



# Political Parties at the European Level: Their Organisation and Activities. The Case of the European People's Party and the Party of European Socialists

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## Abstract

**Abstract:** The literature devoted to political parties at the European level – also known as the ‘Europarties’ – frequently argues that due to the impact of the EU’s peculiar institutional environment and the need to adapt to it, Europarties have converged on some common organizational features. Building on neo-institutional theories of party change and adaptation, and especially on historical and sociological institutionalism, this thesis offers an alternative set of explanations for the organizational forms of the Europarties. In so doing, it brings into question both the extent of their organizational convergence and the primary focus of the literature on environmental factors, as well the limits of the few comparisons between Euro- and national level party organizations that have been made thus far.

To this end, the research focuses on the organization of the two largest Europarties – the European People’s Party (EPP) and the Party of European Socialists (PES) – and on how and why they differ from one another. Europarty organizational development is explained through an assessment of the impact of the organizational traditions of the individual member parties on their EU-level counterpart. Building on data gathered through in-depth interviews, archival research, and personal observations of party proceedings, as well as on the analysis of the formal documents, this thesis delineates and compares the organization and institutional rules of the EPP and the PES over the more than 30-year life-span of their existence, both at the formal and informal level. It also presents a thorough account of the EU legal framework providing for direct financing of Europarties and assesses its impact on their organization and activities.

This thesis demonstrates the existence of important organizational differences between the EPP and the PES relating, among other elements, to their structure, the design of their decision-making process, membership policy and how party goals are specified. This claim stems also from the argument that organizational differences between EPP and PES member parties are transmitted to the EU level, thus causing a similar variation between the EPP and the PES themselves. Therefore, choices made by politicians on the EU *transnational* party scene are influenced by the ways in which they think about *national* party politics, despite the very different institutional environment of EU politics. In this way, the more we study the Europarties, the more we learn about national political parties. It is also apparent that these organizational

choices have been relatively constant since the beginning of the EPP and the PES. Path dependency and historical institutionalism therefore prove to be especially powerful explanatory frameworks. In sum, the thesis has confirmed early assumptions that we need to look more deeply into organization of Europarties in order to gain more insight into their overall nature and role



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### **Wojciech GAGATEK**

Short bio: Wojciech Gagatek was born in Poland. He obtained his master's degrees in Political Sciences and Law from Warsaw University, specializing in European studies, during which he was granted numerous awards for scholarly achievements, including three consecutive the Award of Minister for National Education of the Republic of Poland. Furthermore, as a young activist, he inspired and was in charge of organizing several important national and international conferences on political topics, including civil liberties, European Integration and legal matters. He has also acquired work experience in the European Parliament and various think tanks and foundations.

He began his PhD studies at the EUI in 2004. On 17 December 2008, he defended his thesis entitled "Political Parties at the European Level: Their Organization and Activities". His main academic interests concern comparative political parties (with special focus on their organization); EU political institutions (with a special focus on the European Parliament) and the comparative method. He speaks English, French, German and Italian. Other interests include music, sport and travelling.

