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Are the Europarties real political parties? National parties' involvement in multi-level structures of European political parties

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Are the Europarties *Real* Political Parties? National Parties' Involvement in Multi-level Structures of European Political Parties[*]

Czy europartie można uznać za *prawdziwe* partie polityczne? Zaangażowanie partii krajowych w wielopoziomowe struktury europejskich partii politycznych

• **Abstrakt** •

Europartie są rozpatrywane jako organizacje wielopoziomowe, podobne do partii działających w państwach federalnych lub przechodzących procesy dewolucji. W artykule rozważano, czy mogą one w ogóle być analizowane jako partie polityczne sensu stricto i czy koncepcje stosowane do badania relacji pomiędzy regionalnymi i krajowymi strukturami partyjnymi (integracja wertykalna, wpływ) mogą być używane do studiowania relacji pomiędzy strukturami krajowymi i europejskimi. Zwrócono uwagę, że europartie mogą być rozpatrywane zarówno jako dodatkowe płaszczyzny aktywności partii krajowych, jak i niezależni aktorzy polityczni, w skład których wchodzą partie krajowe (partie wielopoziomowe). Ta druga

• **Abstract** •

Europarties are regarded as multi-level organizations, like parties operating in federal or devolved states. Examined is whether they can even be treated as political parties sensu stricto and whether the concepts used to test the relations between the national and regional party structures (vertical integration, influence) could be used to study relationships between the national and European structures. It was indicated that Europarties can be considered both as the additional arenas of national parties' activity and independent political actors consisted of national parties (multi-level parties). The second perspective was used to research 13 existing Europarties. In result, the similarities between the PES and PEL, but dif-

perspektywa została wykorzystana do badania 13 istniejących europartii. W rezultacie udało się wykazać podobieństwa pomiędzy PES oraz PEL oraz różnice pomiędzy EPP o PES pod względem poziomu integracji wertykalnej i wpływu. Dzięki temu w artykule udowodniono, że nie ma jednego modelu relacji pomiędzy krajowymi i europejskimi strukturami partii oraz, że europartie różnią się między sobą pod względem ich wewnętrznej struktury organizacyjnej czy ich relacji z partiami krajowymi.

ferences between the EPP and PES in term of vertical integration and influence were shown. Hence, in the article was proven that there is no one model of relations between the national and European party structures and the parties differ from each other as far as their internal structures are concerned.

Introduction

The processes of federalisation, devolution and regionalization, though equally the development of European integration have caused political parties to receive new areas of activity. The creation and strengthening of the position of regional assemblies and the European Parliament have meant that political parties have gained new arenas for electoral competition, the representation of interests and articulation of views. In this context Swenden and Maddens talk about "territorial dimension" of party politics (2009).

The transfer of powers from the state to the subnational and supranational levels has led to changes in power allocation within political parties. This does not concern the new division of power between the leaders, activists and ordinary members, about which a lot of studies have been devoted (Katz, Mair, 1995; Poguntke, Webb, 2005; Dalton, Wattenberg, 2002; Luther, Muller-Rommel, 2005), but rather the distribution between the different levels of structure – European, national, regional. This has resulted in a kind of multi-level party, which is "a party of multiple territorial levels, representing competing sources of formal power as well as discursively structured antagonisms between the party's centre and its constituent parts" (Moon, Bratberg, 2010).

Despite the growing interest in multi-level parties and almost a general recognition that this is the result of the simultaneous processes of state decentralization and European integration, analyses are concentrated mainly on relations between the national and regional (subnational) structures of state-wide political parties. In this context, it is worth paying attention to studies on British, Spanish, German and Belgian political parties. Besides the above mentioned, the following authors

need noting: Thorlakson (2009, 2013), Fabre (2008, 2011), Hough and Jaffrey (2006), van Biezen and Hopkin (2006), van Houten (2009), Detterbeck (2012). Less attention has been paid to the relations between the European and national as well as the European and regional party structures. The latter having been mainly presented in a study by Hepburn (2010). The relations between European and national party structures were noticed mostly by Deschouwer (2000, 2003, 2006).

There is also the growing literature related to Europarties beginning from Marquand (1978), Pridham and Pridham (1981) and Niedermayer (1983) through Gaffney (1996), Hix and Lord (1997) to Delwit, Külahci and van de Walle (2001), Johansson and Zervakis (2002), Mittag (2006), Fiala, Mareš and Sokol (2007), Hanley (2008), Armbrecht (2008), de Prat (2009), Mittag and Steuwer (2010) and special issue of Acta Politica (Timuş, Lightfoot, 2014) to name only a few. But there is a lack of research on the Europarties investigated as multi-level organisations. The aim of the article is to fill this gap, therefore the relations between the national and European levels of party structures are here of special importance. The subject of the analysis are "political parties at the European level", considered as organizations that were lawfully acknowledged according to the EC regulation on Europarties (Regulation – EC – No 2004/2003) and which obtained grants from the EU budget in 2013[1].

The article was divided into three parts. Because of the existing controversy whether Europarties can be regarded as political parties, the first section address this issue. There is an evaluation of the possibility of applying traditional approaches into political parties (structural, functional) to an analysis of Europarties. The aim is to prove the hypothesis that they can be regarded as parties *sensu stricto*. In the second part attention is drawn to the possibility of researching Europarties as multi-level organizations, wherein the fundamental problem that has to be addressed is whether Europarties should be researched as additional arenas of the activities for domestic parties or as independent political actors – organisations in their own right comprised of national political parties which are their members. The framework to analyse the Europarties is outlined here. Final part concen-

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1 This selection covers 13 organisations: the European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), the European Green Party (EGP), the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR), the Party of European Left (PEL), the Movement for a Europe of Liberties and Democracy (MELD), the European Democratic Party (EDP), the European Free Alliance (EFA), the European Alliance for Freedom (AEF), the Alliance of European National Movements (AEMN), the European Christian Political Movement (ECPM) and the EU Democrats (EUD).

trates on the empirical researches (based on the Europarties statutory documents) and aims to assess the relations between the European and national structures of 13 analysed Europarties. Its purpose is to verify the hypothesis that the degrees of vertical integration of Europarties as well as the influence that national parties exert upon European party structures are varied in individual Europarties.

Are the Europarties *Real* Political Parties?

Although the European integration process was intended to have the technocratic nature, political parties have been present in it from the outset, both directly and through national governments. The importance of parties gradually but steadily increases along with the development of integration processes. Nowadays in the context of the EU we can distinguish three kinds of party organizations. Firstly, there are national political parties, which participate in the integration process mainly indirectly by members of national governments (in the EU Council), who are party politicians. Secondly – the political groups in the EP, thirdly – extra-parliamentary "political parties at European level" (Europarties, European political parties). The latter have their source in transnational party federations, which were established in the 1970s before the first direct elections to the European Parliament. After the entry of the Treaty of Maastricht into force, most of party federations evolved into "political parties at the European level". The next step, that caused consolidating the already existed Europarties and establishing new ones, was the adoption of the regulation defining the status of "political parties at European level" and granting them funding from the EU budget. In accordance with the provisions of the regulation, Europarties can be created as "associations of citizens" or "alliances of political parties". In practice they pursue the second pattern and are created by domestic political parties, which are their members. A European political party should meet the following criteria: to have a legal personality in the EU member state in which its seat is located, to represent at least one quarter of member states (nowadays 7 of 28), to observe the principles on which the European Union is founded and to participate in the EP election or express the intention to do so (Regulation – EC – 2004/2003).

On the basis of the mentioned regulation 16 organizations got a status of Europarties, but 3 of them lost it, because they stopped to meet the criteria. This does not change the fact that it is still under discussion whether Europarties can even be considered *real* political parties. Whereas some researchers are inclined to do so (Hix, Lord, 1997; Kreppel, 2002; Sobolewska-Myślik, 2005), other scholars refuse

the existing organizations this title (von Arnim, Schuring, 2004; Vieira, 2011; Jacuński, 2006). Europarties are sometimes treated like political parties *sui generis* or *in statu nascendi* (Oppelland, 2006). The issue is complicated, because there are a lot of definitions of political parties that determine the conditions, which organization should meet in order to be considered as a political party. Everything therefore is a matter of a definition we use.

According to the definition of Sartori: "A party is any political group that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office" (2005). Europarties do not directly place candidates in elections in order to take power; hence from this point of view they do not complete conditions of the definition and cannot be considered as political parties. But we should agree with Bonotti that: "this kind of definition risk providing too narrow a picture of the more complex and subtle role parties play" (2011). Political parties fulfil a lot of functions in political systems thanks to their intermediary position between a state and a civil society. The third parties in the USA for example do not have any real chance to win elections. Their *raison d'être* is to act as agencies of democracy that help citizens influence the process of governing (Lawson, 1980). Hence on the basis of such a definition Europarties can be considered as parties, because they seek to affect the agenda and decision-making processes in the EU.

The verification of the hypothesis that Europarties are political parties *sensu stricto*, can be conducted on the basis of two main approaches in the defining of parties – the functional and the structural. In the light of the functional approach this hypothesis is difficult to maintain. Europarties accomplish only to a limited degree the main functions of political parties – the social function and that of governance. The first is accomplished chiefly by national political parties, which do not fulfil that successfully the tasks entrusted them, failing to inform the electorate of their connections with European party structures, conducting campaigns before EP elections based on national and not European questions, etc. The function of governance is accomplished chiefly through the impact made on the decision making process at its various stages. However, it follows to remember that Europarties are neither the only nor the main actors striving to influence the EU agenda and the decision-making process. Within the framework of function of governing Europarties equally strive to fill posts, something however that to a large degree remains the domain of the member states, therefore the Europarties have merely an indirect influence upon these decisions. The exception being the posts within the European Parliament, the assignment of which is based upon inter-party agreements. On the basis of the new regulations adopted in the Lisbon Treaty – Europarties have also the opportunity to exert a greater influence on the

selection of the head of the European Commission. More decidedly optimistic appears the accomplishment of the organisational function. Europarties not only adjust their structures to the changing environment, but also themselves try to shape their conditions by influencing the EU legislation.

The hypothesis discussed as to the possibility of considering Europarties to be *real* political parties is easier when considered against structural definitions. According to these, parties are organisations of a definite internal structure, while each of the elements within this structure has a specific role to fulfil. The development of Europarties, especially those whose roots reach back to the transnational federations of parties functioning since the 1970s, led to the elaboration of expansive structures capable of undertaking decisions in all the areas of traditional party activity (*party on the ground*, *party in public office*, *party in central office*, Katz, Mair, 1994), even if in certain of these their role is a modest one (Hix, 1996; Bardi, 2005; Johansson, 2004; Sobolewska-Myślik, 2005).

To sum up, the adoption of structural definitions as a starting point allows one to corroborate the hypothesis that Europarties can be considered as *real* political parties. The functional approach leads to more pessimistic conclusion. Europarties do not fulfil some functions pointed out in a classic catalogues for example do not peruse control of the government apparatus. However, Schonfeld in his critique of the functional approach, enhances that domestic parties also do not fulfil all functions attributed to them, but despite this they matter, because: "They do many things, even if in each arena of feasible activity their contribution in not necessarily the most critical one, the number of arenas in which they perform make them central to an understanding of politics in the contemporary nation-state" (1983). The same can be said about Europarties operating in the EU political system.

Multi-level Approach in Researches on Europarties

Europarties operate in a multi-layered environment; hence it is worth to consider using the multi-level approach to analyse their structures. This approach is very popular in researches on political parties in federal states and in the latest decades its importance is growing because of using it to investigate the parties in regionalized and devolved states. These studies are devoted to the analysis of relations between the national and subnational (regional) party structures. Scholars developed even a special framework for analysis (Thorlakson, 2009, 2013; Fabre, 2011; Detterbeck, 2012). In order to research Europarties it is important to answer the question as to whether it is adequate to use this framework to investigate the rela-

tion between the national and European party structures. Therefore, in the first place shown is how the relationship of the regional and national party structures are studied, and then the discussion is conducted about the possibility of similar research on the relationship of the national and European party structures.

The multilevelness of party structure appears to be especially important in three areas which are crucial for the functioning of political parties: political recruitment (especially candidate selection), electoral strategies and governing strategies. According to van Biezen and Hopkin, each of these areas is the zone of potential conflicts between the central and regional levels of the party structure (2006). It seems that these areas are useful only to a limited extent to explain the relationship between the European and national levels. The national party structure has a monopoly in candidate selection and the adoption of electoral strategies for elections to national parliaments; it is also responsible for candidate selection and campaign strategies in elections to the European Parliament. However, the European political parties are beginning to engage in electoral activity. The report on candidate selection to the EP in the member states, prepared under the direction of Lehmann, shows that nearly 20% of national parties reported some interaction with the European level structure during the candidate selection phase (Lehmann, 2009; Bardi et al., 2010). It should be noted in particular the pressure to ensure the re-selection of incumbent MEPs. A new area of electoral activity could also be opened for Europarties in connection with the plans to create a pan-European constituency and Europe-wide electoral lists of candidates, but this is a matter for the future.

An increasing involvement of European structures in campaigns before the EP election is also observed. European political parties adopt electoral manifestos and try to convince national political parties to use them during the campaigns. Although the national parties usually do not feel bound by these manifestos and adopt their own, the national manifestos partly repeat the positions and values expressed in the supranational manifestos. Before the EP election in 2009 some parties did not adopt their own electoral programmes at all, but used translated version of the respective European political party manifestos. This was, for example, the case with the French Socialists, the Slovak Green Party and the Alliance of Democratic Left form Poland. Gagatek indicates that, apart from manifestos, the European political parties develop a number of additional electoral activities, which he labels as "service providing". Europarties prepare achievements' lists of their political group in the EP, produce special gifts, leaflets, stickers and others promotional materials. They also organize special meetings, which are attended by the EP candidates and by the national party leaders as well. They not only provide an opportunity to present or promote an electoral manifesto, but also create an

occasion for candidates to have photos taken with well-known politicians, which can be used later in the campaign (2009). Moreover, the regulation of 18 December 2007 which amended the previous regulation governing political parties at the European level allowed for the financing of the campaign to the EP from funds coming from the EU budget (Regulation – EC – No 1524/2007), thus it gave new impetus for Europarties to engage in election campaigns. It is therefore assumed that Europarties' involvement in election campaigns will gradually increase.

The most difficult issue is to examine the relationship between the European and national party structure in the area of governmental strategies. First of all, Europarties do not seem to be able to influence the process of government formation at the state level. Secondly, there is no government in the traditional meaning at the European level, thus the influence of national parties on the EU governance seems to be more complicated. However, a more detailed examination of this point reveals interactions also in this area. For example, Europarties protest against their member parties entering into coalitions with the extreme right and nationalist parties at the national level and try to exert pressure to prevent them from doing this. This happened both in the EPP (reacting to the Italian Forza Italia coalition with the National Alliance and the Austrian People's Party coalition with the Freedom Party of Austria) as well as within the PES. The latter suspended the membership of the Slovak SMER after this party formed a coalition with communists and nationalists at the national level. The national political parties try to also exert influence on EU governance, for example by affecting the composition of the Council and the formally apolitical European Commission as well as the European Parliament through selecting their candidates that are then elected in direct ballots.

Another issue to discuss is whether the concepts used to determine the relationship between the national and regional organizations can also be applied to study the relationship between the supranational and national structures. Relations between the national and regional party structures are usually characterized by: vertical integration, influence and autonomy. There is a general consensus in the subject literature on the meaning of the concept of vertical integration in political parties, but some difficulties arise when we try to operationalize the concept. Vertical integration refers to the extent and strength of linkages between a regional and central party structure (Thorlakson, 2009). The existence of the linkages means that the party is vertically integrated and the levels are interdependent. Vertical integration is an important measure in a multi-level party, but it does not determine the direction of control in the party organization, in the sense that no level needs to be subordinated to another.

Successive conceptions are: the influence that the regional structures exert on the central party and the degree of autonomy of the regional structures within the integrated party (Thorlakson, 2009). Various authors have produced their own variables to measure influence and autonomy. The outline of Fabre seems to be especially clear in this regard, she believes that these conceptions reflect in the best way the distribution of power within a party and defines them very precisely. Influence is "the degree to which regional sub-units (regional party branches) are represented in central organs and involved in central decision-making processes" (2011). Among the variables, which can be used to describe influence are: the selection of the state-wide party leader, the composition of the central party executive, the selection of candidates for national parliamentary elections, the formulation of party programmes for national parliamentary elections, the process to amend the party constitution and the statutory guarantee of the power of regional party branches (Fabre, 2011).

The second group of variables describes autonomy that means the extent to which regional branches are able to act independently from the central party. These are: the ability of regional branches to have an internal organization that is not dictated by the central party structure; the selection of regional party leaders; the selection of candidates for regional elections; the adoption of regional election programmes; the financial autonomy of the regional branches (Fabre, 2011). Analysing the party structure Fabre assigned appropriate values for each of these variables. Low ratios indicate that the regional branches are subordinated to the central structure (low autonomy) and the regional structures are not involved in the decision making process at the central level (low influence). High values, on the contrary, are proofs that the party is a confederation of regional branches that have a high level of autonomy and control over the central party structure.

Vertical integration allows one to determine links between the different levels of the structure, for example: a common party membership, shared finances and a common governance structure (Thorlakson, 2009), therefore this can be used to test the structures of Europarties in terms of their relationship with the national parties which are their members. Some problems may occur when trying to use concepts of autonomy and influence. Moon and Bratberg do not mark in their conceptualization of the multi-level party (MLP) any difference in relationship between the regional and national structures on the one hand, and the European and national – on the other, therefore it can be assumed that they consider these indicators (autonomy, influence) as relevant to examine the relationship between all levels of the MLP structure (2010). However, there is the question as to the direction of control in the party organisation. In other words: should we exam-

ine the autonomy and influence of the European or the national structures? In the first case, European party structures are treated as additional (supranational) arenas of national party activities along with subnational (regional) one. In the second, they are regarded as independent political actors – organisations in their own right comprised of national political parties which are their members.

Figure 1. Conceptualising Europarties as Multi-level Organizations
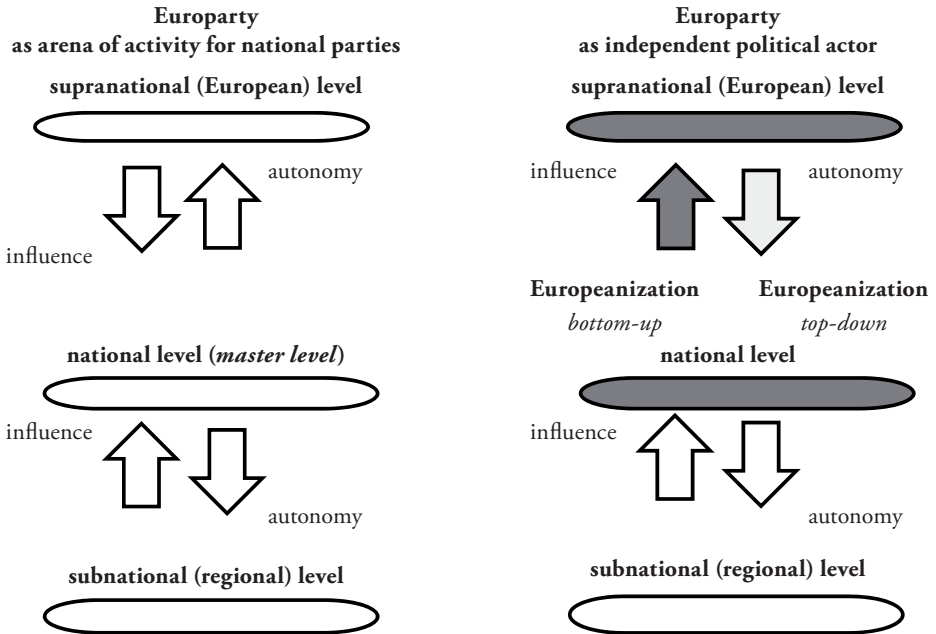
Source: developed by the Author.

If we consider that the national level is still the most important one in the mutual relations with the European Union, this is the "master" or "core level" (Deschouwer, 2000), therefore the direction of control should be – *bottom-up*. But, on the other hand, the concepts used in the study of party structures in federal or devolved states seek to determine the autonomy of lower-level structures and the influence of lower-level structures at a higher-level, even if the first is a core one (e.g. in some parties in Switzerland), therefore perhaps it is worth following on this idea. However, the use of the variables suggested by Thorlakson (2013) or Fabre (2011) and the rigid setting of them to numerical values can, at first glance, lead to the conclusion that national structures are totally autonomous and exercise full

control over the European structures; in other words, the autonomy and influence of national structures in each case can obtain maximum values, and this does not allow one to capture the differences between Europarties. Nevertheless, a closer look at the individual Europarties reveals that while some of them are based on national parties, others are more advanced in the elaboration of a model based on power delegation to the European structures by the national parties. Moreover, researches on the *bottom-up* Europeanization prove that the national parties exert influence on Eurparties which they belong to, and studies on the *top-down* Europeanization point out that membership in Europarties lead to a reduction of autonomy of national parties, which are Europarties' members (Ladrech, 2002). Hence, the discussed concepts can be used to investigate relations between the national and European party structures, but they need different operationalization.

Vertical Integration and Influence in Europarties

The concepts of vertical integration and influence are used to prove the hypothesis pointing to differences in the level of vertical integration of the individual Europarties as well as the influence which the national parties exert on European structures. Autonomy of national parties, which can also be regarded as one of the indicators of multi-level party structures requires researches in each of the 28 member states, which exceeds the scope of this article. But there are a lot of studies on *top-down* Europeanization of political parties that concentrate on this issue (Külahci, 2012; Poguntke et al., 2007; Lewis, Mansfeldová, 2006; Ladrech, 2002).

As vertically integrated are to be considered those Europarties which have their structures and compete at both levels of the EU multi-layered system (European, national). The level of vertical integration of Europarties is shaped through the formal inclusion of national parties from if possible a large number of member states (a high level of transnationality), the possession of a common party membership, as well as the inclusion of national parties' representation within executive body of European party. In turn, as indicators of influence the involvement of national parties in Europarty organs as well as the way decisions within the latter are taken are considered, and in particular the role that befalls national parties in this process.

The research on vertical integration and influence was conducted mainly on statutory documents of Europarties. Data from Europarties' websites were also taken into consideration. It results from the exploration that the Europarties con-

sist of the national parties, which are their members. Hence, the national level party structures are formally incorporated into the Europarties. Some of them reserve full membership only for political parties from the EU member states, other accept as members also organizations and movements from both the EU and non EU countries. Vertical integration is connected with the level of inclusiveness (Bardi, 2005) or transnationality (Hix, Lord, 1997), which describes the coverage degree of the EU by the various Europarties. Each of the two largest Europarties: the EPP and the PES has full members in 27 of the 28 EU states. The next two parties are the EGP and the ALDE, the first has its members in 25, and the second in 22 EU states, however, both accept among the full members also parties beyond the EU. Next – the PEL and the EFA have their members respectively in 16 and 15 EU states; the PEL has also many beyond the Union. Other political parties at European level are present in less than half of the member states (the AECR, the MELD, the EUD in 11 countries each, the EDP in nine, the AEMN and the ECPM in eight each, and the EAF in seven). Moreover, in the AECR, the MELD, the EDP, the EAF and the AEMN some states are represented by individual MEPs. Europarties, which have their members in a large number of member states can be regarded as organizations with a significant degree of vertical integration, others as truncated (active only at one of two considered levels) or split (cooperate with parties from another level, but without formal connections) (Wolinetz, Carty, 2006). The last situation took place for example when British Conservatives cooperated with the EPP in a common group in the EP (till 2009), but formally the Conservative Party was not a member of the EPP.

The next indicator of the vertical integration is possessing or not a common membership. Although the existing Europarties are mainly the alliance of the national political parties, each of them offers a kind of individual membership. Some are open for all physical persons (ELDR, PEL, EUD, EAF); others restrict their individual membership to MEPs or MPs from the EU member states (EPP, EGP, AECR, EDP, EFA, ECPM). The latter offer for physical persons a status of supporting members, activists or friends, who can cooperate with Europarties and support them, but without the formal rights and obligations of individual members. In some parties, there is also a multi-level membership, which means that all members of national parties that belong to the Europarty are automatically members of that Europarty. This kind of membership exists in PES, EDP and is also possible in PEL. The idea is that the Europarties are based on the national parties, which have their members, who can also be considered as members of the Europarties. The multi-level and therefore common membership is characteristic for vertically integrated parties.

The other indicator of vertical integration is the formal inclusion of national parties' representations within Europarty executive body. The analysis shows that there is provided the possibility for representation of all member parties in Europarty executive body in the statutes of left-wing (PES and PEL), extreme right-wing (AEMN) and Eurosceptic (EUD) parties. But it is occurred only in the leftist organizations. Members of AEMN and EUD do not use in practice their capabilities. Other Europarties restrict the executive bodies to narrower groups of party officials selected by one of the representative bodies regarded as the highest authority in Europarty (generally the Congress, but in the EGP and AECR – the Council) on the base of the principles outlined in the statute. To sum up, it seems that the representatives of PES and PEL member parties are in the highest degree incorporated into Europarties' executive bodies.

The next concept, which can be used to measure the multi-level organization, is the influence, which the national parties exert on the structures of Europarties. It is described by two variables: the level of representation of national parties in Europarty' bodies and the way in which political decisions are taken within Europarty structures (unanimously; qualified, absolute or simple majority). Influence is considered strong if the representatives of member parties (*party on the ground*) have a dominating share in the main Europarty bodies, while decisions are taken unanimously. As weak influence is considered a state of affairs whereby the representatives of other subsystems dominate in Europarty organs – *party in central office* (party officers entering into the composition of collective party bodies) and *party in public office* (politicians entering as a result of holding office within EU organs or other organisations), while decisions are undertaken on the basis of an ordinary majority.

Table 1 presents the variables, which characterise the involvement of national parties in Europarty bodies and the meaning of each score. Each Europarty receives a code 1-4 for each score. When we take into consideration involvement of national parties in the Europarty decision-making bodies (usually Congress and Council) – a score of 4 (very strong representation) means that the decision-making bodies of the Europarty are composed of almost exclusively representatives of members parties. A score of 3 (strong representation) characterises a situation in which these bodies are composed of the representatives of member parties, but also some representatives of other subsystems of party structure are included. A score of 2 (average representations) means that decision-making bodies consist of some representatives of member parties and some representatives of other subsystems of party structure. A score of 1 (weak representation) means that the representatives of member parties are in minority and the other subsystems of party

structure dominate. The analyses were made separately for each of the decision-making bodies (Congress, Council). Moving on to the issue of the involvement of national parties in the Europarty executive body (usually Presidency, Bureau, Board or Committee) – a score 4 means that it is composed by the representatives of all member parties approved by the highest decision-making body. A score of 3 represents a situation in which the executive body also consists of the representatives elected by the highest decision-making body, but not all member parties are represented. A score of 2 means that the body is composed partly by the representatives elected by the highest decision-making body, and partly by *ex officio* members, but the former dominate. A score of 1 describes almost the same situation, but with dominance of the latter.

Table 1. Involvement of National Parties in the Europarties' Structure – Coding Scheme

Involvement of national parties in the Europarty' decision-making bodies (usually Congress and Council)	4 very strong representation	almost exclusively representatives of member parties
	3 strong representation	representatives of member parties and some representatives of other subsystems of party structure
	2 average representation	representatives of member parties and a lot of representatives of other subsystems of party structure
	1 weak representation	representatives of member parties in minority, domination of other subsystems of party structure
Involvement of national parties in the Europarty' executive body (usually Presidency, Bureau, Board or Committee)	4 very strong representation	representatives of all member parties approved by the highest decision-making body
	3 strong representation	representatives elected by the highest decision-making body, but not all parties are represented
	2 average representation	partly representatives elected by the highest decision-making body, and partly ex officio members, but former dominate
	1 weak representation	partly representatives elected by the highest decision-making body, and partly ex officio members, but latter dominate

Source: developed by the Author on the base of the subject literature.

Table 2 presents the results of the analyses of the level of national parties involvement in Europarties' bodies conducted on the statutory documents of Europarties. It is obvious that we are dealing with differences in this respect.

Whereas an analysis of the structures of the Party of European Left (score 4), the Movement for a Europe of Liberties and Democracy, the European Free Alliance, the EU Democrats (score of 3.5 each) and the Party of European Socialists (score 3.3) leads to a conclusion that the national level is a core one, then an analysis of the European People's Party (score 2) in contrary, shows that the European level is also very important. The other parties are located between these extremes. None of them has got score 1.

Table 2. Codes for the Involvement of National Parties in Europarties' Bodies

	Europarty	Involvement of national parties in the Europarty' decision-making body (usually Congress)	Involvement of national parties in the Europarty' second decision-making body (usually Council)	Involvement of national parties in the Europarty' executive body (usually Presidency, Bureau, Board or Committee)	Average
1	European People's Party (EPP)	2	2	2	2
2	Party of European Socialists(PES)	3	3	4	3.3
3	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE)	3	3	3	3
4	European Green Party (EGP)	3	3	3	3
5	Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR)	3	3	3	3
6	Party of European Left (PEL)	4	4	4	4
7	Movement for a Europe of Liberties and Democracy (MELD)	4	—	3	3.5
8	European Democratic Party (EDP)	2	3	2	2.3
9	European Free Alliance(EFA)	4	—	3	3.5

Tab. 2 – continue

	Europarty	Involvement of national parties in the Europarty' decision-making body (usually Congress)	Involvement of national parties in the Europarty' second decision-making body (usually Council)	Involvement of national parties in the Europarty' executive body (usually Presidency, Bureau, Board or Committee)	Average
10	European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	2	—	3	2.5
11	Alliance of European National Movements (AENM)	2	3	4	3
12	European Christian Political Movement (ECPM)	2	—	3	2.5
13	EU Democrats (EUD)	3	—	4	3.5

Source: developed by the Author on the base of Europarites' statutes.

The next indicator of the influence is the way in which political decisions within Europarties are taken. In order to analyse the decision-making process the following codes were used. Unanimity means a very strong influence of national parties (code 4), qualified majority – a strong influence (code 3), absolute majority – average (code 2), and simple majority – weak (code 1). The strongest influence on the Europarties' political decisions is exerted by national parties in the PEL (code 4) and the PES. The latter seeks for achieving consensus, and when this is not possible, decisions have to be taken by qualified majority (at least 75%). There is also the possibility that the decisions do not bind the PES members who do not agree with them if they communicate their distinct position before voting. A qualified majority is also used in the EGP (code 3). In turn, the EPP and the ECPM use absolute majority (code 2), the ALDE, the AECR, the EDP, the EFA, the EAF and the EUD – the simple majority (code 1). In the statutes of the MELD and the AEMN there is a lack of information on the subject.

To sum up, it results from the research that the most vertically integrated Europarties (a high level of transnationality, common multi-level membership, inclusion of representatives of all member parties into the Europarties executive bodies),

in which the national parties maintain the strongest influence (strong representation of national parties in the main bodies, the taking of decisions in accordance with the principle of unanimity) should be considered the Party of the European Left and the Party of European Socialists. Both groupings are created on the basis of national structures, which have preserved within them the dominant position. Particularly in view of the fact that the mentioned Europarties are left-wing in nature one may conjecture a hypothesis with regard to further research into Europarties, namely that the level of vertical integration and influence is conditioned by the ideological-programme face of the Europarty. Of importance is the fact that the two largest parties which have achieved the greatest level of transnationality – the Party of European Socialists and the European People's Party build their structures in a different way. While the former bases itself on national parties, the latter to a greater degree separates itself from them incorporating into its organs numerous representatives of the *party in public office* subsystem (e.g. members of the EP and the EC). The EPP has been considered the only Europarty in which the national parties have an average influence, in all the others it is deemed as strong or very strong. This not only confirms the hypothesis as to the differentiation of Europarties in relation to the degree of vertical integration and the influence of national parties on European structures, but it also means that there are no model solutions in the area of relations amongst Europarties and the national parties which are their members.

Conclusions

The hypothesis that Europarties are political parties *sensu stricto* was verified on the basis of two main approaches in the defining of parties – the functional and the structural. Although European political parties do not perform or do not perform well the functions parties are traditionally expected to fulfil, they have their structures in all three fields of party activity (*party on the ground*, *party in public office*, *party in central office*). Even if Europarties are not the only actors in any of them, exclusively they undertake activities in each of them. Moreover, when we take into account changes taking place in the contemporary parties – weakening parties' ties with civil society, their closer ties with the state, strengthening of the party executives, increasing role of party elites, decrease in the number of members etc., we must admit that Europarties do not differ too much from this picture.

In the article the multi-level approach was used to research on Europarties. At the present stage of scientific reflection on Europarties, it seems that they can

be researched both as additional arenas for the activities of domestic parties and as independent political actors comprised of national political parties which are their members. Here the second perspective was chosen. This allowed confirming the hypothesis that the individual Europarties differ in terms of the relationship between European and national level of party structures. In particular we managed to show that the two major parties the EPP and the PES use in this regard quite different solutions, while some similarity can be seen in two leftist parties the PES and the PEL.

The analysis of Europarties conducted as on multi-level organisations, undoubtedly opens up a new research perspective. Scholars employing the classic model of the institutionalisation of Europarties as coined by Niedermayer (1983) place Europarties between the second and third phase of development. In their opinion, European organisations not only make contacts easier for national parties (the first phase) but concentrate on transnational coordination (the second phase) though are not yet fully integrated parties (the third phase) (Johannsson, Zervakis, 2002). In this conception increasing the level of Europarty integration would mean limiting the influence and autonomy of national parties (Sandström, 2004). Contrary to these views, the development of Europarties within the multi-level EU political system does not have to represent their separation from national parties, quite the reverse. One may state that basing themselves on national parties lies in the interests of Europarties. One may even go as far as stating that the stronger the former are, the greater the significance of Europarties becomes.

The multileveled nature of the EU system and the dispersion of the decision making process mean that only Europarties possessing strong structures at all levels are able to influence this process at all its stages. Hence, when we look for a master level of Europarties structures, we should indicate not only differences between the individual parties, but also between areas of their activity. Where given tasks are realised at the level of EU member states (intergovernmental) a significant role is played by national party structure; however, when decisions are taken at a supranational level, this creates greater possibilities for action for European party structures. Only a party with structures at each stage where decisions are taken can fully influence this process. Therefore, the problem appears to be not so much the opposition of national parties against the transfer of certain tasks to the European structures of which they are members, for this is often unnecessary, but the insufficient activity of national parties in the field of accomplishing tasks imposed on them through the processes of integration (e.g. the shortfalls in the mobilisation of citizens to take part in elections to the EP).

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