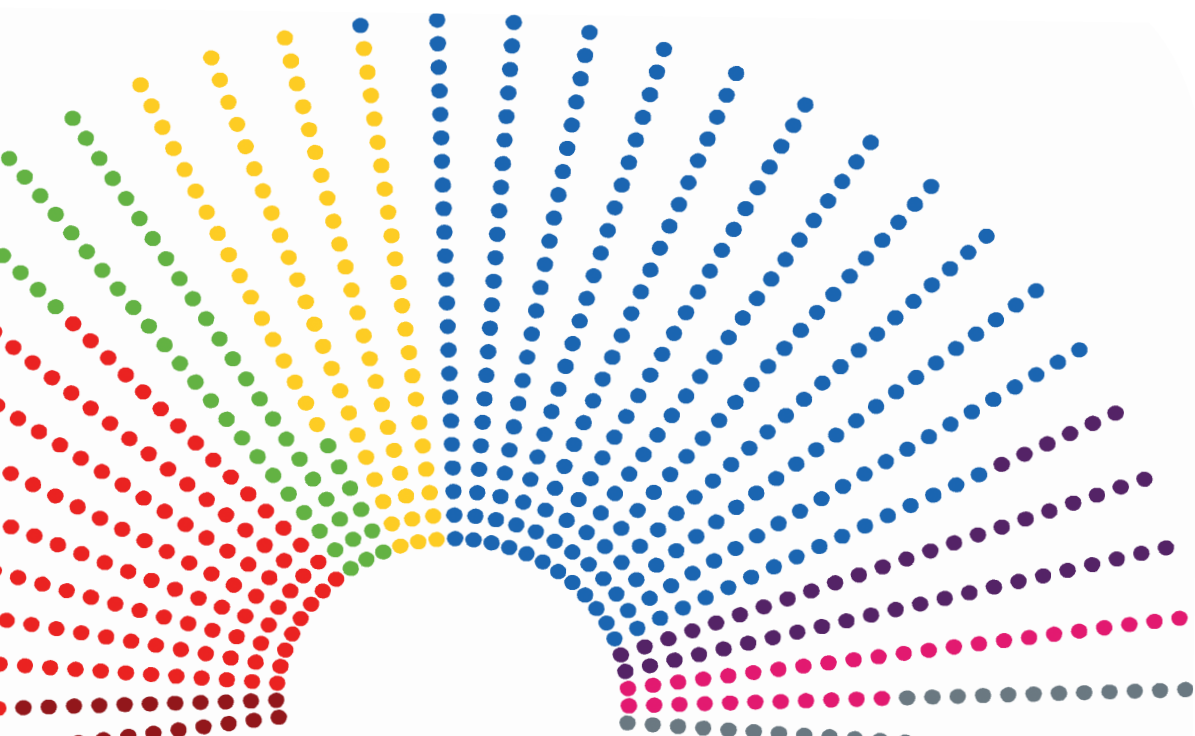


# All Tomorrow's Parties:

## The Changing Face of European Party Politics

Florian Hartleb





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## CREDITS

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## Acknowledgments

My research on party politics is rooted in my own experiences and my interest in genuine populist parties, the topic of my doctoral thesis and many other publications since 2004. Recently, my interest in this topic gained a real and unexpected European dimension through my stay as a visiting fellow at the Centre for European Studies (CES), the official political foundation of the European People's Party (EPP). First of all, I wish to thank Roland Freudenstein, head of research at the CES, who had the brilliant (and strategic) idea to come up with a study on the 'all tomorrow's parties' (the title derives from a Velvet Underground song), as well as for his inspiring comments. I am extremely grateful to Angelos-Stylianos Chrysogelos who created the concept draft. In addition, I would like to thank Tomi Huhtanen, director of the CES, for our fruitful discussions on the recent revolutionary developments in the context of political parties and for the freedom to write this paper. For their input, I do not want to neglect the great help given by Bence Bauer, Brenda Furniere, Emanuela Farris, Vít Novotný, Santiago Robles and Vesta Ratkevičiūtė. I would also like to thank Marvin DuBois and the Communicative English editing team. Personally, I hope that this paper will contribute to the important discussion about the future of our European (party) democracies. My assumptions and scenarios could turn out to be true or false, but more decisive is the discussion about the not self-evident need that our democracies have to consist of political parties which fulfil their functions of representation, control and people's participation. Rapid changes in society also produce rapid party change, in a positive or negative manner.

Brussels, May 2012

Dr Florian Hartleb

## Executive Summary

Political parties are continually under pressure, due to changes in societies, technologies and politics as a whole. But at the moment, Europe is on the threshold of a new environment that is changing the face of political parties themselves. The picture has elements both optimistic (concerning the possibilities of 'virtual' activism) and pessimistic (concerning 'real' membership and stable voting). In general, parties have to transform the tools of organisation and participation to tackle their declining memberships. New types of populist parties—virtual, 'flash', 'couch' or 'one seat' parties in which members fit on a single couch or in the case of Geert Wilders even on one chair—only arise during the electoral campaign. It is possible to observe two extreme positions or models that are attributable to the parties: one form is a strictly authoritarian leadership; the other is a more even, unfiltered participation based on a 'virtual community'. In spite of this development, strongly principled parties based on values and stable commitments could still take a lead, provided they do not embrace a loose societal modernisation.



## Introduction

'The party is thus not a meteor, confronting its inevitable burn-up. Nor is it a phoenix, rising to new glories out of the ashes of its past. It is a chameleon, permanently engaged in surveying its political landscape and transforming itself to respond to new circumstances and thus guarantee continued relevance'.<sup>1</sup>

Parties do continually change, thus reflecting dynamic processes in society. Currently, commentators in print and online media are demanding 'new parties', expressing their dissatisfaction with the established ones.<sup>2</sup> In general, politics has been depoliticised, whereas decision-making processes in reality have become ever more complex: 'Electoral competition has increasingly been reduced to a beauty contest between candidates whose claim to distinctiveness is based less and less on differences in political conviction and a substantive policy platform.'<sup>3</sup> The new anti-politics culture, at least on the national level, gives the floor to a new wave of challengers in the field of party democracies.

This is happening everywhere in Europe: in Italy, a grassroots movement called 'Movimento 5 stelle' ('Five Star Movement') has coalesced around former comedian and showman Beppe Grillo, who writes one of the world's most influential political blogs aimed at young people.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Meisel and M. Mendelsohn, 'Meteor? Phoenix? Chameleon? The Decline and Transformation of Party in Canada', in H. G. Thorburn and A. Whitehorn (eds.), *Party Politics in Canada* (Toronto: Prentice Hall/Pearson Education, 2001), 163.

<sup>2</sup> The Austrian newspaper *Salzburger Nachrichten* recently proclaimed this on page 1 (title story), in consequence of the permanent corruption scandals in the established parties, 'New parties are needed for the country'. See M. Perterer, 'Neue Parteien braucht das Land', *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 31 March 2012.

<sup>3</sup> C. Hay and G. Stoker, 'Revitalising Politics: Have We Lost the Plot?' *Representation* 45/3 (2009), 235.

In Poland the newly founded protest party Ruch Palikota was able to immediately amass 10.1% of votes at the parliamentary election in October 2011. In the Slovakian national elections in 2012, a party called Ordinary People and Independent Personalities achieved some electoral success by calling all political elites thieves (owing to some real, pre-existing corruption scandals). The Pirate Party (Piratenpartei Deutschland), a new political force of Internet freedom activists modelled on the Swedish Piratpartiet, have shaken up Germany's political scene in only a few months. The most recent national elections in Hungary in 2010 and Greece in May 2012 have shown that as a consequence of a deep crisis even extremist forces can come up and enter parliament. In modern party democracies change through globalisation processes and technological change seems to be especially rapid. Linked to such a change, which Colin Crouch<sup>4</sup> calls 'post-democratisation' or generally 'post-democracy', is an alteration of the function of political leadership. Outside of pressure groups and the mass media, strong leading personalities gain influence as they can win the trust of the electorate, bundle diverting interests and take trend-setting decisions—these actions are to be evaluated by the electorate a posteriori. Representation is now guided by changing popular moods, in a system of so-called *Stimmungsdemokratie* (democracy based on popular moods).

The new, post-representative dimensions of democracy mostly favour the educated and articulate middle classes. In civil initiatives and non-governmental organisations, and in global and European politics, as well as with regard to the use of the Internet, the labouring and lower classes, the less educated in formal terms—often also migrants—can be found less frequently, because of the difficulties of stepping

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<sup>4</sup> C. Crouch, *Post-democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

over material and cultural thresholds.<sup>5</sup> It seems that the wave of protests has arisen against austerity measures and social service cuts, against the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), and within the counter-globalisation movement against Wall Street and big business ('Occupy Wall Street'). Some intellectuals, including Canadian journalist Naomi Klein, American linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek<sup>6</sup>, and the anarchist David Graeber, spiritus rector of 'Occupy', have tried to give the counter-globalisation movement a new identity frame in the sense of titles such as 'Another world is possible' and 'We are the 99 per cent'.<sup>7</sup> Protest movements have developed as a consequence of the economic crisis in some European states. In 2011, throughout Spain, about 6 million out of a population of 46 million participated in *indignados* ('the outraged') protests. The protests spread to Greece; in 2011, an estimated 400,000 of that country's 11 million citizens marched in protest against the global situation. The US magazine *Time* chose 'The Protester' as the word of the year for 2011.<sup>8</sup> Based on the new technology and therefore on international networks, a new, third revolution of participation and social movement (after the first cultural one in the 1970s and 1980s in Western Europe and the second system-changing revolution in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989–90) could sow the seeds for new protest parties—or simply for new challengers in party politics.

In general, people tend to be more sceptical than they are trusting of democratic decision-making processes.

<sup>5</sup> P. Nolte, 'Von der Repräsentativen zur multiplen Demokratie', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 1/2 (2011), 5–12.

<sup>6</sup> All three belong to the world-wide Top 100 Public Intellectuals based on the polls conducted in November 2005 and June 2008 by *Prospect Magazine* (UK) and *Foreign Policy* (US) on the basis of the responses from ballots of readers.

<sup>7</sup> With contributions, see A. Curcio and G. Roggero (eds), *Occupy! I movimenti nella crisi globale*, (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> 'Person of the year 2011', *Times*, accessed at <http://www.time.com/time/person-of-the-year/2011/> on 5 January 2012.

In addition, a crucial tendency in European politics lies in features such as lower turnout, participation and so on. Protests today are influenced by political agendas, due to sudden, media-supported attention, which undermines parliamentary, legislative or governmental attention. There is an ambivalent, decreasing confidence in legislatures and governments, a distrust of political elites within European national systems.<sup>9</sup> This paper intends to outline the environment in which all tomorrow's parties are embedded. First, it will deal with the change in determining factors, from which we can derive diverse consequences with regard to the parties of the future. Second, the paper presents the broad categories of challenges that political parties are facing: ideological challenges (populism, extremism, flash and couch parties), values-based challenges (business firm parties, corruption), organisational challenges (personal authoritarianism of populists, decentralism of pirate parties) and representational challenges (collapse of traditional cleavages, prevalence of issue-based voting, individualisation of society). These challenges are interrelated, of course. After this, I describe some possible scenarios: the tendency for candidates to follow the US model, especially with respect to primaries; elites, especially leaders following right-wing populists; and the new belief in a pure foundation, especially in the virtual community. At the end, I analyse the consequences and give some recommendations.

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<sup>9</sup> See F. Hartleb, 'A New Protest Culture in Western Europe?', *European View* 10/1 (2011), 3–10.

## Functions of Parties in Competition

On the matter of party change, many discussions do not refer to the functions of parties on principle which is an important precondition for debate. According to the Norwegian political scientist Kaare Strøm, political parties have three goals: vote seeking, office seeking and policy seeking.

The vote-seeking criterion assumes that leaders will aim to maximise votes in order to control government; the office-seeking criterion assumes that leaders will seek to maximise the 'private goods bestowed upon recipients of politically discretionary governmental and sub-governmental appointments' — the control of elected office, often defined by government portfolios; and the policy-seeking objective assumes that leaders will seek to maximise their effect on public policy. Most competition occurs along these lines.<sup>10</sup> Parties in European democracies engage in diverse functions. The most important ones are typically these:<sup>11</sup>

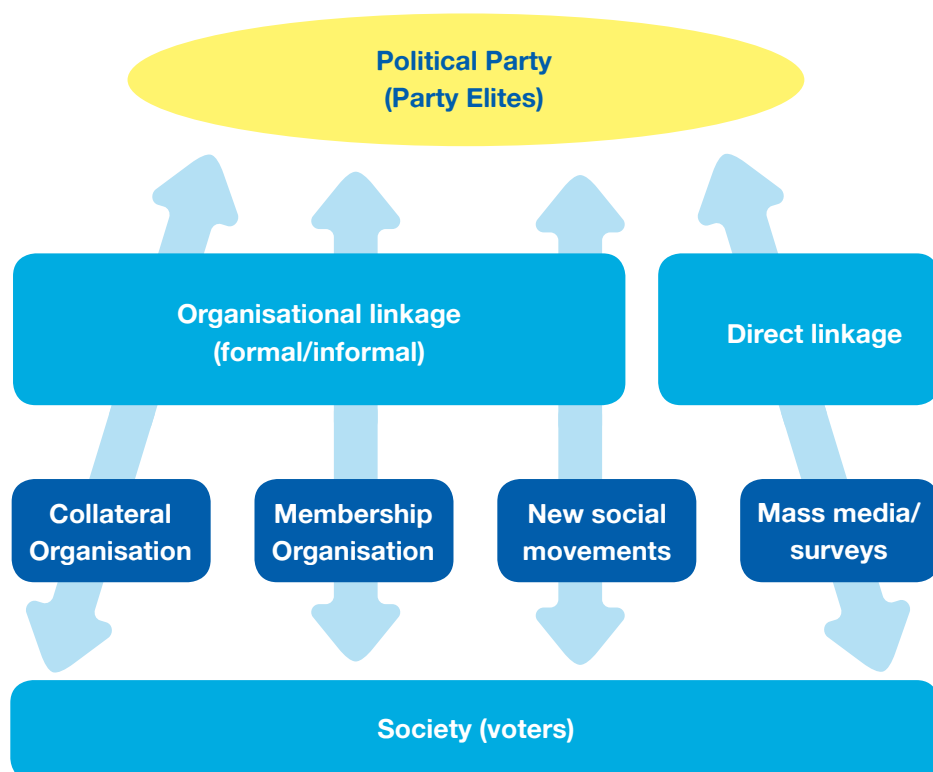
- **Representation:** Parties represent social tensions in society. Their political programmes should reflect the interests of the electoral groups represented by them. For real representation it is indispensable to have a sufficient number of votes and members.
- **Control:** Parties seek governmental power and influence over the state's decision-making process. With the aim of gaining political power, they engage in a competition with opponents.

<sup>10</sup> K. Strøm, 'A Behavioural Theory of Competitive Political Parties', *American Journal of Political Science* 34/2 (1990), 535–98.

<sup>11</sup> F. Decker, *Parteien und Parteiensysteme in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011), 16.

- **Legitimation:** Parties are institutions of the decision-making process. They should integrate by mobilising and activating the citizens for participation.

Figure 1 The Linkages between Political Parties and Society<sup>12</sup>



<sup>12</sup> Based on T. Poguntke, 'Party Organizational Linkage: Parties Without Firm Social Roots?' in K. R. Luther and F. Müller-Rommel (eds), *Political Parties in the New Europe: Political and Analytical Challenges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 43–62.

- **Socialising and elite recruitment:** Parties are career vehicles. Achieving high-ranking party office is often a result of years-long party activities and leads generally to high-ranking state and government offices within successful parties. Parties are crucial as channels of influence in the political inner circles of parliament, government and bureaucracy. Parties also serve as exclusive gates of access to public offices and bureaucracy, and have many high-ranking officials and advisors among their members.

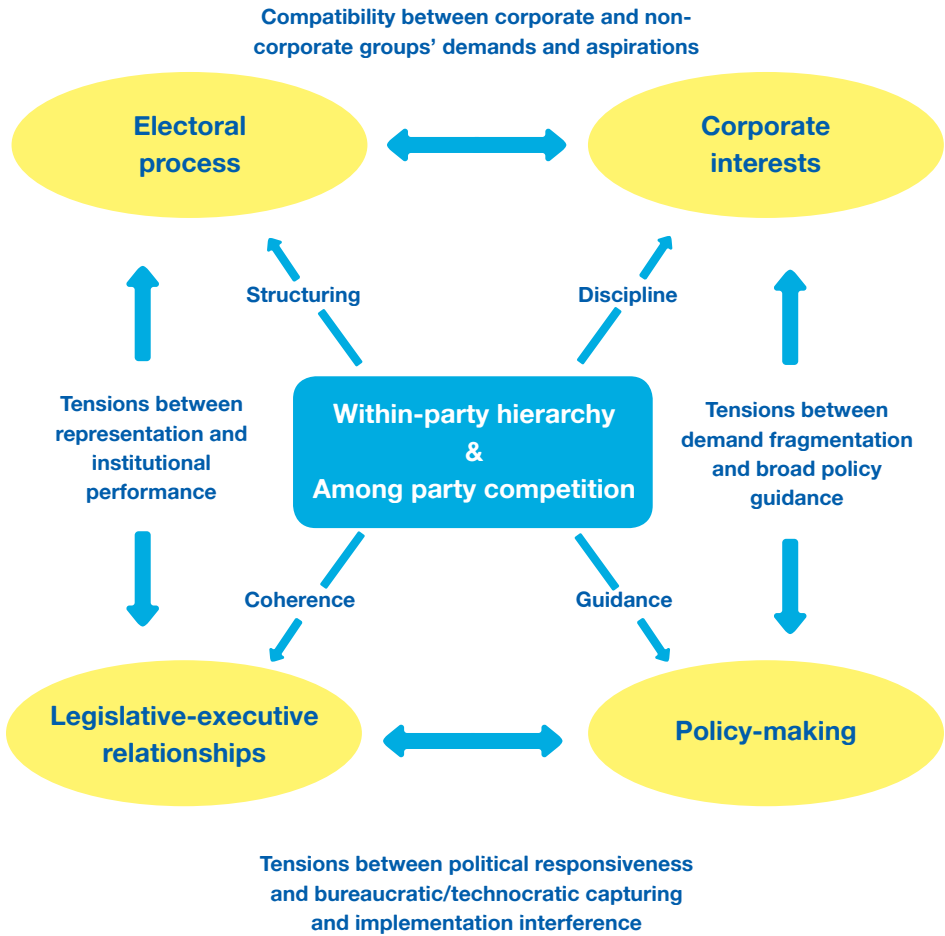
Because of these functions, political parties have gained a hegemonic role in the established European democracies. Therefore, parties provide an organisational linkage, a stable bridge to the society.

The linkages between parties and society are not stable or at least are not transparent any more. Going back to the compatibility between corporate and non-corporate groups and parties, the Western party democracies have provided long-term stability with the emergence of party families such as the Christian democrat, social democrat, liberal and, later, green parties. Significantly, the 'golden era' of political parties, that stretched between the 1940s and the 1990s, is over. In this period, parties in Western Europe proved able to structure the electorate, to discipline the corporate interest, to give coherence to legislative–executive relations and to guide policy output.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> S. Bartolini, 'Political Parties, Ideology and Populism in the Post-crisis Europe', Poros conference paper (July 2011), accessed at <http://europeanseminars.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Stefano-Bartolini-Paper.pdf> on 5 January 2012.

Figure 2 The Hegemonic Role of Political Parties.<sup>14</sup>



<sup>14</sup> S. Bartolini, Political parties, Ideology and Populism in the Post-crisis Europe, Poros conference paper (July 2011), accessed at <http://europeanseminars.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Stefano-Bartolini-Paper.pdf> on 5 January 2012.



Political parties, especially in Western Europe, have been encountering 'significant problems of disenchantment'<sup>15</sup> since the beginning of the twenty-first century, which challenge their hegemonic roles in European party democracies. As a result, political parties can no longer fulfil the traditional functions described in the political science literature. At the very least, the representation and legitimisation functions are endangered. The latter is also challenged by spontaneous civil initiatives outshining parties. In Europe people go into the streets more often than in the recent past, since 1968 and excluding 1989–90, to protest against policies such as austerity and major infrastructural projects (such as Stuttgart 21 in Germany). The new approach confronts governments on different levels, after decisions have passed through democratic institutions such as parliaments.

Parties have usually been studied in the past by focusing on the different types of challenges they are facing. Traditional class structure was characterised by a division in social groups (e.g. affiliation with the church or with the trade unions) that identified with a specific political party. Economic development has caused the disaggregation of social groups, the weakening of loyalty to any political party and, in consequence, the de-alignment of the electoral market. As well, the rise of 'new' post-materialist values<sup>16</sup> such as ecology, peace and gender, has brought new issues into the political agenda. Parties compete on issues that are not structured by a left–right pattern anymore.

On the one hand, increasingly there are political parties and leaders that seek a mandate based not on party

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<sup>15</sup> P. Webb, 'Political Parties in Western Europe: Linkage, Legitimacy and Reform', *Representation* 37/3–4 (2000), 203–14.

<sup>16</sup> R. Inglehart, 'The Changing Structure of Political Cleavages in Western Society', in R. J. Dalton, S. C. Flanagan and P. A. Beck (eds), *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies: Re-alignment or Dealignment?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 25–69.

ideologies, but on concrete promises to achieve specific preset targets. On the other hand, new issues, such as immigration, have to a large extent become integrated into the left–right dimension, at least at the party level. In response to these changes, political parties have begun to seek support not exclusively on the basis of identification with the social group whose interests they claim to represent, but also among other social groups in society. Voters, in turn, vote increasingly on the basis of political issues, and various scholars have noted that the decline of structural voting has gone hand in hand with an increase in issue-based voting.<sup>17</sup>

## Changing Framework for Political Parties

### Decline of the Traditional Established Parties

Mainstream parties after 1945, despite clear Christian or social democratic roots, frequently became ‘catch-all’ parties, concerned with maximising votes. Across Europe, once-dominant political parties are experiencing a fragmentation of their support. Some ‘natural’ parties of government, such as Fianna Fáil (FF) in Ireland and the Social Democrats in Sweden, are out in the cold after decades of hegemony. In Britain and Germany systems in

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<sup>17</sup> W. van der Brug and S. Kritzinger, *Electoral Change in the 21st Century: Dealignment or Realignment?* European Consortium for Political Research Standing Group on Voting Behaviour and Public Opinion, accessed at <http://povb-ecpr.org/node/25> on 25 February 2012.

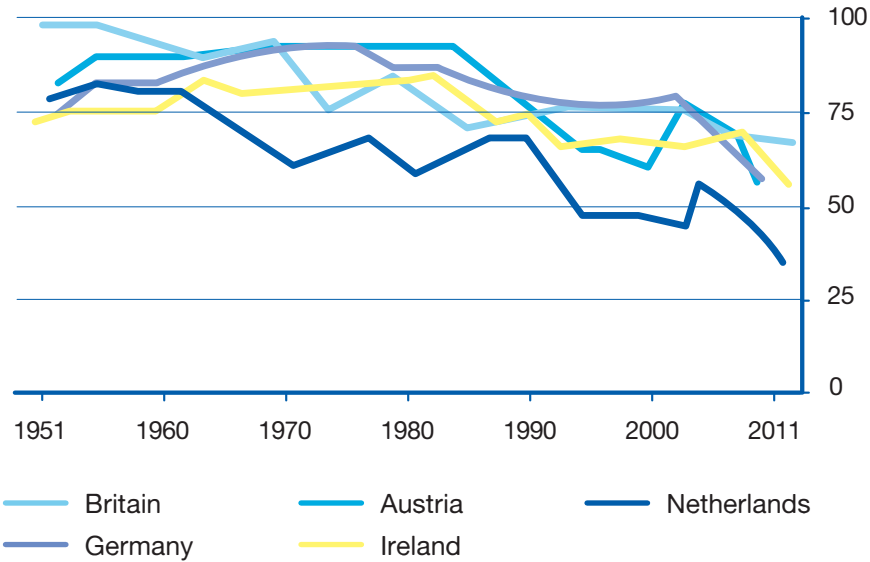
which power alternated between the centre-left and centre-right for generations have been upset by the strength of smaller parties. A new politics has emerged in which old allegiances have frayed, political identities have blurred and voters' trust in familiar parties has crumbled. One result is that voter turnout has fallen almost everywhere. Recent elections have laid bare the established parties' woes, but the causes go back decades. One is the decline of institutions that linked individuals to parties—the church in countries with a tradition of Christian democracy, or trade unions that channelled funds (and votes) to left-wing parties.<sup>18</sup> A particular challenge for the mainstream parties is the division and fragmentation of society. This puts pressure on these parties, which have to implement ever more intense integration efforts to further bond the various groups and environments. This drifting apart within the mainstream parties shows the cracks in contemporary societies.

The fragmentation process within the mainstream parties should constitute a wake-up call: The social cohesion that establishes the solidarity of European society is basically under fire. Across Europe, once-dominant political parties are seeing their support fragment. Recent elections have laid bare the established parties' woes, but the causes go back decades. With pews empty and unions shrinking to a mostly public-sector rump, old parties are seeing their membership lists shrivel and their financing dry up. Voting has become more a matter of consumer choice than of ideological fealty. The cosy consensus that so often marked post-war politics is gone.

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<sup>18</sup> 'The Shrinking Big Tents', *Economist*, 28 April 2011, accessed at <http://www.economist.com/node/18621743>, on 25 February 2012.

**Figure 3 The Two Main Parties' Share of the Parliamentary Vote in Britain, Austria, Germany, Ireland and the Netherlands, 1951–2011, by Percentage of Votes<sup>19</sup>**



Source: parties-and-elections.de

A severe example of this is the crisis in Greece which was visible in the elections in May 2012: Anger over punishing austerity cuts pushed voters towards a number of protest parties, including the far-left Syriza party, which unseated scores of socialist and conservative backbenchers, and the fascist far-right Golden Dawn party, whose anti-immigrant stand and thuggish tactics have sparked widespread

<sup>19</sup> 'The Shrinking Big Tents', *Economist*, 28 April 2011.

concern. The parties of Central and Eastern Europe are highly disparate. Among voters, there is also little faith in the institutions. In the still turbulent political landscape, feelings against parties and the establishment can be easily exploited. The classic formation of established parties is therefore still in process. In Hungary the picture of the last election, in 2010, has changed dramatically since the impression given at that time that the two major parties—Fidesz on the centre-right and the social democratic MSZP<sup>20</sup>—would be the main competitors. MSZP has declined significantly; due to a loss of credibility, common dissatisfaction with politics has led to the emergence of new parties.

### Decline of Party Membership

Concerning party membership, the European landscape varies a lot.<sup>21</sup> Whereas on average, memberships generally have declined, the total party membership as a percentage of the electorate is high in a few countries, although in most countries it is less than 4%. Taking all the newer democracies from 1989/1990 together, it can be observed that the average level of party membership totals 3.5%, as against an average of 5.7% for the longer established Western democracies. Considerable exceptions to these low rates of party memberships in European democracies are Austria with 17.27% in 2008, the Republic of Cyprus (Greek) with 16.25% in 2009, Finland with 8.08% in 2006 and Greece with 6.59% in 2008. All the post-Communist countries (with the exceptions of Slovenia with 6.28% and Estonia with 4.87% in 2008) fall below the average

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<sup>20</sup> Magyar Szocialista Párt (Hungarian Socialist Party).

<sup>21</sup> I. van Biezen, P. Mair and T. Poguntke, 'Going, Going, . . . Gone? The Decline of Party Membership in Contemporary Europe', *European Journal of Political Research* 51 (2011), 24–56.

concerning total party membership as a percentage of the electorate. Located at the extremely low end of the spectrum are Latvia and Poland, where levels of membership fail to reach even 1%, as well as Britain, Hungary, France and the Czech Republic, where they register under 2%.

In the old democracies the raw numbers of membership have fallen dramatically. In the United Kingdom and France parties have lost around one million members over the past three decades, leaving them with two-thirds of the membership recorded around 1980. Membership in the Scandinavian countries, and Norway and Sweden in particular, has fallen in a similar way: in Denmark from 7.3% of the electorate holding party membership in 1980 to 4.13% in 2008, in Finland from 15.74% in 1980 to 8.08% in 2006, in Sweden from 8.41% 1980 to 4.36% in 2008 and in Norway, dramatically, from 15.35% in 1980 to 5.04% in 2008. *In none of the long-established Western democracies have raw memberships fallen by less than 25%! Only the three southern democracies buck the overall trend.* The data lead to the conclusion that 'party membership has now reached such a low ebb that it may no longer constitute a relevant indicator of party organisational capacity'.<sup>22</sup> The number of active members is strongly associated with the ability to mobilise voters. This can be seen in the national and international comparison of election results.<sup>23</sup> The mobilisation weakness of established parties is also due to their loss of members. This is exactly why they want to provide new incentives for membership.

<sup>22</sup> I. van Biezen et al., 'Going, Going . . . Gone?', 24.

<sup>23</sup> K. von Beyme, *Parteien im Wandel. Von den Volksparteien zu den professionalisierten Wählerparteien* (Opladen: Westdeutscher, 2000), 108.

The reasons for decline in party membership are not totally clear. Many argue that it is because of general changes in society, whereas others see the reason in the changing parties themselves. The various reasons demonstrate that it is too early to figure out the precise causes and consequences of the party membership decline.

Table 1 Party Membership Decline – Two Possible Reasons

Macro-level explanations	Meso-level explanations
Societal change	Organisational evolution of parties
Individualisation	Professionalisation
Secularisation	Personification
Working class decline	Mass media campaign
<i>Social bonds weakening</i>	<i>Members not needed anymore</i>

Sociological studies on disengagement show two kinds of causes for disengagement, latent causes (such as the structural decline of parties) and punctual causes (such as electoral defeat, leadership change or conflicts in parties).

### Emergence of New Parties

The foundation and electoral success of a new party can be attributed mainly to three factors:<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> P. Lucardie: ‘Prophets, Purifiers and Prolocutors. Towards a Theory on the Emergence of New Parties’, Party Politics 6/2 (2000), 175-85.

1. Its political project, which should address problems considered urgent by substantial sections of the electorate;
2. Its resources: members, money, management, innovation, coverage in mass media;
3. The political opportunity structure: institutional, socio-economic and cultural conditions. This includes the configuration of power in the party system and the formal access to the state; informal procedures and political culture are also worthy of remark.

The main decisive question for new challengers is do they only represent protests or campaign on issues based on new tensions, needs or changes in society? In this sense, the three factors affect different types of new parties differently:

1. 'Prophetic' parties which articulate a new ideology,
2. 'Purifiers' which want to 'clean' the system of corruption within the establishment and the established parties,
3. 'Prolocutors' which represent interests neglected by established parties.<sup>25</sup>

New challenges for the traditional parties include

- nationalistic right-wing populist parties with anti-Islamism (fear of migration) as a winning formula (in Western Europe); with authoritarian leadership styles;

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<sup>25</sup> P. Lucardie, 'Prophets, Purifiers and Prolocutors'.



- unconventional 'clown' parties or movements, such as Palikot's Movement in Poland or Beppe Grillo in Italy;
- leadership-based, but simultaneously grassroots-oriented movements with successful blogs, rooted in campaigning (e.g. showman and comedian Beppe Grillo in Italy);
- parties strictly distinct from regular politicians, such those in Slovakia (e.g. 'Ordinary People');
- leftist 'lifestyle' parties like the new green parties in Central and Eastern Europe;
- pirate parties which use the Internet for participation and promoting freedom of access without data protection;
- more generally, according to the trend of individualisation in societies, single-issue parties based on a polarising, mobilising issue such as the freedom of the Internet or taboo topics (especially in the fields of migration or the social cohesion of societies); and
- groups splitting away from the mainstream parties, claiming to re-establish the social democratic or conservative agenda (such as The Left in Germany).

Have the political parties reached a new age of instability in the twenty-first century? The tendency of stability was reinforced after 1945 by the fact that Western European societies became less socially divided and more economically equal. Also, the ideological contradiction of the three classic political streams of the nineteenth century, liberalism, conservatism and socialism, created a clear picture. This process provided fewer opportunities for

insurgent parties to exploit grievances, although occasional 'flash' movements rose and quickly fell, by playing on transitory grievances.<sup>26</sup> The institutionalisation of a party system is a process which takes time. In Central and Eastern Europe, aside from parties that were derived from old, often inter-war, systems and that were somewhat transformed into the new reality, due to high volatility in elections, there arose numerous, often weak, new parties, without much of a member base (sarcastically called couch parties, because all the members could fit on one couch),<sup>27</sup> or public support, or any parliamentary experience. Sometimes, flash parties emerge that start strong but soon die. The most important features of party development in countries such as Armenia, Georgia or Azerbaijan since independence, that distinguish it from party development in a majority of the Eastern and Central European states, are the highly unstable supply of parties and the semi-authoritarian or politically ambiguous background against which multiparty politics has evolved. Most relevant parties position themselves as centre-right, speak out in favour of pro-market reforms and consider Euro-Atlantic cooperation as the top priority of foreign policy.<sup>28</sup>

However, two decades after the system change of 1989/90, the process of party consolidation has often led to the elimination of ineffective parties. There are still so-

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<sup>26</sup> R. Eatwell, 'The Rebirth of the Extreme Right in Western Europe?', *Parliamentary Affairs* 53 (2000), 414.

<sup>27</sup> This has been evident in Poland, especially in the 1990s. In 1991, only 42% of the eligible electorate voted in the parliamentary elections, which saw 29 different parties elected to the lower house, including the Polish Party of the Friends of Beer (Beer Lovers' Party) as a joke party, which won 16 seats in the lower house of parliament in 1991, capturing 2.97% of the vote. Originally, the party's goal was to promote cultural beer drinking in English-style pubs, instead of vodka consumption. The party soon split into Large Beer and Small Beer factions leading to the term couch parties being applied by T. Bale and A. Szczerbiak in *Why Is There No Christian Democracy in Poland (and Why Does This Matter?)* (Sussex Working Paper, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> M. Bader, 'Fluid Party Politics and the Challenge for Democratic Assistance in Georgia', *Caucasian Review for International Affairs* 2/2 (2008), 84–93.

called critical elections or political realignment,<sup>29</sup> describing a dramatic change in the political system. Usually this signals the coming of a new political force or coalition to governmental power, replacing an old dominant coalition and the political forces. Supply-side volatility occurs when a party that won votes at one election disappears from the ballot and new parties appear at the next. Voters cannot hold politicians accountable by reaffirming or withdrawing their support from one election to the next and may be attracted to 'flash parties', which have no record on which they can be judged. A flash party with some features of protest is one that appears suddenly in the political landscape, as is currently the case in Poland (Palikot's Movement, in the national parliament since 2011), Slovakia (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities, in parliament since 2012), Hungary (LMP,<sup>30</sup> in the national parliament since 2010) and Germany (Pirates, in Berlin since 2011, entering other parliaments and with remarkable results in national polls). A flash party is often focused on a single issue, and once it makes progress on that issue—or not, as the case may be—it becomes electorally insignificant or non-existent.

A high level of supply-side volatility creates a 'floating system of parties'.<sup>31</sup> According to expert Herbert Kitschelt in 2000, most parties in Eastern and Central Europe can be seen as combining programmatic, clientelistic and charismatic elements in different proportions.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, the picture has changed, in some respects showing

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<sup>29</sup> See, for the concept, P. Norris, 'A Critical Election? Understanding the Outcome of the Next Election', *Politics Review* 6/4 (1997), 2–6.

<sup>30</sup> Lehet Más a Politika ('Another politics is possible').

<sup>31</sup> R. Rose, 'A Supply-side View of Russia's Elections', *East European Constitutional Review* 9/1–2 (2000), 53–9.

<sup>32</sup> H. Kitschelt, 'Linkages Between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Polities', *Comparative Political Studies* 33/6–7 (2000), 845–79.

similarities with the traditional Western European party systems. In general, the results have led to big changes, and even to some eruptions: The Polish parliamentary election of 2005 resulted in a widely expected heavy defeat for the post-Communist Democratic Left Alliance government, with conservative parties such as Law and Justice and Civic Platform emerging as the dominant parties in Poland. Previously, the main paradigm had been between the centre-right and the extreme populist right, after the decline of the socialists and social democrats. But in Western Europe, as well, there is much fluctuation in times of less loyalty to the parties and more spontaneous voting. In the Irish general election in 2011 Fianna Fáil (FF), which had governed Ireland for most of the post-independence era, was heavily defeated, following anger over Ireland's financial crisis. For the first time, Fine Gael overtook FF to win the most votes and seats, while FF fell from first place to third place in terms of votes and seats.

As big parties all over Europe are faced with problems such as lower milieu adhesion, decreasing support from voters and general crises, it is not surprising that new competitors are emerging. The big wave of change in Western Europe took place at the beginning of the 1980s when the 'green' movement established itself with a kind of 'lifestyle politics'. This kind of beachhead cannot occur in unlimited numbers, as the established parties always have advantages in competition.

First, the initial actors in party politics have the opportunity to design and redesign the electoral rules. Second, public financing of parties can be considered a hurdle, as it is primarily or even only directed towards the parties already represented, and particularly the more heavily represented ones. This constitutes an important additional advantage for the incumbent parties, the more

so because the nature of party work and campaigning is argued to be capital intensive in modern cartel-party systems.<sup>33</sup> Third, stabilisers can also be included in party laws and other regulations regarding their formation and activities. These may make the advent of new parties more complicated (e.g. through membership requirements) and their continuation more demanding. For instance, the Estonian law on parties prescribes 1,000 as the minimum number of members for registering a party.

With the emergence of green-alternative movements based on a post-material shift of values in vast parts of Western European society, it is unlikely that today there could be a societal erosion comparable to the post-1968 zeitgeist. Notwithstanding this, individually felt uncertainty is increasing in the course of stronger economic globalisation and new cultural narratives in all social milieus, more or less distinctively. This development inevitably poses the question of which meaningful, distinctive symbols, such as patriotism and identity, should and could interdependent European societies exercise at all. Anti-immigrant sentiments have in recent years been associated with radical right parties with authoritarian leanings and traditions. Now anti-immigrant feelings seem to be feeding into the emergence of a new kind of populism claiming to defend liberal democracy from outside influences.

The Europe-wide success of right-wing populist parties is proven by the electoral results in individual countries. Since the early 1980s novel, mainly nationalistic right-wing populist parties with an anti-establishment attitude, protest issues and a charismatic leading personality have had electoral successes in France, Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Scandinavia and Finland, as new competitors.

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<sup>33</sup> R. S. Katz and P. Mair, 'Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party', *Party Politics* 1/1 (1995), 5–31.

Also in Central and Eastern Europe, populism is having its effects.<sup>34</sup> The authoritarian leadership structure, which lacks intra-party democracy, is ostentatious.

What populism has to offer is orientation, as it is a movement that 'personalises' the solution to problems. Paul Taggart defines some characteristics of populism and populists:<sup>35</sup>

- Populists are hostile to representative politics in the sense of anti-elitism.
- Populists identify themselves with an idealised heartland within the community they favour.
- Populists offer simple solutions to complicated problems.
- Populism is an ideology lacking core values.
- Populism is a powerful reaction to a sense of extreme crisis.
- Populism is a chameleon, adopting the colours of its environment.

The rise of populism has some real, existing conflicts within modern representative democracies:

- Populism is a substitute for the eroded left-right divide in politics. It replaces it through the populist cleavage of 'the establishment' versus 'the people'. The elites are perceived as false unities and indeed pose a potential threat to the pluralist and constitutional dimensions of democracy.

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<sup>34</sup> For an overview combined with an in-depth analysis, see C. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> P. Taggart, *Populism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 2.

- Populism is a revolt against the powerlessness of the political class, who have lost all control (to the forces of globalisation, the financial markets and the logic of the EU).

Overall, right-wing populists have shown themselves to have solid electoral roots, and they are even increasingly garnering the favour of voters in some locations, although there are fluctuations. New challengers are entering the fray, as in Sweden in 2010 or in Finland in 2011. For moderate rightists, this means having to include tiresome rivals in their alliance considerations, if they do not want to lose their potential majority over the leftists. In this way, right-wing populists became 'socially acceptable' at the beginning of the decade and were able to participate in government in a number of states, either directly (Austria, Italy and the Netherlands) or indirectly (also the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway). Right-wing populism consists of a conglomerate made up of trends that appeal to the 'man in the street', rather than to specific social strata, classes, professional groups or interests. It treats both privileged strata and fringe groups as scapegoats for outrages in society. Its structures are characterised by the fact that it consists of loosely organised movements with a broad base, rather than traditional political parties. There are thus two central aspects:<sup>36</sup>

- The *vertical* dimension is a general characteristic of populism, the dissociation from the political classes (institutions and traditional parties). The attitude is one of 'us' against 'the powers that be'.

<sup>36</sup> F. Hartleb, *After Their Establishment: Right-wing Populist Parties in Europe* (Brussels: Centre for European Studies/Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2011), 24.

- The *horizontal* dimension is a specifically right-wing variant of populism, the dissociation from immigrants, aliens and criminals: the attitude of 'us' against 'the outsiders'.

The Dutchman Geert Wilders is in fact the only member of his party, which constitutes a complete departure from the usual concept of member parties, leading to couch or even one-seat parties.<sup>37</sup> Intra-party debates are only marginally welcome in right-wing populist parties, as the direction is imposed by the leading figure. Contrary to early predictions that they would disappear over time, or that their fortunes were intimately tied to economic cycles, these parties have recruited loyal electorates and proven stubbornly persistent. For many observers the constant successes are surprising, as is the stability of some right-wing populist challengers. Right-wing populist parties are demonstrating an ability to reinvent themselves. In Austria Heinz-Christian Strache has replaced Jörg Haider at the helm of the Freedom Party of Austria, and in France, Marine Le Pen successfully took the place of her father as the leader of the Front National in the presidential elections of 2012.<sup>38</sup>

There are four dimensions that always seem to constitute a structural and typological guideline for right-wing populist challengers:

- *Technical dimension*: Populism simplifies and creates a direct contrast between a 'people', regarded as homogeneous, and the establishment. The anti-elitist stance is displayed through chronic, inflammatorily accentuated protests in the sense of the 'taboo breaker'.

<sup>37</sup> Of course, Wilders uses modern technology to gain support. In 2012 he created a website, titled 'Report Middle and Eastern Europeans', asking people whether they have been annoyed by noise, drunkenness or squalor associated with migrant workers, or have lost jobs to them. The Vlaams Belang followed this example.

<sup>38</sup> Hartleb, *After Their Establishment*, 24.



- *Content-related dimension:* Populism presents itself as a kind of 'anti-ism' with concrete content. In this sense, an anti-Islam tendency within European right-wing populism has become a talking point in recent times. Other enemy stereotypes are 'global capitalists', 'social parasites' and immigrants.
- *Personal dimension:* An eloquent and charismatic leader is often recognised as the speaker in populist movements, as the advocate of the 'will of the people', who fights the establishment in a manner similar to Robin Hood.
- *Media dimension:* The mass media—in particular, the tabloids—often enter into a symbiotic relationship with populist movements, hoping for headlines.

Thus, the definition of the phenomenon is simple enough: populism, which has appeared since the 1980s in Western Europe (with the variants of right-wing and left-wing populism), refers to parties and movements that fight with a polarising attitude 'against the powers that be', in particular, traditional people's parties, thus playing the 'advocate of the homogeneous people'.

Populist parties can be described as:

- 'anti-party' parties (against the traditional organisational structure of parties),
- anti-establishment parties (against the political, economic and social elites),
- taboo-breaking parties (especially on topics such as immigration, the EU, etc.),

- parties of simplification (especially in the context of multi-level-governance), and
- parties of a charismatic leader.

Populism can also take the form of a left-wing movement, mobilising around emotional topics such as peace, ecology and social issues.<sup>39</sup> The Greens started in the 1980s as anti-party parties. In addition, socialist parties in the Netherlands and in Germany (The Left) have some features similar to right-wing populist parties. Also, some leaders are often described as left-wing populists, such as Robert Fico in Slovakia. After the elections in 2006, to gain power, he even constructed a coalition including the right-wing radical Slovak National Party.

Few directly anti-constitutional right-wing forces are able to gain even 1% of the vote in national elections in Europe. The most successful example, and as such, an exception in Europe, is the dogmatic Jobbik party in Hungary. In the European Parliament elections of June 2009, this new right-wing extremist force in Hungary created an uproar. Jobbik, founded in 2004 by anti-Communist students, received 14.8% of the vote in their first run and became the third strongest political force in the country, trailing the Socialists. In the national elections of 2010 Jobbik even achieved 16.7% of the vote. The name Jobbik is a revealing pun in Hungarian, being a grammatical comparative of 'good' and 'right'. With slogans such as 'Hungary belongs to the Hungarians', the Hungarian Jobbik party is not only right-wing extremist, anti-Roma and anti-Semitic, but also seriously Eurosceptic.<sup>40</sup> In April 2012, Jobbik proposed to

<sup>39</sup> F. Hartleb, *Rechts- und Linkspopulismus. Eine Fallstudie anhand von Schill-Partei und PDS* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaft, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> M. Barlai and F. Hartleb, 'Rechtsextremismus als Posttransformationsphänomen – der Fall Ungarn', *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* 7/1 (2010), 83–104.

'protect public morals and the mental health of the young generations' by banning the popularisation of 'sexual deviancy'. Targets are 'homosexuality, sex changes, transvestitism, bisexuality and paedophile behaviour'. The proposed amendments would criminalise anyone who 'popularises their sexual relations –deviancy– with another person of the same sex, or other disturbances of sexual behaviour, before the wider public'.<sup>41</sup> This would result in three years in prison for offenders according to Jobbik's proposal, and would presumably apply to participants in Gay Pride events. The face of the campaign for the 2009 European elections, on central display on all election posters, was Krisztina Morvai. She was formerly a women's rights activist, working on the expert committee of the United Nations and lecturing on criminal law at the public (state run and prestigious!) Loránd Eötvös University in Budapest, but has since become a fanatic right-wing extremist. Another example of an extremist party with some degree of power is the third strongest force in the Czech political landscape, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, which can be seen in many ways as an anti-system party.

The political landscape is also enlarged by single-issue or flash parties appearing from nowhere and getting into parliament. Often they use provocative issues. Predominantly in Central and Eastern Europe, developments 20 years after the transition are still driving a lot of changes in the post-transformation period. Relatively weak civil society and dissatisfaction with political institutions offer free spots for new competitors. In Hungary, with the newly founded LMP<sup>42</sup> as a green party, for the first time ever a

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<sup>41</sup> 'Jobbik Seeks "Gay propaganda" ban' Budapest Times, accessed at <http://www.budapesttimes.hu/2012/04/19/jobbik-seeks-gay-propaganda-ban/> on 26 April 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Lehet Más a Politika ('Another politics is possible').

green party was able to enter Parliament after the elections in 2010. In the Slovakian national elections in 2012, a party called Ordinary People and Independent Personalities achieved some electoral success by calling, in true populist style, all political elites thieves (owing to some real, pre-existing corruption scandals).<sup>43</sup>

In Poland the newly founded protest party Ruch Palikota was able to immediately amass 10.1% of votes at the parliamentary election in October 2011. Palikot can be considered a philosophical 'political clown'. The movement—aligned to the party chairman and namesake, like the right-wing populists Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands and the Schill Party in Hamburg<sup>44</sup>—campaigns for less state intervention, a rejection of the Catholic Church, economic liberalism, legalising of soft drugs and cost-free access to the Internet.<sup>45</sup> In Italy, former comedian and showman Beppe Grillo started in 2010 a leadership-based grassroots movement called 'Movimento 5 stelle' (5 Star Movement), based on political blogs<sup>46</sup> and aimed at young people. People join, by the Internet, who 'believe in ideals like honesty and direct democracy, and saying that politicians are only subordinates of the people and that they should work for the country only for a short time and only if they are not condemned for crimes, and thinking about the

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<sup>43</sup> See the blog SME (Slovakian Ordinary People and Independent Personalities), accessed at <http://matovic.blog.sme.sk/> on 3 April 2012. In particular, past and present Prime Minister Robert Fico is attacked there.

<sup>44</sup> F. Hartleb, 'Auf- und Abstieg der Hamburger Schill-Partei', in H. Zehetmair (ed.), *Das deutsche Parteiensystem. Perspektiven für das 21. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004), 213–27.

<sup>45</sup> R. Vetter, 'Zweite Chance für Tusk: Die Parlamentswahlen in Polen', *Osteuropa* 61/11 (2011), 27–42.

<sup>46</sup> Beppe Grillo's blog on <http://www.beppegrillo.it/> (accessed 26 April 2012), also available in English and Japanese (!). The blog was started in October 2005 and by 2008 it was already among the top ranking ones worldwide (see [http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1725323\\_1727246,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1725323_1727246,00.html), accessed on 26 April 2012).

problems of their country without any other interest'.<sup>47</sup> Grillo, born in 1948, often attacks politicians on superficial issues and their private lives in a satirical style, claiming to be anti-politician with an emphasis on ecology ('anti-elitist green movement'). The comedian also promises a new politics in Italy 'after Berlusconi' and direct Internet-ecology.

Grillo leans to the political left, but he spares neither side in his sold-out shows and popular blog. The problem, in his view, is the system itself.<sup>48</sup> Actions include 'cleaning up parliament', using the list of names of Italian representatives in the Italian and European Parliaments that have been convicted of a crime. The movement will truly only have the chance to be a party after the next round of elections when it will campaign not only in some regions but also nationally. The five stars represent the five basic points of the shared programme: water, environment, transport, connectivity, growth. The blog is sometimes ranked among the 10 most visited blogs in the world. As with the equally new left-alternative Pirates in Germany, these new parties are targeting youth and protesting against the behaviours of the establishment. Traditional forms of politics can only remain sustainable if political parties make an effort to reach out to youth cultures, without surrendering the pillars of sensible and sustainable politics in the interest of opportunism and pragmatism.

<sup>47</sup> In 2005, his blog was so successful that *Time* magazine named him one of the Europeans of the year for his work in public information and communications. In September 2007 Grillo held his infamous 'V Day' rally, where the 'V' stood for *Vaffanculo* ('f\*\*\* off'), during which he collected 350,000 signatures for proposed legislation that would 'clean up' parliament. Grillo delivered his petition but parliament paid little or no attention.

<sup>48</sup> I. Fisher, 'In a Funk, Italy Sings an Aria of Disappointment', *New York Times*, 13 December 2007, accessed at, [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/13/world/europe/13italy.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=1&ei=5087&em&en=e9cd7b1e90c17196&ex=1197694800](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/13/world/europe/13italy.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&ei=5087&em&en=e9cd7b1e90c17196&ex=1197694800) on 13 April 2012.

## Changing Party Types: Towards Cyber Parties?

After 1945, especially in Germany and Italy, most of the parties wanted to rehabilitate themselves and to promote democracy.<sup>49</sup> Everywhere in Western Europe, parties of 'mass integration' were recognised as the protagonists of democratic life, internally organised from the grassroots on the basis of pluralism. In these conditions, parties were not only encouraged to grow and organise; they also moved to become one with society, which they vowed to promote politically. Of course, the society with which conservative or Christian Democratic parties were in dialogue was different from that of the socialist parties. Parties also coordinated close links to associations and institutions such as trade unions (socialist parties) and churches (Christian Democrat parties), creating branches for youth, women, seniors, special professions and so forth. The 'transformation' of political parties from the nineteenth century to the present is expressed through ideal models that seek to consider the relationships between voters and members and the linkage and communication between the party elites and the grassroots, and society in general. Most remarkably, as early as 1988, Italian scholar Angelo Panebianco identified a new type of party, which remains relevant in light of developments that continue to the present day. He identified the electoral professional party, which he contrasted with the mass bureaucratic party. For him, the electoral professional party has much in common with the catch-all party, with features such as de-ideologisation, weak electoral links

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<sup>49</sup> In Germany after 1945, two parties were banned through a decision of the federal constitutional court (Bundesverfassungsgericht), the openly Nazi-oriented Socialist Reich Party of Germany in 1952 and the Communist Party of Germany in 1956.

Table 2 Political Parties by Type: Development and Categories<sup>50</sup>

	Caucus Party	Mass Party	Catch-all Party	Cartel Party	Cyber Party
<b>Emergence</b>	19th century	1880–1960	1945–	1970–	Late 1990s
<b>Origins</b>	Caucus of the elite	Increasing gap within society (new class of proletarians through the effects of industrialisation)	Existing elite or mass parties	Growth of state funding of parties; falling membership; rise of electronic media in election campaigns	Changing patterns of political participation; mixed electoral systems; web-based technologies & the Internet
<b>Claim to Support</b>	Traditional status of leaders	Represents a social group	Skill at governing	Diminishing competition between established parties	Direct link to voters; lively competition for voters' multiple preferences
<b>Membership</b>	Small, elitist	Large card-carrying membership	Membership open to all and encouraged; rights but not obligations	Neither rights nor obligations; blurred distinction between members and non-members	Small membership—loose definition of supporters as potentially all voters
<b>Channels of Communication</b>	Inter-personal network	Party provides its own channels of communication	Party competes for access to non-party channels	Party gains privileged access to state-regulated channels	Web-based channels of communication; intranets, extranets
<b>Role between civil society and state</b>	Unclear boundary between state and civil society	Party belongs to civil society	Parties as competing brokers between civil society and state	Party becomes part of state	Parties as organisations, not institutions, operating on the boundary between state and society
<b>Examples</b>	19th century liberal parties	Socialist parties	US parties	German, Austrian, Scandinavian parties	Initially British; now commonly developed

<sup>50</sup> Based on H. Margetts, 'The Cyber Party', paper presented to ECPR Joint Sessions, (London 2011), 9, accessed at [http://www.governmentontheweb.org/sites/governmentontheweb.org/files/Cyber\\_party\\_paper.pdf](http://www.governmentontheweb.org/sites/governmentontheweb.org/files/Cyber_party_paper.pdf) on 10 February 2012.

and centralisation of power around the leadership. He also introduced a new element of the professionalisation of party organisations, the increasing dependence of party politicians on outsiders with technical expertise (examples include marketing consultants and opinion pollsters). Established parties might get into trouble and political 'turbulence' as they become incapable of binding electors to collective projects.<sup>51</sup>

In modern democracies, (all) political parties tend to be 'professionalised media communication parties' with the following features, naturally with differences in the countries and dependant on the financial resources:<sup>52</sup>

- professionalised communication management,
- issues adopted based on the criteria of media (Twitter) logic,
- oriented more to single issues than to a coherent programme,
- perceived competences filtered through a strategic centre of power,
- reduced importance of the resource of active members (volunteers in campaigning).

Parties, of course, still employ full-time functionaries alongside volunteers, but their key activities of managing electoral campaigns, drawing up programmes and promoting them along with the image of their leaders are now delegated to public relations experts and political marketing gurus whose relationships with parties are of

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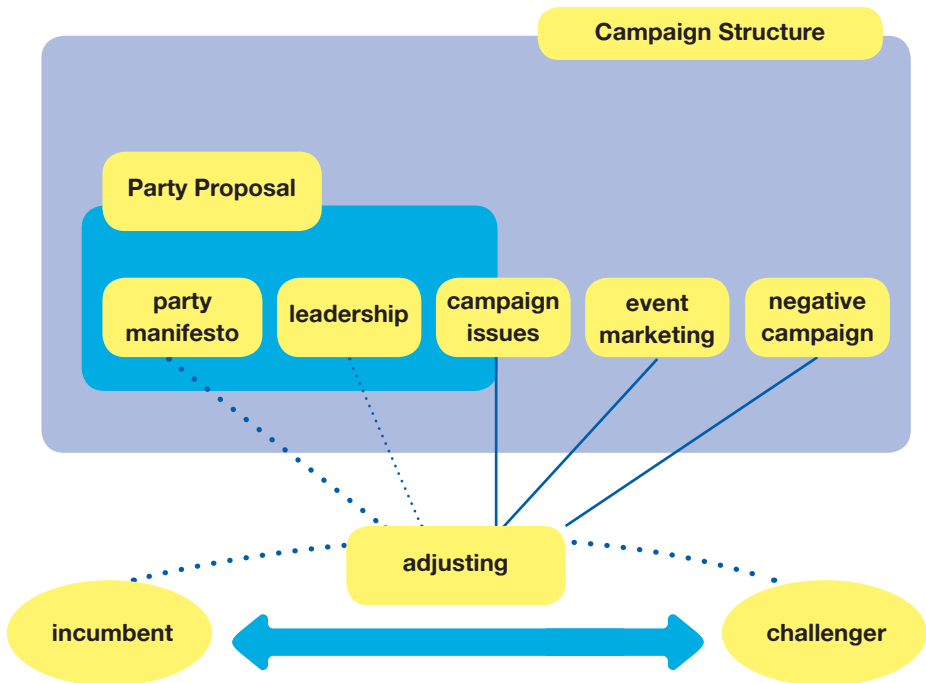
<sup>51</sup> A. Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 262–74.

<sup>52</sup> U. Jun, *Der Wandel von Parteien in der Mediendemokratie: SPD und Labour Party im Vergleich* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2004).



a strictly professional nature following the trend from the US. This has radically changed the image of the party.<sup>53</sup> The professionalisation of the communication function is highlighted in the campaigning aspect. During the campaign, the parties seek out the best position from which to attack their opponents and introduce their political proposals/ programmes, leadership and chief campaign themes.

**Figure 4 Political Campaign Structure<sup>54</sup>**



<sup>53</sup> A. Mastropaolo, 'Politics Against Democracy: Party Withdrawal and Populist Breakthrough', in D. Albertazzi and D. McDonnell (eds), *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 40.

<sup>54</sup> O. Eibl and A. Matušková, 'Introduction of the Election Cycle Model: The Case of the Czech Republic 2006–2007', *Central European Political Studies Review* 9/2–3 (2007), 119, accessed at <http://www.cepsr.com/clanek.php?ID=301> on 25 February 2012.

The figure shows the importance of and possibilities that result from further work with the campaign structure. Obviously, it is very difficult to change some parts of the campaign (specifically the programme). However, leadership, campaign issues and other aspects can be modified in connection with changes in opinion polls or opponents' strategies. This makes campaigns more dynamic and attractive to voters.

As so much social interaction moves online, there is pressure for political parties to do the same, particularly given that their key competitors for citizens' attention and participation are interest groups and social movements, which have been particularly innovative in using the Internet. Critics charge that

most parties have been slow to adapt, conservative in approach, and unimaginative in design. The 'cyber party' is an ideal type: widespread Internet penetration is too new, its potential too unrealized for there to be substantive empirical evidence of its existence. Technological development will not inevitably lead to the formation of cyber parties, nor will cyber parties exist entirely in cyberspace—but much of what cyber parties do could take place via the Internet.<sup>55</sup>

There is the 'cyber party' or 'network party' in which members are afforded more flexible channels for participation and opportunities to form and join looser issue- and policy-based networks. Levels and timing of individuals' involvement can vary, ranging from simply receiving regular news updates to donating funds and contributing feedback on an individual policy or issue basis. Significantly, some

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<sup>55</sup> H. Margetts, 'Cyber Parties', in R. S. Katz and W. Crotty (eds), *Handbook of Party Politics* (London: Sage, 2006), 528–35.

within the British parties themselves have echoed these concerns, particularly over increasing member passivity within these new online supporter networks.<sup>56</sup>

Such developments also contain some anti-democratic tendencies, however, including the creation of a more passive and drifting base of support, less able to hold leaders accountable, and the emergence of a new, narrower digital elite that has displaced the older, more traditional activist base. Parties which no longer rely on the notion of membership for their 'legitimising myth' work instead on their digital presence; they find themselves suffering a loss of real members and general support and have to turn to alternative resources to retain influence.<sup>57</sup> The rise of newer, user-driven 'web 2.0' technologies such as blogs, social networking sites and video-sharing tools has raised new possibilities for party activism and organisation. As well as offering new means for parties to organise their supporters and activists, these applications also stimulate the growth of unofficial groups and networks, which are loosely aligned with party politics but are not under their control.

In the centre we find less a genesis of a new field of politics with the label 'Net politics', than an online representation of all political processes. It is not the instrument or the use of the Internet that is important, but the attitude of the users towards the basic conflict between freedom and security. Certainly, however, a generation socialised online will search and vote online for its respective hangers-on in the long run. Digital politics requires a new design for power. The new currency of power is represented not by traditional ownership, but rather by potential access.

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<sup>56</sup> R. K. Gibson and S. Ward, 'Parties in the Digital Age: A Review', *Representation* 45/1 (2009), 87–100.

<sup>57</sup> Margetts, 'Cyber Parties'.

Access—online as well as offline, material as well as idea-based—open up new options. Which will remain as a party able to master the future by providing new access? Professional parties of voters suffer also from a permanent communication stress, which has increased in the digital democracy. Everything they do is public, reported in real time. Party political leadership, which is now open to new participation formats and even non-party members, is placed under additional participation and performance pressure. Although rightly criticising some details, parties do support the most modern form of political decision-making processes in representative democracies. What should substitute for parties in free elections? So far, it remains the central challenge to strengthen party democracy in order to cope adequately with expectations about decisions. Parties remain mediators and transmission devices in the complex management of decisions, especially under digital conditions.<sup>58</sup> In this environment the party's name and symbols are merely 'branding', similar to corporate marketing devices for products. Like 'virtual' corporations in the networked information technology sphere, cyber parties network across traditional organisational boundaries, via spin doctors, PR and policy bites. But rebranding will be needed if the substance in government (reform processes which need ongoing interaction with ministerial bureaucracies) is found not to be enough. Professionalised media-communication parties, such as New Labour in Britain and the Social Democratic Party of Germany,<sup>59</sup> failed under the conditions of 'realpolitik'.

The cyber party type is becoming more and more dominant because of<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> K.-R. Korte, 'Beschleunigte Demokratie: Entscheidungsstress als Regelfall', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 62/7 (2012), 21–6.

<sup>59</sup> Jun, *Der Wandel von Parteien in der Mediendemokratie*.

<sup>60</sup> For these considerations and discussions I would like to thank Santiago Robles.

- *the role of social media*: Nowadays, parties are transforming communication not only in our private lives, but also through political organisations. This could be considered an evolution of the cyber party, making an even larger array of choices available to citizens. Voters can now interact in new ways, both to promote and to criticise party policies.
- *flexible, multi-channel political communication*: Parties have many more pathways to voters, and new platforms (such as Twitter) allow for more flexible and diverse communication. Using these also raises risks: it might make it more difficult for a party to have a constant, values-based agenda.
- *the 24-hour news cycle*: The constant barrage of information makes it more difficult to establish a presence. Parties and their policies are now vying with thousands of other media sources for limited attention spans. There is also the risk that even small mistakes that would have previously gone unnoticed can now end up in the negative campaigns of political rivals (e.g. the wrong thing said on Twitter, or an out-of-place comment caught on camera and diffused via the web).
- *'cheaper campaigning'*: The increasingly sensitive point of party funding and financing as an open door for populist forces does not much affect cyber parties. They can campaign through cheaper methods due to modern technologies.

This new, more diffuse, political participation raises questions about the viability of political parties as they exist today. This could have dramatic consequences for democratic systems based on political parties in their familiar forms from the time of the mass party onwards.

How are political parties to be funded? (Should public money be available? How should it be distributed?) And how should increasingly fragmented legislatures, where tiny, ultra-focused political movements can make or break governments, be dealt with? These are not necessarily new questions, but it is becoming increasingly urgent that they are dealt with. While 'cyber-optimists' describe the democratic potential of the Internet and emphasise the better access through the Internet and new channels of communication, 'cyber-pessimists' highlight the potential threats to democracy in terms of classic institutional representation.<sup>61</sup>

Parties today arguably need to find new ways to interact with social society. Sometimes independent movements and pressure groups are seen to have more legitimacy on certain issues (the environment and Internet freedom, for instance) and can exert huge political pressure, without actually participating in the democratic-institutional process and without being beholden to one party or another, instead exerting pressure across the political spectrum for changes on very specific issues. Their legitimacy can challenge that of traditional parties. (This was one of the key complaints about the *indignados* movement in Spain in 2011, for example.)

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<sup>61</sup> K. Pedersen and J. Saglie, 'New Technology in Ageing Parties', *Party Politics* 11/3 (2005), 359.

## Future Alignment of Parties<sup>62</sup>

### Alignment of Candidates

Any personalisation strategy based on candidates instead of parties would limit the power of parties, as the nomination of candidates takes place via plebiscite. In the 2012 elections in Slovakia, a new party entered the parliament, calling itself, in a populist, anti-elitist stance, The Ordinary People and Independent Personalities Party, and exploiting the decreasing popularity of 'classic party politicians'. A historical model is that of the US, where there are primaries to select candidates. Via the primaries, individual candidates build up their own supportive networks independent from the party, to be pushed by lobbyists in their own milieus. Political careers in the US are individualised to a greater extent than in Western Europe; the attachment of members of Congress to their parties and parliamentary groups is weaker. However, an American-style personalisation of politics would fail in Europe because of two factors: first, the systems in Europe are not presidential, but parliamentary; and second, proportional representation via lists prevails in comparison to the first-past-the-post system, which is majoritarian. Such systematic factors are mostly overlooked.

Still, in Europe there are many discussions around this reform, and they are quite controversial. The Socialists in particular favour such initiatives, as they are losing members and electoral support. For the first time in history, the French Socialists introduced primaries to nominate the party's candidate for the presidential elections in 2012. With regard to these primaries, the biggest opposition party took the US as its example. Every French voter could participate

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<sup>62</sup> See also, for the three possible developments, K. Detterbeck, *Parteien und Parteiensystem* (Konstanz: UTB, 2011), 237–44.

by paying a symbolic fee of one euro. Approximately 2.5 million voters took part, which was judged by the party to be a success. More people attended these primaries than the Socialists have party members. In 2009 there were 813,559 members in all parties in France, which in a European comparison is a low figure (only 1.85% of the electorate are party members). We can therefore detect a strong mobilisation effect, other than in the US itself, where primaries have a low turnout.

In Italy the left, which was deep in quarrels, organised primaries in 2005 for the first time. In 2006 Romano Prodi won the primaries of the left alliance *L'Unione* beating six other candidates, and later on, the parliamentary elections, beating Berlusconi. As early as 1994, the Austrian Social Democrats introduced an innovative form of grassroots democracy to nominate the party list candidates for the parliamentary elections that year, via intra-party primaries. The attempt did not help to ameliorate the party's image; because of the resistance among party activists, these primaries have never been repeated.<sup>63</sup>

In Great Britain the electoral system, being majoritarian, provides a counterbalance to personalisation tendencies, although the political system is strictly structured according to parliamentary principles. British Labour experimented with leadership elections in a rather complicated procedure. On 10 May 2010, Gordon Brown resigned as leader of the Labour Party. The rules of the Labour Party state that each nomination (for leader) must be supported by 12.5 per cent of the Commons members of the Parliamentary Labour Party. As the number of Labour MPs was 257, the support

<sup>63</sup> M. Micus, 'Die Macht der Autosuggestion: Reale Krise und gefühlte Stärke bei der österreichischen Sozialdemokratie', in F. Butzlaff, M. Micus and F. Walter (eds), *Genossen in der Krise? Europas Sozialdemokratie auf dem Prüfstand* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 31–48.



of 33 MPs was needed for any nomination. There were three distinct electorates, the electors of which cast their votes on a 'one member, one vote' basis in each applicable category:

- Labour members of the House of Commons and the European Parliament;
- individual members of the party;
- individual members of affiliated organisations, such as trade unions and socialist associations.

Each of the three electorates or sections contributed one-third (33.33%) of the total votes, which were counted using the alternative vote system. The election was run by the National Executive Committee and the results were announced at the annual conference in September 2010.<sup>64</sup>

Primaries accelerate the professionalisation of campaigning. First of all, higher requirements are set for campaigns which seek to mobilise voters for the primaries without using the party identification. Second, the number of electoral campaigns and thus the market for electoral consultancy increases. Third, staff from the party headquarters can only be allocated to primary campaigns in small numbers, as the headquarters must observe the principle of candidate neutrality. Therefore, the market for external strategy consultants in the example of American political consultants<sup>65</sup> is getting bigger.

The question remains open as to whether a system of primaries fits with the philosophy of parliamentary systems, which differ fundamentally from presidential ones, and

<sup>64</sup> M. Russell, *Building New Labour: The Politics of Party Organisation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); D. Michelsen and F. Walter, 'Beyond New Labour?' in F. Butzlaff, M. Micus and F. Walter (eds.), *Genossen in der Krise? Europas Sozialdemokratie auf dem Prüfstand* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 129–50.

<sup>65</sup> S. T. Siefken, 'Vorwahlen in Deutschland? Folgen der Kandidatenauswahl nach U.S.-Vorbild', *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 33/3 (2002), 543.

whether it seems to make sense. In contrast to a strict parliamentary party system, a system of primaries also affords opportunities for politicians not supported by the party establishment. It even provides prospects for external candidates. This is precisely why, in a strong party political system, primaries will not succeed.

### Alignment of Elites

Some parties focus on a top-down model based on elite empowerment. Even the new communication technologies may weaken the deliberative aspect of party organisations and give the leader more leeway.<sup>66</sup> Poorly institutionalised parties often tend to replace with strong leadership the organisational constraints that characterise highly institutionalised parties. They lack the guarantee of participation and electoral support established parties generally enjoy. Right-wing populist challengers especially are aligned to charismatic leaders who have much greater freedom to manoeuvre. Populism is a symptom of a fundamental change in the functioning of a party, because the party is no longer growing from its base according to a pyramid structure, but seems to be a virtual façade around one single person. The rather loose internal organisation goes hand in hand with the top-down approach concentrated in the role of a leader. Within the party this can lead to a strong democratic deficit. Parties are subject to an authoritarian leadership and represent, via the chairperson, such a pretension. In Central and Eastern Europe especially, the party chair often exercises such a strong influence.

We can name as an example Fidesz in Hungary under

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<sup>66</sup> Pedersen and Saglie, 'New Technology', 363.

Viktor Orbán, who has been the undisputed leader of the party since its founding over two decades ago. Between 1998 and 2002, and since his fulminate comeback at the parliamentary elections in April 2010, after having lost twice, he has assumed the position of prime minister. Another example is Boyko Borisov in Bulgaria. In March 2006 he founded the movement Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria,<sup>67</sup> from which the party with the same name emerged in December 2006. A former bodyguard and chief of police, Borisov is a decisive figure, and became prime minister of Bulgaria. But this development, in which strong leaders dominate their parties, is not new; even in the old democracies in Western Europe there have been very dominant party leaders, such as Franz Josef Strauß of the Bavarian Christian Social Union, who was party leader from 1961 until his death in 1988.

Clear, top-down alignment is often a feature of the right-wing populist parties. With the True Finns, such a party structure has recently succeeded. The Finnish researcher Tapio Raunio has written in a study of this party,

As is typical for populist and radical right parties, The (True) Finns is a highly leader-dependent organisation. A highly popular party leader, the role of Soini should not be underestimated in the success of The (True) Finns. A charismatic figure known for his witty and insightful comments, Soini was the vote king in both the 2009 European Parliament and the 2011 Eduskunta elections, winning most votes of the individual candidates.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> In Bulgarian, *Grazhdani za evropeisko razvitie na Bulgariya*. The acronym GERB also means 'coat of arms'.

<sup>68</sup> T. Raunio, *Whenever the EU Is Involved, You Get Problems: Explaining the European Policy of The (True) Finns* (Sussex: Sussex European Institute, 2012), 6, note 2.

However, in the presidential elections in January 2012, Timo Soini failed as a candidate and gained 'only' 9.4% of the votes.

In some extreme cases parties bear the name of their party leader, as in the Netherlands, which listed Pim Fortuyn on the national level in 2002, or in Hamburg's Bürgerschaft (regional parliament), where the Schill Party was represented in 2001. Core questions are decided by the leading figure in this type of party, without including the party rank and file (except for 'acclamation') or other leading personnel. Sometimes, this figure coerces the party into allowing the leader to make policy decisions in public in order to exercise pressure on functionaries and members. However, this is not always the case.

In any event, there is a symbiosis between the party leader and the subordinate party levels. One example is the Dutch freedom party of Geert Wilders, which has just one member: the party leader himself. It perfectly fulfils the criteria of so-called couch parties (where all the members can fit on a single couch) or even a 'chair party', with Wilders in the chair. In April 2012, Geert Wilders, leader of the populist Freedom Party, dramatically walked out of talks at the last minute, just as an agreement seemed imminent. After one and a half years of helping to govern the Netherlands by supporting a minority government, Geert Wilders has had enough. Now his Freedom Party movement can return to its more comfortable role as a protest party. Wilders has suffered a blow to his credibility. His Freedom Party is proving to be an unreliable partner. Having learned from the chaos that sank his party's populist predecessor the Pim Fortuyn List, Wilders has worked hard to avoid divisions within his Freedom Party, but now they seem to have caught up with him nonetheless. Nearly a dozen local Freedom Party representatives have left the party in the past

few years. In early 2012, one of the party's most prominent MPs announced he was leaving. These troubles expose the weaknesses of the party's lack of structure and its complete reliance on one-man rule. Wilders has been unwilling to delegate authority and his party has grown too fast for him to control everything while of course remaining an important player in Dutch politics.

A populist leader, who acts the part of the self-appointed party political representative of the interests of the 'man in the street' and/or the 'national interest', maintains that he/she recognises the 'real' needs of the people by invoking the hypothetical will of the people. A number of rhetorical stylistic devices may be used:<sup>69</sup>

- *The trick of persecuted innocence:* The leader portrays himself as a victim, wrongly stigmatised by the media and by the 'old, established parties'.
- *The crusader mentality:* The leader wants to fight for the 'man in the street', who is finally demanding his rights. He acts vicariously against corruption and sleaze.
- *The trick of tirelessness:* The leader wants to act the part of a persistent and stubborn fighter for what is right.
- *The emissary trick:* The leader adopts the image of a patron of the nation, bringing security and welfare (against immigrants and other enemies).

The populist at the top of the party is acting in some circumstances as a 'pop star'; he downgrades his co-workers and members to the status of fans, and the party

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<sup>69</sup> Still applicable is H.-G. Jaschke, *Die 'Republikaner': Profile einer Rechtaußenpartei* (Bonn: Dietz, 1990), 88–9.

to a simple electoral association. The strategic concept calls for intra-party cohesion, not for a pluralistic concert of voices. Non-political attributes have a high impact on the image: appearance and charisma squeeze out competences in certain subjects as relevant assessment criteria on the part of the voters, supporters and party members. Considerations of political issues are reduced to a second tier. The leader's political thinking alternates between wishful thinking and self-overestimation. A continuous tension between claims and reality, appearance and substance, sets in. If he finds himself in the crossfire of criticism (more than the usual need for articulating critiques), this can paralyse the party's capacity to act. If their leader becomes untouchable as a result of electoral failure, this will easily lead to internal quarrels and discord in a party that seems unstable. Such parties are rarely able to regenerate from coup attempts and 'palace revolutions'. They are dependent on their leaders; the fate of the party is connected to that of the leader.

Right-wing populist parties always claim to 'fight' against corruption in politics. In contradiction to these slogans, they themselves are often involved in scandals, as the example of the Freedom Party of Austria reveals. Party funding scandals have blighted all political parties over time. Umberto Bossi, the founder and leader of Italy's populist Northern League, resigned in April 2012 after a 30-year political career, as a party funding scandal raised questions about his judgment and probity. Bossi's departure followed allegations by prosecutors that taxpayers' money earmarked for his party had been spent on improvements to his house and favours for members of his family. The League emerged from the affair with its credibility woefully damaged. It came into existence to spearhead a protest at the corruption and waste of the south and *Roma ladrona* ('she-thief Rome'), depicted by Bossi as a black hole relentlessly devouring

the taxes of hard-working, decent northerners. League politicians openly describe southerners in contemptuous terms and frequently link them to the Mafia.<sup>70</sup>

Sometimes, the figures at the top are highly controversial, such as Andrzej Lepper in Poland. In 1992 Lepper formed a new political party, an organisation of struggling farmers like himself, naming it 'Samoobrona' (SO, Self-defence). It has sometimes been described as both left-wing and right-wing extremist and populist, which clearly shows that the party was based on a mixture of anti-capitalist, nationalist and anti-European elements.<sup>71</sup> Lepper's party received 11.4% of the vote and 56 seats in the September 2005 parliamentary election, making it the third biggest party in the Sejm. Lepper entered his party into a ruling coalition in May 2006, taking on the positions of deputy prime minister and minister for agriculture. In December 2006 a female party member claimed that Lepper had demanded sexual favours in exchange for a job in a regional party office. In February 2010 Andrzej Lepper was sentenced to two years and three months in jail after being found guilty of demanding and accepting sexual favours from female members of his SO party. He was one of the candidates in the 2010 Polish presidential election, but won only 1.28% of votes and did not get into the second round. After this, his and his party's careers were over. He was found dead in his Warsaw office on 5 August 2011, having probably committed suicide.

Sometimes the career of a populist does not develop along the same lines as those of a typical politician; the populist is a newcomer (or acts like one), and can thus distance himself outwardly from conventional types of

<sup>70</sup> J. Hooper: 'Umberto Bossi Resigns as Leader of Northern League Amid Funding Scandal', *Guardian*, 5 April 2012, Accessed at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/apr/05/umberto-bossi-resigns-northern-league> on 26 April 2012.

<sup>71</sup> Z. Wilkiewicz, 'Populismus in Polen: Das Beispiel der Samoobrona unter Andrzej Lepper', in N. Werz (ed.), *Populismus* (Opladen: Westdeutscher, 2003), 163–76.

politicians. He pitches his lack of experience in politics as a positive quality. Furthermore, he adopts the image of the 'anti-career politician', assuming the role of a non-politician who has won his spurs elsewhere—in business or entertainment. During the election campaign he attempts to continue to develop the element of the new ('other') politician, based on mythology.

The populist preaches, in his own words, that hard work automatically leads to success—as his own example demonstrates—and that high, self-envisioned aims can also be fulfilled with the aid of courage, self-confidence and belief in one's own strength. Thus, Christoph Blocher from the Swiss People's Party incarnates a dual function. On the one hand, he works as a billionaire chemicals entrepreneur—he is obviously a successful businessman. On the other hand, as a farmer by training, he has the farmyard smell of the ordinary man still clinging to him, figuratively speaking. He has always maintained his distance from the elites, who have never regarded him as one of their own. Blocher does not act the part; he really is a 'folksy' character. He expresses discontent and indignation, and speaks in short sentences and with pithy words. His party on the ground is limited to a minimum of activity; all the resources go into campaigning.

An alignment of elites can also be found in the so-called business firm parties serving particularistic interests.<sup>72</sup> In broad terms, the business firm models tend to undermine the institutionalisation of parties and party systems, and evidently this is a serious matter for newly created parties in new or rapidly changing democracies or party democracies in crisis.<sup>73</sup> This type of party has the structure

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<sup>72</sup> J. Hopkins and C. Paoluci, 'The Business Firm Model of Party Organization: Cases from Spain and Italy', *European Journal of Political Research* 35/3 (1999), 307–39.

<sup>73</sup> J. Hopkins and C. Paoluci, 'The Business Firm Model', 332.



of a commercial company; the programme is based on marketing. Party bureaucracies are kept to a bare minimum. Business firm parties will have 'only a lightweight organization with the sole basic function of mobilising short-time support at election-time',<sup>74</sup> following the US example. Much of the focus of the discussion was on the case in which the Italian businessman and media entrepreneur Silvio Berlusconi founded a party in 1994, Forza Italia. He profited from the collapse of morality in the Italian party political system in 1993 and made use of this unique opportunity. Forza Italia (after the football slogan 'Forward Italy') started by fostering its formation in the worlds of business, journalism and the liberal professions, to attract centre-right voters and put halt to the dissolution process affecting the right. The party programme was based on opinion polls and modern marketing methods. Forza Italia's organisation was based on the idea of a 'party of the elected people', giving more importance to the whole electorate than to the party's members. Since its birth, Forza Italia has used unconventional means for European politics (in fact more resembling the American model), such as SMS messaging and mass mailing of propaganda material, including the biography of its leader, Berlusconi, *An Italian Story (Una storia italiana)*.

Business firm parties also play a role in the new, or not yet consolidated, democracies. In Eastern and South-eastern Europe economic elites enter politics in the later stages of their careers in order to secure their economic interests politically.<sup>75</sup> Credibility or morality is sometimes replaced by personality, or simply by money. In Armenia, Prosperous Armenia was a party in government which

<sup>74</sup> J. Hopkins and C. Paolucci, 'The Business Firm Model', 315.

<sup>75</sup> D. de Nève, 'Parteien in der Krise?' in E. Bos and D. Segert (eds.), *Osteuropäische Demokratien als Trendsetter? Parteien und Parteiensysteme nach dem Ende des Übergangsjahrzehnts* (Opladen/Farmington Hills: Budrich, 2008), 286.

was founded by the oligarch Gagik Tsarukian<sup>76</sup>. Similar developments occur in Georgia with the oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili. This approach is not new: Decades ago the great sociologist Max Weber and the economist Joseph Schumpeter saw political parties as serving the more or less private interests of political entrepreneurs; the entrepreneur supports a party personally and financially in order to gain the prestige and advantages of public office.<sup>77</sup>

To sum up, business firm parties have the following features:

- They profit from eruptions (within or after a crisis, or as a consequence of rapid changes).
- They benefit from association with the personal advantages of an entrepreneur or investor (gaining public credibility).
- The role of party bureaucracies is kept to a bare minimum.
- Grassroots memberships are limited and not needed.
- Party members are mainly officeholders who see the party as a vehicle for acquiring political positions.
- They rely on marketing experts and opinion polls.
- Party slogans reflect opinion polls.

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<sup>76</sup> In the last national election in Armenia in May 2012 the party won 28.8% of the votes.

<sup>77</sup> M. Weber, 'Science and Politics', in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1945), 77–158; J. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1976).

## Alignment of the Party Rank and File, including a Virtual Community

In contrast to the top-down model is the bottom-up model, which focuses on the renaissance of membership parties through innovative participation. The potential of social networking in times of declining membership is being more intensively discussed within parties. The Social Democratic Party of Germany has long been discussing possibilities for involving non-members in the party's work. Scepticism is widespread, especially in the lower party branches. Defensive reactions reflect a fear of the traditional party organisation being squeezed out by supportive groups gathering in networks.

New technology may facilitate the growth of informal party networks at the expense of formal organisational structures. This would move party organisations towards the cyber party model.<sup>78</sup> The Pirate Party is a new phenomenon in the field of parties in the whole European landscape, and especially in Germany. The Pirates depict themselves as a real party in which everybody's contribution is possible and no one holds any privileges. They adopted their name on being accused of piracy over a fondness for downloading copyrighted information and material from the Internet; they have tapped into a rich vein of voter discontent over established parties. The party started as a marginal club of computer nerds and hackers demanding online freedom, but its appeal as an anti-establishment movement has lured many young voters to the ballot boxes, catapulting it into two state parliaments in less than a year. Despite an alternative approach, the all-volunteer Pirates offer little ideology and focus on promoting their flagship policies of near-total transparency and an unrestricted Internet.

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<sup>78</sup> Pedersen and Saglie, 'New Technology', 363.

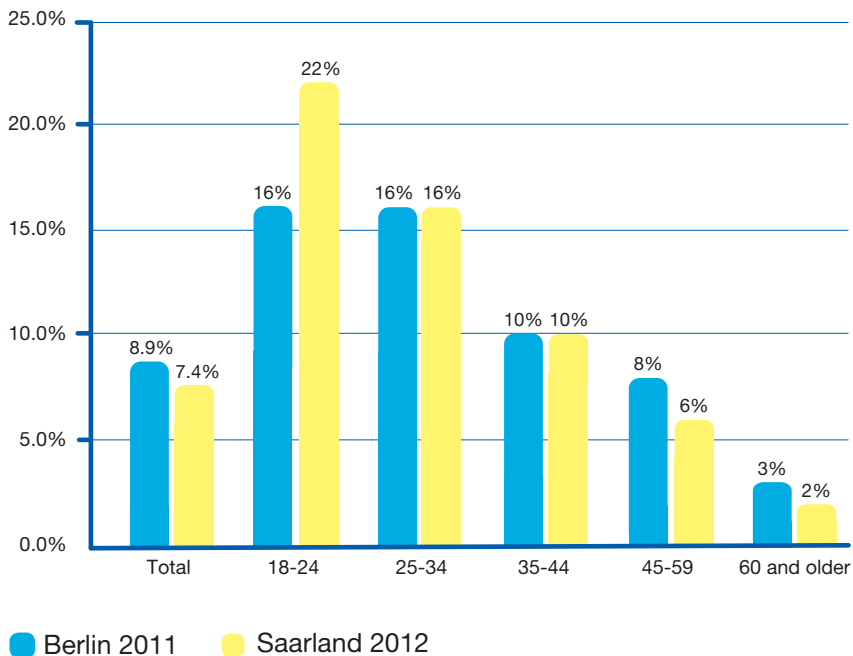
The Pirates are trying to hack politics, in the sense of making and tweaking it, rather than destroying it. The movement may have begun with a narrow focus on intellectual property, but it has developed into an attempt to make the political process transparent —and of course better suited to the digital age. The Pirates have their own software and use the Internet as the medium for internal party decision-making. As a new party it was able, starting in Sweden, to create a functioning organisation by means of the Internet. Even critics have to admit that the new form of participation has been vitalising to intra-party democracy, although caution should be exercised before taking any revolutionary idea too seriously. Excessive transparency for instance the live streaming of each session, could open politics up to ridicule. Each malfunction or scurrilous occurrence would be monitored. Such openness might serve to promote curiosity, rather than democracy. Furthermore, the notion of participation and thus equality would be limited to the virtual community. And even here there are drawbacks: Only a small number of party members are active in online communities. Moreover, the party congresses of The Pirates are, in important respects, conventional. We have witnessed internal quarrels, even up to the level of insults and wars over internal regulations and statutes—the typical tools also used in debates within the established parties.<sup>79</sup> In the 2011 Berlin state election, with 8.9% of the votes, the Pirates managed for the first time to overcome the 5% threshold and to win seats (15 out of 141 seats in the Abgeordnetenhaus) in a German state parliament. In March 2012 the Pirates received 7.4% of the vote and thus won 4 seats in the Landtag of Saarland.

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<sup>79</sup> F. Hartleb, 'Außenansicht: Im Takt der Piraten. Eine neue Partei zeigt den alten, wie wenig sie Mitglieder an Entscheidungen beteiligen', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13 February 2012, 2.

Subsequent 2012 polls have shown an increase in popularity in the party (which has remained constantly over 10%); and the success story is expected to continue in subsequent elections. Similar to Berlin, in Saarland nearly one quarter of first time voters (23%) gave their vote to the Pirate Party. The sharp generational divide (see figure 5 below) indicates that reasons other than protest are more important for the Pirate Party's success. At least, the Internet generation or digital native arguments seem more convincing than the protest argument.

**Figure 5: Pirate Party Voters by Age Group<sup>80</sup>**



<sup>80</sup> Landtagswahl Saarland 2012, Pirate Party Voters by Age Group, accessed at <http://wahlarchiv.tagesschau.de> on 24 April 2012.

The next step is the development of purely online parties, which will emerge in the future. In Austria, three IT experts have just founded an online party with a press conference held on 27 March 2012. They follow the principle of direct democracy via the online community, that is, the online community should make the decisions. Specific topics (Internet related, such as ACTA, and society related) are open for voting, with deadlines; live Tweets from the parliament should make the party attractive. A watchdog council is expected to control communication and prevent, for example, extremist argumentations. Starting in 2013, the party will install 'real' regional branches and a national unit to participate in elections.<sup>81</sup>

The strong slogan of ongoing communication and questioning is not persuasive, when considered more closely. Real progress towards a lively commitment of members is mingled with symbolic politics, which exemplifies the fascination with the unconventional new. Still, we can say that the Pirate Party has placed the increasingly important topic of the Internet at the focus of its political action; it has concentrated on technological progress and its consequences for communication and data freedom, and has thus filled a gap. The general accusation of being populist that is directed towards all new parties is unconvincing. Most importantly, the new parties are showing the old ones that in fact the latter have not yet developed forms of broader participation. All modern democracies are on the search for new patterns of participation and interaction to reverse the decline in membership and voters and to activate citizens.

The Pirate parties, formed in several European states, use tools similar to Wikipedia and Liquid Feedback that

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<sup>81</sup> Online-Party Austria, platform, accessed at <http://www.opoe.at/home/?page=2> on 2 April 2012.

allow the integration of text suggestions, which enables the Internet to be used as a tool for internal party decision-making. A more fundamental question is how to put the Pirates' principles into practice, which will become harder as they get closer to power. They deliberate on Twitter, Mumble (a version of Skype), Piratepad (a chatroom) and face to face. The Berliners set store by LiquidFeedback, a software programme that lets people vote on documents or delegate votes to proxies. This is a compromise between grassroots and representative democracy which is only used within the virtual community, and only by party members. In opening a new topic, one can opt for a set of rules, depending on the goals of the initiator. This set of rules erects deadlines and quora, as well as demonstrating the impact of a successful voting procedure. This set of rules is provided by the user of the respective software installation. The idea of a 'liquid democracy' offering individual party members diverse options for commitment is especially closely linked with the claims of grassroots democracy and the will to employ the technological innovation of the Pirate Party. Here, too, the necessary processes for the selection of candidates and issues (the campaign aspect) are still needed to make politics happen. Disputes arise concerning party congresses, internal differences, internal regulation and statutes. A technical-administrative picture of political decision-making is behind this notion, which has—despite all claims—nothing to do with grassroots democratic participation. Critics, especially in mainstream parties, portray them as a chaotic assembly of individuals with few policies beyond a vague infatuation with the Internet. But all parties are under pressure from this unpredictable technical innovation. The Pirate movement is really still in its infant stages. There are a tremendous number of kinks that need to be worked out in the way the party operates and what it

wants, from the mechanisms of Liquid Feedback to much deeper internal ideological clashes. There are also questions to be answered about the alleged extremist past of some high-profile members -something that can carry a lot of weight in Europe.

## Conclusion and Consequences

All political parties have to accept the fact that democracies are developing from party democracies into 'virtual audience democracies'.<sup>82</sup> Politics can be regarded as theatre: Just as actors are assessed after a show—by standing ovation, applause, and so on—the electorate today has in common a retrospective opinion on the performance of political parties and politicians. As a consequence, parties are focused virtually exclusively on media communication. The attributes of such 'audience democracies' are

- finding the possible within the virtual world, which could create societal conflicts according to the 'click-mentality' of users;
- a greater distance between representatives and the electorate in reality for which compensation is sought through the virtual world;
- multi-channel, but unselective, political communication ('the information superhighway');

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<sup>82</sup> As early as 1997 Bernhard Manin used the term 'audience democracies'. See B. Manin, *The Principles of Representative Democracies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).



- despite an active role in social media and web 2.0, a reactive role in the high-speed decision-making process.

Of course, not everybody participates in the 'virtual' theatre of politics. As parties lose their social functions with the decline of membership, the picture has elements that are both optimistic (concerning the possibilities of 'virtual' activism) and pessimistic (concerning activism with 'real' membership and stable voting). Party organisations have to react to this. One can observe two extreme positions or models: one form is a *strictly authoritarian* form of leadership; another follows the pattern of the Pirate Party, at the moment so successful in Germany, which involves *more participation* via the Internet and a new style of participation and organisation.<sup>83</sup> The Pirates' rivals are starting to copy their methods. A group close to the Social Democrats recently rolled out D64, an Internet policy platform, to 'prepare Germany for digital democracy'. The Christian Democrats have followed suit with CNetz. If the copies are good enough, the Pirates themselves may become obsolete but the ideas could change the whole of party politics. Take, for example, Bavaria's state premier Horst Seehofer's invitation to a party via Facebook – the politician offered entry to a famous Munich nightclub and a free drink to everyone on his social networking page.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>83</sup> R. Vetter, 'Zweite Chance für Tusk: Die Parlamentswahlen in Polen', *Osteuropa* 61/11 (2011), 27–42.

<sup>84</sup> On 24 April 2012 he invited all those who had 'liked' his page to a 'Fanparty' at the famous P1 disco for a free drink, saying he wanted to get to know as many of them personally as possible. As of late Wednesday morning, more than 5,500 people had 'liked' Seehofer's page, while 617 people had confirmed they were going to go to the party. A further 128 people were keeping Seehofer dangling, saying they 'might be' going. The CSU covered the costs. 'Politician Invites 5,000 to Facebook Party', accessed at <http://www.thelocal.de/politics/20120425-42155.html> on 1 May 2012.

With this, new tendencies are addressed, putting pressure on the mainstream parties of Western Europe. The structure of the established parties will not yet change at their cores, even while new competitors pop up that focus more on campaigning than on organisational life between legislative periods. For certain there will be more participation, as can be seen in the US-inspired primaries of the French Socialists, and the use of membership surveys. Participation will concern questions of personnel (leadership selection) and resolving questions tabled by the leadership for decision. Big hopes will be placed on web 2.0, which will, however, not have miracle effects. Nevertheless, Facebook, Twitter and other social media can contribute to activating and mobilising members and (already politicised) non-members.

Of course, the classic membership type of party is losing significance. This also means that it will be possible to vote in elections for ad hoc movements absent of vital party life. Even 'couch parties', named for their quick formation among a few people gathered around a charismatic leader such as Geert Wilders or businessman Silvio Berlusconi, will emerge in the electoral sphere. The example of Wilders shows that even one member (Wilders himself), and even only one chair instead of one couch, is enough to build up a successful political party. This finding does not endanger the existence of establishment parties, as it is mostly in the interest of parties to keep their organisations alive and to exercise offices and mandates. Membership parties will prevail – on a low level in Western Europe, and with weak civil society in Central and Eastern Europe. Also in the future, parties will claim the monopoly to recruit elites in state and other manifold societal areas. With less penetration in society,

the question is whether parties in this form still possess the legitimacy to do so.

For the parties of tomorrow, the central challenge will be to implement new, realistic forms of participation without surrendering political leadership. Changes will be smaller than some party strategists and academics are now claiming, because parties can reform or transform their organisational patterns only to a certain extent. At the local levels, because of the ageing membership complement, many parties still use the same methods as they did in the 1960s, merely replacing postal invitation letters with emails.

The central functions of parties will remain—participation, selection and articulation of interests—and the recruitment of elites will continue, as will the parties' role in legitimating the political system as a whole. But it is possible that, as online parties emerge, later on they will search for real structures, as is now on trial in Austria. Future discussions about the organisations and structures of parties will be based on the question of membership surveys and decisions as well as the question of virtualisation, especially after the success of the Pirate Party and the self-dynamics of the social media community, which can already sometimes be regarded as the agenda-setter for classic media. European Pirate parties, regarding themselves as a new family with ambitions for the European elections in 2014<sup>85</sup>, vow to promote a more transparent state and a larger share in decision-making for citizens.<sup>86</sup> They are claiming that they would also seek a reform of the intellectual property concept. The party appeals to a generation raised on Facebook, the Occupy protests, and file-sharing sites such

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<sup>85</sup> The Pirates see themselves as a global movement, with members from as far away as Brazil.

<sup>86</sup> 'European Pirate Family Is Born', *EurActive.com*, 16 April 2012, accessed at <http://www.euractiv.com/elections/european-pirate-family-born-news-512171> on 16 April 2012.

as The Pirate Bay. In Europe, success in the polls can often be self-perpetuating, as a demonstration of support can qualify a party for state funding. At a time of electoral uncertainty and disaffection, the Pirate movement has established footholds across the continent. Maybe it will be possible to reach out to the younger generations. Parties could take a lead here, provided they do not embrace a loose societal modernisation and act less administratively and more strategically. European networking could prove to be sensible, for the exchange of experiences, professionalisation and ideas to achieve a more European public. To conclude, it may be said that the 'parties of tomorrow' will be reformed 'parties of today', with more participative elements and fewer party members.

Populism professes to represent a hypothetical, homogeneous will of the people and reproaches rival parties for — allegedly — sabotaging this. This gives rise to a type of general accusation that is aimed not against party democracy, as such, but against its status quo and against a malaise caused by an overstretched party state. The most common demand in this context is that Christian and Social Democratic parties should hone their programmes in order to remain clearly distinguishable from one another. The argument also relates to the question of social justice and the preservation of wealth in the context of an increasingly internationalised economy. Furthermore, the questions of a modern environmental policy in the national and international context, educational justice and the finality of Europe lie at the centre of consideration and discussion. Yet there are major problems standing in the way of the desired aim for traditional parties to differentiate themselves from each other. Given the wide variety of political expectations and priorities within the population, the task of gaining and, above all, securing a large voter potential for the long term,

by means of specific policies and aims, appears difficult—maybe impossible. With regard to the organisational strengthening of parties, there are various proposals that aim to make membership more attractive and to make procedures within parties more transparent and open. To a certain extent, the first steps have already been enacted in this respect or are at the planning stage. However, the extent to which such activities will be able to halt the decline of the major parties and their organisational weakening has yet to be determined.

One fundamental trait of populism lies in its defensive attitude towards the political system and its identification of scapegoats. 'Us' against 'the powers that be'—this populist slogan is targeted against representative bodies and thus classic institutions. The more recent successes of right-wing populist parties were in fact not the result of propagating a neo-Nazi programme, but of seizing upon populist campaign strategies and, in programmatic terms, reducing them to socio-populist protest. Thus, the simple dichotomy of 'us upright democrats against evil, anti-constitutional extremists', popularly used in politics, does not apply.

Populism can only be counteracted if education in the processes and fundamental values of democracy begins at an early age, and if this course continues, wherever possible, in the exercise of lifelong learning. Another particular challenge is the division and fragmentation of society. This puts pressure on the mainstream parties, which have to implement ever greater integration measures to further bond the various groups and environments. The drifting apart within the mainstream parties shows the cracks in European society. The fragmentation process within the mainstream parties should constitute a wake-up call. The change of communication due to the new technologies should not lead

to new gaps in society, for example, between old and young, educated and non-educated, globalised or locally oriented people. But the development of a new party face has already started, in the form of an evolution, not a revolution in the classic sense.

It is possible to believe that the current rise of populism is just a temporary aberration on the road to normal 'European' party politics. An alternative explanation is that there is a process of profound political transformation. Traditional programmatic parties gradually give way to new, situational political players. In this new brave world of populist politics there is no need for coherent party platforms and stable loyalties. Parties have to adapt their communication via slogans and bytes, which they have already begun to do, while maintaining stability, credibility and loyalty among the electorate. Otherwise, political parties are simply interchangeable vehicles of unpredictable emotions produced by (social) media and marketing, and lose their deep-rooted functions in society and the transformation of people's interests (inputs) into the decision-making process (outputs).

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Political parties are continually under pressure, due to changes of societies, technologies and politics as a whole. But at the moment, Europe is on the threshold of a new environment that is changing even the whole face of political parties themselves. The picture has elements both optimistic and pessimistic. In general, parties have to transform the tools of organisation and participation to tackle their declining memberships. New types of anti-elitists movements come up only in the electoral competition. It is possible to observe two extreme positions or models that are attributable to the parties: one form is a strictly authoritarian leadership; the other is a more even, unfiltered participation based on a 'virtual community'. In spite of this development, strongly principled parties based on values and stable commitments could still take a lead, provided they do not embrace a loose societal modernisation. For the parties of tomorrow, the central challenge will be to implement new, realistic forms of participation without surrendering political leadership.

