control the MEPs. It is, however, already the case that the linkage between the national party and the European group, which is working through the individual MEP, pose some difficulties to the MEP as well as to the national parties. It can even be argued that the new Euro-parties constitute a challenge to the national parties in general – and their leadership in particular. Perhaps not a serious challenge at the present, but in the longer run this may change. In this chapter I will discuss some aspects of this challenge.

HOW PARTIES CAME TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

When the Treaty of Rome created new European institutions, the former consultative assembly of the Coal- and Steel Union was transformed into a consultative assembly for the entire network of treaty institutions. From the early 1960s this assembly started to call itself a parlia-

ment. With the enlargement of the EEC in 1973 the European Parliament gradually took on a new role as a meeting-place for European politicians from many different parties.

In this 'parliament' the same development took place as in other institutionalising parliaments: politicians from various parts of Europe started to meet across national boundary lines, and the most daring among them even started to talk about the possible emergence of trans-national parties. The use of the semi-circular format of the European chamber facilitated the creation of a familiar ordering of members from a left, through a centre, to a right tendency while avoiding the terms 'groups', 'party groups', or 'parties'. It was exactly these shared notions that made it possible within a few years to bring some order to the new European parliament.

During the 1970s members were appointed by their national parliaments, and it gradually became commonplace to send members to Strasbourg in numbers that reflected the strength of the respective parties in the national parliaments. In this way a certain 'mirroring' took place, even if the voters themselves were not involved. The 'semi-circles' of the various European parliaments were easily copied in Strasbourg.

With the introduction of the principle of direct election in 1979 another important step was taken. There were almost 4000 candidates for the, then, 410 seats in the European Parliament, and the members were elected by the voters in their respective nations, using the nationally appropriate electoral system, and – most important – as candidates representing the various national parties. In other words, the traditional parties were from the very beginning in control of the nominations. Only in Denmark was there an exception when a strong opposition movement against the EEC successfully put up its own candidates. It can be argued that Denmark from 1979 on had two, partly different, party systems: a national party system and another EEC-related party system which was only mobilised every four years (see, for example, Worre 1987; Pedersen 1987). Denmark is, however, the exception which proves the rule that national parties were in command. It could also be said that the Danish case represented a special type of potential conflict between the political order in a national parliament and an emerging European political order.

THE BASIC FEATURES OF PARTY SYSTEMS IN EUROPE

This story of the emergence of an ordering of representatives is one that has been heard before.

In 1789 the French *Etats Generaux* met in Versailles for a session that would soon change for good the political landscape, not only in France, but in all other European nations as well. During late summer modern parties were born in the sense that some of the most crucial aspects of the modern party system inadvertently were 'discovered' for the very first time. In September, when the assembly had already been turned into a National Assembly, the members gradually started to converge in some groupings in the assembly hall, and smart journalists soon gave these groupings the labels Left and Right. In this way the basic organising principle of party systems came into being.

From France these notions of a left side and a right side in politics gradually spread to most other European nations. In some countries in Scandinavia the labels *Venstre* (Left) and *Højre* (Right) even became the official names of some of the early parties which were founded around 1870–80. When new parties were grafted on the original nucleus of – mostly bourgeois – parties, the distinction between the two polar positions in politics was preserved. It was gradually becoming the major ordering dimension of all party systems in Europe.

In the classical analysis of the formation of parties in Europe it is argued that the modern party systems took their present form around 1920, in some countries with few parties, in other countries with a greater number (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). In any case, it was only possible to understand the formative period and the ensuing result, if one used the Left–Right dimension as the primary cleavage dimension in the national political systems. Along the same lines political historians have argued that it would be completely impossible to write the political history of European nations without resort to this distinction (see, for example, Rémond 1968).

Political scientists have since demonstrated the value of the distinction in numerous studies of voters, parties, parliaments, etc. (for example, Duverger 1951; Sartori 1976; Inglehart and Klingemann 1976; Laponce 1981; Castles and Mair 1984; Huber and Inglehart 1995). In later years another cleavage dimension has sometime been added to the description. It has been baptised the 'post-materialist' dimension, the 'green' dimension or something along these lines, but it is still the case that the older – socio-economic – 'left–right' dimension dominates.

The reason why this distinction has to be taken into consideration here is that it is fundamentally embedded in the mind of the European citizen. It is one of the few political images that all Europeans share. We are all taught how to make the distinction. Learning how to use the dichotomy for description as well as evaluation is a central part of the socialisation of the ordinary citizen (Percheron 1973). It thus happens

to be one of the major shared cognitive dimensions in the politics of Western European nations. And consequently it is no wonder that it also plays an important role for the emergence of some kind of party system at the level of the European Parliament.

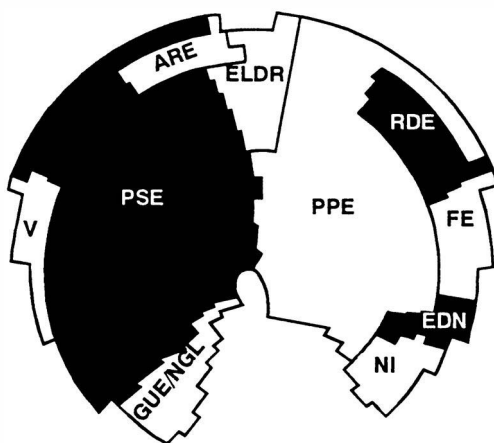
The pictorial presentation in Figure 2.1 of the political groups in the Parliament as of January 1995 reflects the old cleavage – with its two major groups at the left and right respectively. But it also suggests that other, complicating, political dimensions exist, not only the second cleavage dimension mentioned above, but others as well: it is these to which we will turn next.

THE 'FIT' BETWEEN NATIONAL PARTY SYSTEMS AND THE EURO-PARTY SYSTEM

To compare the system of political groups in the European Parliament and the various party systems in the member states, we will look at the composition of political groups after the two elections of 1989 and 1994.

The format of the party system in the European Parliament is a multi-party system with approximately 10 parties. Two of these – the Socialist group and the European People's Party – are fairly big groups with 150–200 members. The other parties are smallish in comparison. In this respect the format resembles somewhat the format of some of

Figure 2.1: *Political groups in the European Parliament, January 1995*



the national party systems.

But how good is the 'fit' between the two levels? A perfect 'fit' between the EP-format and the national format can be defined as a situation with total congruence between the two, meaning that: (1) each national party is mirrored into one of the groups in the European chamber; (2) two parties from a given nation will never register with the same European group; and (3) each European group will have one party member from each European nation. Conversely a bad 'fit' is any situation in which a high degree of incongruence occurs.

The problematic and embryonic character of the new Euro-party system is easily understood when we compare the 'fit' between the EU-system of political groups and the national party systems. Although the political groups relate to the classical left-right dimension as well as to newer – and 'greener' – dimensions, at least five important deviations from perfect congruence are observed (see Table 2.1).

Superficially, Table 2.1 suggests that the political groups are able to absorb most of the elected members. Thus, in 1989, the political groups encompassed 506 of 517 members of the parliament. Nine of the unattached members (NI) were elected in Italy and in Spain. Five years later, 540 out of 567 members affiliated with one of the political groups, and most of the non-affiliated were French (Front National) or Italians (Alleanza Nazionale and PSDI). In this limited perspective the fit between the two types of 'party system' can be said to be quite good.

Upon closer inspection the picture is different, however. Reading the two tables 'horizontally', we see, firstly, that only the two big groups – the Socialist Group (PSE/SOC) and the European People's Party (PPE) – attract members from all countries. Some – like the European Democrats (ED) only bring in members from two countries. In 1994 Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia decided to form its own group (FE). An intriguing question to ask is what it means to the working conditions of a political group that it has members from all countries? Even more interesting is the question about the effects of a nationally skewed distribution of members and the absence of some – or many – nations in the political group? Does it mean, for instance, that the members of that group more or less ignore the interests of the excluded nations?

Secondly, a 'vertical' reading of the tables indicates that in no case will a collective national representation cover all political groups. The fragmented Italian party system comes closest to all-encompassing coverage while in the nature of their national party systems, the British and the Germans fit into only a few of the political groups. These discrepancies have important consequences for the activities of – and activities within – the political groups.

Table 2.1: *the 'fit' between official groups in the European Parliament and National Parties in the twelve Member States*

(a) July 1989

	Group/Country											
	B	DK	F	G	GR	IR	IT	L	N	P	S	UK
SOC	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2
PPE	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1
LDR	2	1	5	1	—	2	1	1	1	1	2	—
ED	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
VER	2	—	2	1	—	—	4	—	2	1	1	—
GUE	—	1	—	—	1	—	2	—	—	—	1	—
RDE	—	—	3	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
DR	1	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
CG	—	—	1	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
ARE	1	4	1	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	2	1
NI	—	—	1	—	—	—	2	—	1	—	3	1

Legend: '1' = Only one national party was affiliated with the European political group;
 '2' = Two national parties were affiliated, etc.

Source: Mackie 1990.

(b) July 1994

	Group/Country											
	B	DK	F	G	GR	IR	IT	L	N	P	S	UK
PSE	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
PPE	2	1	1*	1	1	1	3	1	1	—	2	1
ELDR1	2	1*	—	—	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	—
GUE	—	—	1	—	2	—	1	—	—	1	—	—
FE	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
RDE	—	—	1*	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1	—
V	1	1	—	1	—	1	2	1	1	—	1	—
ARE	1	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	3	—
EN	—	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
NI	2	—	1	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	2	—

(1* = French UDF/RPR affiliated themselves with three political groups)

Legend: '1' = Only one national party was affiliated with the European political group;
 '2' = Two national parties were affiliated, etc.

Source: Doc. PE 182.789, final edition.