Andrea Volkens

Policy Positions of Left Parties in the 1999–2004 European Parliament: Programmatic Similarities and Differences

Introduction

With the widening and deepening of the European Union (EU) on the one hand and institutional changes in favor of powers to the European Parliament (EP) on the other, policy positions of national parties are getting increasingly important on the European level of governance. National parties are the core collective actors within the party groups of the EP. The EP party groups, largely organized according to the party families present in the national party systems, rule the EP. The formal structures of the EP, however, provide scope for influence only if the member parties can act as a united group (Bowler/Farrel 1999). Up to now, the capacity of party groups to act unitedly has been studied mainly with respect to voting cohesion of members of the EP (MEPs). In these studies, cohesion is assumed to be fostered by institutional requirements on the one hand and ideological homogeneity of the members of party groups on the other. This paper assesses the ideological homogeneity of the three Left EP party groups – the Group of the Party of European Socialists (Socialists), the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens), and the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (United Left or Left Socialists) – based upon quantitative content analysis of the national election programs of the member parties.

Ideological homogeneity is a prerequisite for united actions of EP party groups as well as for transnational Euro-parties which are also created along party family lines. Whereas EP party groups are mainly concerned with European legislation, the Euro-parties are involved in electioneering. Only two of the three Left groups, the Socialists and the Greens, have managed to organize transnational party federations. Up to now, these federations are rather weak in resources with about 50 per cent of their income deriving from EP party groups and 50 per cent from the national member parties (Bardi 1994). An incentive for increased transnational cooperation is now provided by a new proposal of the EP and the European Council for an independent financing of Euro-parties (Das Parlament 2003). With this proposal, Euro-parties will become especially important for small EP party groups because Euro-parties can strengthen and integrate weak national parties not represented in the EP. In the future, transnational party federations will get money from the EU provided that they can come up with a statute and a joint program. Based on a bench-mark approach, the chances of the parties of the United Left to agree on a joint program will here be assessed by comparing the programmatic homogeneity of the United Left group to the Socialist and the Green group. If programmatic differences between parties of the United Left are much bigger than the differences between socialist and green parties, the chances for a transnational United Left are bad. If, however, the programmatic compatibility of the parties of the United Left is comparable to that of the socialist and green parties, the United Left stands a good chance.

In the next section, the question of EP party group unity is described as a two-tier collective actor problem. Propositions and results from existing studies on parties, party families, EP party groups and transnational party federations are used to develop hypotheses on the programmatic compatibility of the three Left party groups. In the methodological part, a multi-dimensional approach will be employed. Recent research has shown that positions of the transnational Euro-parties and MEPs towards the Left-Right and the European integration

dimension have an influence on European politics. But in the European multi-level system three levels of decision-taking – the European, the national and the regional level – are competing. Therefore, the programmatic homogeneity of party groups with respect to national sovereignty and decentralization will be evaluated in addition to the Left-Right and the European integration dimension. Moreover, the general Left-Right dimension which is a combination of policy positions from all relevant policy areas is disaggregated into five specific policy dimensions – economic policy, societal policy, social policy, environmental policy, and external relations – because parties may agree on policy positions in one policy area, but differ in another. Deviations of national parties' programmatic positions from EP group means serve as measures for the programmatic homogeneity of EP party groups. In the summary part of the paper, conclusions on the chances of the United Left for writing a joint Euro-party program will be drawn by comparing the degrees of programmatic homogeneity of the three Left party groups.

1. Empirical Research to Date

The problem of EP party unity is two-fold: MEPs from a national party must cooperate and national parties must cooperate within EP party groups to produce joint outputs. There are two basic types of reasons for expecting group unity (Brzinski 1995). First, rules and procedures reward MEPs and member parties for acting unitedly and, second, MEPs and parties in a EP party group share ideological positions.

Rules and Procedures Enhancing EP Party Group Discipline

All existing studies on EP party group cohesion, defined as the ability of party groups to achieve internal unity (Hix/Lord 1997), agree that the core role of national parties in the party groups is due to formal rules and procedures. Although a survey from 1998 on contacts between MEPs and national parties shows that MEPs feel quite independent from national parties regarding their legislative work (Raunio 2000a), national parties have the capacity to control their EP representatives by means of selecting EP election candidates (Bardi 1994). Candidate selection by party committees is judged to be the main reason for national parties' influence on the EP party groups as well as on national parties' unity. 'Candidate selection is the key to understanding the strong position of national parties' (Raunio 2000b: 238). The national parties 'largely control the MEPs ... (because, AV) the traditional parties were from the beginning in control of the nominations' (Pedersen 1996: 17). Brzinski who interviewed a couple of full-time staff members of the two largest EP party groups in 1994 notes: 'The decisions on electoral lists do not reflect or contribute to the needs of the political groups but only those of the national party' (1995: 143). Moreover, elections to the EP 'are fought almost wholly along national lines and according to national issues' (Gaffney 1996: 17) and EP campaigns generally focus on national priorities (Brzinski 1995). Another reason for the influence of national parties is attributed to the high percentage of MEPs that are also national party officials (about 20% in Italy and Germany) (Bardi 1994). Voting cohesion may be further enhanced by scheduling meetings of national party delegations before the group meetings (Raunio 2000b, Brzinski 1995).

On the second tier, EP party group cohesion is encouraged by several rules and procedures (Raunio 2000b, Corbett et al. 2000). First and foremost, national parties are forced to cooperate because EP party groups can only be organized transnationally and many rights and resources that are only provided for groups. Other main reasons for cross-national cooperation are scarcity of time that necessitates an intra-group division of labor and committee-based division of labor. In the committees, spokespersons act as heads of their group. Group meetings before plenary sessions – the group week in Brussels – are used extensively by many

groups to come up with a common group position. Some groups even appoint whips to enforce uniform voting behavior. Dissidents may risk expulsion from the group, although this has happened very rarely.

Some authors, however, point out that EP party groups will be necessarily less cohesive than parties in national parliamentary systems where party discipline is the rule. EP party groups 'have fewer powers and fewer ways to discipline their members in comparison with national parties. Part of this stems from the fact, that there is no government to support' (Brzinski 1995: 142–143). Raunio (1997) lists other reasons why EP party groups may not be as cohesive as national parties. In addition to the lack of government and opposition roles within the EP, the distance of MEPs from their voters, voting by nationalities and other cross-group coalitions, the transnationality, and fractionalization of political groups may contribute to minimize group cohesion. A study testing whether MEPs vote according to personal policy preferences, to national parties' positions or, in case of disagreement, according to EP party groups' positions concludes that positions of national parties are by far the most influential (Hix 2002). 'Since members' political careers are in most cases dependent on their reputation within national parties, disobeying voting instructions from national headquarters is more self-destructive than defying the group whip inside the Strasbourg chamber' (Raunio 1997: 185).

Party Families

Ideological homogeneity of European party families is usually considered to be decisive for EP party group unity as well as for transnational parties (Bardi 1994). 'Based mainly on traditional party families found in the EU member states, ideological homogeneity facilitates the internal cohesion of EP party groups' (Raunio 1997: 182). 'Ideological homogeneity has been equally important in facilitating the entry of national parties into the party groups. The EP party system is largely based on the traditional party families found in the EU member states ...' (Raunio 2000b: 244). Bardi argues that in the middle of the 1990s most EP party groups had reached a high level of ideological homogeneity with only few deviating parties (Bardi 1994). The impact of party families is amply shown in a recent study by Marks et al. (2002) which is based on an expert survey conducted by Ray (1999). In this study, political scientists were asked to estimate the positions of parties on the European integration dimension for four time points between 1984 and 1996. Almost two-thirds of the thus identified variance in issue positions of national parties can be explained by party families.

In the party family approach, parties are primarily seen as differing in terms of ideologies based upon the same major and enduring conflicts in national societies (Volkens/Klingemann 2002). Nonetheless, there are reasons to expect differences between parties of the same party family. Brzinski notes that 'though political parties in different nations may share similar names (...) unique historical and national experiences have made these parties distinct from one another. Therefore, political groups include a heterogeneous set of parties' (1995: 144).

EP Party Groups and Transnational Euro-Parties

In addition, transnational party federations sometimes cut across EP party group lines. Today the Green group comprises member parties of the European Federation of Green Parties, founded in 1993 and succeeding the Green Coordination from 1983, as well as parties from the European Free Alliance, a federation of regionalist parties. Dietz (2002) notes that the transnational cooperation among the Greens in Europe has reached a considerable level, although there are still important differences in comparison with the other party federations. First and foremost, the Green parties choose the term 'federation' to demonstrate that the national parties would keep their independence. Although the Green federation issues joint

election programs since 1994, the federation does not take decisions binding for the national parties.

The Socialist group has a relatively well-established Euro-party organization. In 1992 the Party of European Socialists (PES) was founded by parties that were until then organized in the Federation of Social Democrats, a regional organization of the Socialist International. Since the founding of the PES, the Euro-party issues programs for EP elections (Damm 1999). Ideological homogeneity of Socialist parties may not only stem from the fact that the member parties belong to the same party family, but may also be due to the years of cooperation in the Federation of Social Democrats from 1974 onwards and to the years of cooperation within the Socialist International as an established international party organization.

Transnational Euro-party formation, though, has been a long-term process, and the organizations existing today are a more recent phenomenon and novelty than the founding dates may suggest. In the beginning, the formulation of joint policy positions was difficult if not impossible. For quite a while, joint Euro-programs were not issued at all, they were very vague or policy areas in which member parties disagreed were ignored (Niedermayer 1996). Hix (1996) notes that all existing party federations were deeply divided in drafting the joint election manifestos of 1979, 1985, and 1989 because of the ideological diversity of the member parties and problems with opposing ideological views.

Concurrently, there are opposing conceptions about European party federations (Hix 1996) and their programs. On the one hand, Gabel and Hix speculate that '… the Euro-parties may have significant internal conflict over EU policies, yet they must write a common manifesto. Such internal consent could result in manifestos that avoid sensitive issues or ones that are ambivalent. For example, if all Euro-parties suffer from an internal division over further institutional and territorial integration of Europe, then this integration dimension of conflict may simply be ignored in the Euro-party manifesto' (2002: 954). On the other hand, the Euro-parties are judged to produce programs with noticeably different profiles (Niedermayer 1996) to contribute to programmatic similarities between member parties, especially with respect to joint positions in European institution building (Damm 1999), and 'to ease the development of often difficult and complex policies' (Hix 1996: 321).

The growing importance of EU politics led to a growing transnational party co-operation, a process which has been promoted mainly by a closer interlinkage between the national parties, party groups in the EP, and transnational party federations (Ladrech 1996). But the existing transnational Euro-parties are still weak because of limited resources and organizations (Raunio 1997). Although the main EP party groups are the official organs of their Euro-parties (Raunio 2000b), EP groups are in practice quite independent of their Euro-parties during the legislative term. 'Euro-parties function more as umbrella organizations, providing a forum for co-ordination to like-minded national parties' (Raunio 2000b: 245) 'The relationship between EP groups and the party federations rests upon a division of responsibilities. The domain of responsibility for election campaign co-ordination lies with the party federation, while the EP groups focus on EU legislative matters' (Ladrech 1996: 294). Therefore, a high degree of independence between EP party groups and their Euro-parties is the rule rather than the exception (Bardi 1994). 'The relationship between EP groups and their Euro-parties is best described as triangular cooperation, with national member parties forming the third and definitely the most important part of the structure' (Raunio 2000b: 245).

Whereas the Socialists and the Greens are relatively consolidated (Raunio 1997), the Communist group has suffered so many transformations and splits that it is considered to be a new group (Bardi 1996). After World War II and during the onset of the Cold War all Communist parties, 'orchestrated by Moscow' (Bell 1996: 220), took the same positions. But the Communist parties were soon divided between the Eurocommunist and the more traditional pro-

Moscow wings. Although this is certainly an oversimplification, the divisions were interpreted as the French (PCF) and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) routes (Bell 1996). The Eurocommunists were dominated by the Italian PCI, the more traditional group by the French Communists. As a result of these divisions the group hardly ever held common meetings and seldom agreed on a common line in committee or plenary meetings (Corbett et al. 2000). After the 1989 elections, the two factions divided formally and created two new EP party groups with similar names, the Italian-led United European Left and the more hard-line group Left Unity. Soon afterwards, the PCI transformed into the PDS and finally defected to the Socialist group, which Left the United European Left without enough members to keep the group going.

In 1994 the two groups were re-united (Corbett et al. 2000). After the enlargement in 1995, it gained Swedish and Finnish members. At the insistence of its new members the group added the new reference 'Nordic Green Left' at the end of the existing name of the group (Corbett et al. 2000). The group now contains two different French Communist parties and independents, two Italian parties, three parties from Greece, three parties from the Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, the German PDS, the Dutch SP, the Spanish IU, and the Portuguese PCP (see Appendix 1 and 2 for details). Can these parties agree on a joint program and establish a transnational party federation? It is argued here that the parties of the United Left have a chance to agree on a joint program if their ideological homogeneity equals the level of homogeneity of the Socialist or the Green parties because these two party federations managed to agree on joint programs with a given degree of programmatic heterogeneity. Should the degree of programmatic homogeneity match the level of homogeneity of the Socialists, the establishment of a fully-fledged Euro-party is possible; if, however, the ideological homogeneity of the United Left matched the (presumably lower) level of homogeneity of the parties of the Green federation, a transnational federation in which parties keep their independence is a likely model for the United Left.

Hypotheses on Programmatic Similarities and Differences

Various studies have tried to measure the cohesion of EP party groups. Most of them rely on the analysis of EP roll-call data, but some studies also use interviews of MEPs or draw on expert judgements. All of these studies reveal a high degree of intra-group cohesion.

Attina (1990) presented an analysis of EP roll-call data in which he calculated agreement indices for all party groups in the first and second EP on five categories of resolutions (international, institutional, political-economic, social-cultural, sectional-solidaristic). The average indeces for these five categories reveal that the Communist group was even more united in respect to its voting behavior than the Socialists. Member agreement of the Socialists was 65.8% in the first and 62.2% in the second parliament, whereas the Communist group gained a 71.9% agreement in the first and 71,2% agreement in the second parliament. Within the Communist group, disagreements appeared mainly between the two major parties, the Italian and the French parties, and were highest on institutional matters, closely followed by disagreements in economic interests, and lowest on international matters. A roll-call analysis conducted by Brzinski (1995) for a randomly selected sample of all roll-calls between 1989 and 1994 reveals an even higher record of intra-group agreement: 98.6% for the Orthodox Communist group, 91.5% for the Euro-Communists, 90.4% for the Socialists and 85% for the Green group. Raunio (1997) shows that in the same time period no relationship appeared between party group heterogeneity (the number and strength of parties) and voting cohesion. The United European Left and Left Unity group were the most cohesive, the Socialists the least cohesive group. More recent data for the time period between 1994 and 1995 is presented by Hix and Lord (1997). In their sample, levels of voting cohesion do not differ much between the three groups, but now the Socialists appear to be the most cohesive (89%), the

Left Socialists the least cohesive group (84%) closely followed by the Greens (85%). All studies based on roll-call votes, however, may overestimate the cohesion of Left Socialists. There are many general objections to roll-call analysis. Here, I just want to point out a basic difference between a yes-vote and a no-vote. A no-vote may hide opposing views: MEP A may vote 'no' because something is too much, MEP B may choose 'no' because it is too little.

Bardi (1994) presented a study based on attitudinal data for MEPs in the first elected parliament, in which the questionnaire was designed to bring out differences of opinion among MEPs. This attitudinal study reveals potential for intra-group conflicts and disagreements within all party groups because the agreement indices for all groups are much lower in comparison to roll-call data. However, the relative positions of the various groups are the same with the Left groups being much more united than the center-right groups. In 1990, Bowler and Farrell (1999) conducted a mail survey of MEPs. They asked a series of twelve questions relating to general courtesy, or civilized behavior norms, on the one hand and party loyalty norms on the other. Three questions are of special importance with respect to party group discipline: (1) publicly speak against the position of the group leaders (56% unacceptable versus 30% acceptable to all MEPs), (2) introduce a motion without party group advice (36% versus 55%), and (3) vote against group line (38% versus 53%). Unfortunately, no raw data for the Left groups is given and only regression coefficients are presented. From these regression coefficients, Bowler and Farrell conclude that 'the Leftist groups are generally more willing to go along with the party group than other groups, a finding broadly in keeping with the roll call analysis of Attina'(1999: 218).

Despite the encouraging results from roll-call data and attitudinal analysis, most political scientists are very pessimistic about future prospects for the United Left. This leads to pessimistic hypotheses concerning the chances of Left Socialist parties to agree on a joint manifesto. Only Corbett et al. note that: 'In spite of its still varied membership there are signs that the present Group is acting in a more cohesive way than its predecessors, holding, for example, its first ever press briefing session at the first plenary session in October 1999' (2000: 77). All other political scientists would agree with Bell that 'in reality, Communist MEPs had never operated as a group, met infrequently, were fragmented into national delegations' (1998: 134). They talk about 'stages of disintegration of the Western Communist movement' (Bell 1998: 138) and would concur with the statement that 'with the collapse of the Soviet bloc and then of the Soviet Union, the western Communists lost their organizing focus, their mission and their social model' (Bell 1998: 147). It is argued that 'taken overall, the coherence of the movement is not what it was …. And there are considerable divergences of outlook' (Bell 1998: 148). Therefore, we can expect that *the Left-Right positions as well as the specific positions on social policies of United Left parties are more divergent than the Left-Right positions and the social policy positions of the Socialists and the Greens.*

Hix argues specifically that the Communist parties do not stand a good chance of forming a transnational party organization because the national parties 'are fundamentally divided over the question of European integration'(1996: 309). This may be a serious handicap because many issues at the European level are on the pro/anti-integration dimension (Raunio 1997). After the founding of Komintern in September 1947, Communist parties became hostile to European integration. 'Europe was then identified, by all communist parties, as capitalist, Atlanticist, reformist and a rampart against the Revolution' (Bell 1996: 222). In 1959 the six Communist parties of the EC met in Rome and demanded the rejection of the Treaty (Bell 1996). At the end of the 1970s most Communist parties were either opposed to their countries' entry into the EU or else opposed to more integration. At that time, the community-friendly policy rested with the Spanish and Italian Communists (Bell 1996). But even the Spanish Communists later on turned away from their previous pro-Europeanism when their socialist competitor, the PSOE, became pro-European (Bell 1996). At the beginning of the

1990s, most parties also objected the Maastricht Treaty. All parties emphasized the 'democratic deficit' of Europe, some also criticized the common foreign and military policies. The PCF pictured the EU as a brutally free market ruled by multinationals and bankers and feared a rise in unemployment rates and a general decline in living standards. But there were also dissidents from this party line who argued that 'the campaign should not be purely negative and should present some other project, in this case the idea of a Left-wing Europe' (Bell 1996: 230). After the enlargements in 1995, the Group gained Swedish and Finnish members with the Swedish party being anti-EU and the Finnish party being more divided (Corbett et al. 2000). Bell argues that the positions of these two parties are not only due to the anti-European position of their voters, but also meant to be 'a way of maintaining their separate identities on the Left of the party systems' (1996: 228).

Hix and Lord (1997) combined different methods to measure the level of coherence of party families from the middle of the 1990s. They mixed expert judgments on the Left-Right dimension and voters' self-placements on the integration dimension. With this method, the Socialists appear as the most, the Greens as the least cohesive on the Left-Right dimension with the Left Socialist parties in between. However, on the European integration dimension the Left Socialist parties were by far the most heterogeneous party family. Hix also notes that the Greens 'emerged as the only clearly anti-integrationist force with a party organization at the European level. For example, in the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, the Green parties voted against the Treaty in the EP and in every national parliament' (Hix 1999: 88–89). Therefore, we can expect that *the Socialist programs should be the most homogenous, but the United Left may not be more heterogeneous than the Greens with respect to the European integration dimension*.

Furthermore, the three Nordic parties may deviate from the other Left Socialist parties because they see themselves as the environmentalist forces of their countries, a fact which is amply stated by the new name of the group. Therefore, the *Left Socialist parties may be more divided than the Socialist parties and the parties from the Green Federation with respect to environmental policies*.

There are additional reasons to expect that the Left Socialist parties will be less homogeneous than the Socialist and Green parties. The PCF was known to view the EU as a threat to national sovereignty (Bell 1996). In the 1972 referendum on the EU enlargement, the PCF did not only oppose the British membership but objected to supra-nationalism in general. At that time, 'the French party adopted an aggressive stance intended to defend the autonomy of the national political arena' (Bell 1996: 225). Bell argues that the 'PCF made a forceful case against any detraction from state sovereignty and emerged as a defender of the nation state and a critic of any power devolved to the Commission' (1996: 234). He states that the PCF is only one party out of a group which objects to any moves towards the integration of Europe. For these parties, participation in EU institutions is 'only as a means to slowing or preventing further integration' (Bell 1998: 135). Although the communist movement was the first truly international movement in Europe, we can expect *that the programs of the Left Socialist parties are more divided than the programs of the Socialist and the Green parties with respect to the national sovereignty-internationalism dimension*.

Moreover, the Left Socialist Group comprises more than one party from France, Italy, and Greece. In the national systems, these parties compete with each other (Wehr 2001). To survive, they have to keep their separate identities, so they may stress divergent positions. Thus, we can expect that *the programmatic homogeneity of the Left Socialists is lower than the programmatic homogeneity of the Socialists and the Greens on all dimensions, with the Greek, the French, and the Italian parties being the deviating parties*.

Changes over Time on the Pro/Anti-Integration Dimension

Only recently, Hooghe et al. (2002) pictured the distribution of parties on the pro/anti-integration dimension as an inverted U-curve. Whereas extreme Left and extreme Right parties share Euro-skepticism, parties in the middle are judged to be more supportive of European integration. They state that this distribution is an 'uncontested fact.' However, the most striking feature with respect to the pro/anti-integration dimension is the complete change of parties' positions over time. 'One of the striking features of national party responses to the European Union is the manner in which most parties of EU member states are or else have become pro-European Union. This is not always the case, but is a strong tendency within EU politics. By the 1990s, only a handful of communist and extreme right-wing parties remained uncompromisingly anti-EU. ... Classic examples of hostility are ... the French and the Portuguese Communist Parties' (Gaffney 1996: 19). 'In the course of a few years Denmark and Britain, traditionally the two most reluctant EC Member States, have experienced marked changes of policy towards European integration within two nationally important parties: the Danish Social Democratic Party and the British Labour Party' (Haahr 1992: 77–78). In addition to the increasing support for European integration, the importance of the issue of integration has also grown (Ray 1999).

Hooghe et al. (2002) extended an expert survey on support for European integration, conducted by Ray (1999) for 1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996, to 1999. In this extended survey, political scientists judged the Socialists to be on an upwards trend of support from 1984 onwards. The Green parties are seen as less integrationist from 1984 to 1996, followed by a noticeable rise in support for the EU from 1996 to 1999. For the Left-Socialist parties respondents noticed hardly any change. This, however, may be a wrong impression given the rapidity with which other parties have changed their position with respect to European integration. Hix, for instance, spoke of a convergence to a pro-European position, because Socialists moved from a moderately anti-integration position at the end of the 1970s to a pro-European position at the end of the 1980s (Hix 1999: 87). Only a couple of years later Gabel and Hix (2002: 952) stated that the Socialist and the European Peoples parties completely swapt their policy positions. In the next section, the various results from empirical studies and the impressions and propositions arising from them, sometimes based on random evidence only, will be checked against the statements in national election platforms of the Left parties.

2. Method of Empirical Analysis

As a rule, election programs are issued for each election by every party contesting for national parliaments of the 15 EU member states. Opposed to other statements from party elites or factions of parties, election programs are authoritatively endorsed by the party as a whole and constitute the main policy premises for voters to choose between. Although election programs are often criticized for being mere 'shopping lists' to attract voters and of being without relevance for the political behavior of parties, a number of studies have shown programmatic positions to be translated into legislation (Pomper 1968; Ginsberg 1982; Rallings 1987; Thomson 2001) and into budgets (Klingemann/Hofferbert/Budge 1994). National election programs are a useful source for investigating the programmatic compatibility of party groups, because the national parties are the main collective actors in the EP party groups. Moreover, the programmatic homogeneity of EP party groups can not be studied on the basis of Euro-manifestos, because the Socialist and the Green parties today compete the EP elections with joint programs (although some Socialist and Green parties still issue their own EP election programs). In addition, national parties, not MEPs or national party elites, are the constituting units of transnational Euro-parties.

The Manifesto Research Group and its continuation, the Comparative Manifestos Project, collects and codes election programs from all relevant parties in the national parliaments. Because the data collection excludes minor parties, no data is available for the small French and Italian parties (see Appendix 1 and 2 for details). The content analytical method of the Manifesto Group (Budge/Robertson/Hearl 1987) is easily applicable. In a first step, a coder reads each sentence of a program and checks whether one of the 56 given categories applies. These 56 categories were designed to cover the whole content of election programs in different countries. Examples for the categories are 'European Integration: positive' or 'European Integration: negative.' Each category is defined by a set of typical issues and political ideas. Thus, the category 'European Integration: positive' comprises all specific issues and positions in favor of European integration.

The second step of content analysis counts how many times each of the 56 positions applies in a program. In a third step, all of the 56 positions are standardized according to the total number of positions in each program. Because of the different length of programs, each position can then be given as a percentage of the total program. The more space is devoted to a position, the more important it is for a party. The measure thus combines the position and its saliency. A citation of a member of the EPP group secretariat reveals that the salience of a position is important for MEPs: 'On issues on which members would not feel very strongly, they will vote with the majority' (Brzinski 1995: 149). In a fourth step, indeces for policy dimensions can be calculated by adding up all positions that define the Left pole of a dimension and adding up all positions that define the Right pole. The combined percentage of the Left pole positions is then subtracted from the percentage of the Right pole positions. The more negative the value of an index, the more Leftist is the position of a party.

Whereas the computation of indeces is easily done, it is much more difficult to choose the relevant dimensions. There are four rival models of the EU policy space (Marks/Steenbergen 2002) which are based on different assumptions about the importance of policy dimensions and their relationships (Gabel/Hix 2002). These four models are combinations of the Left-Right dimension and the European integration dimension. Based upon content analysis of policy positions of the Socialist, Christian Democrat, Liberal, and Green party leaders between 1976 and 1994, Hix concludes that 'the EU political space is essentially two-dimensional: an Integration-Independence dimension, arising from different identities and interests of national and territorial groups; and a (summary) Left-Right dimension, arising from the different interests of (transnational) socio-economic groups (i.e. classes)' (1999: 92). This two-dimensional result is consistent with a study of citizen attitudes on EU issues (Gabel/Anderson 2002).

In this study, four general as well as five specific policy dimensions are computed (see Appendix 3 for details). By looking not just at the EU-integration dimension, but also at the national sovereignty-internationalism dimension and the centralization-decentralization dimension, a multi-level approach is employed for several reasons. First and foremost, the EU is a multi-level system of government. Therefore, the chosen policy dimensions should reflect the levels of decision-making. Furthermore, the three dimensions are related. Bell (1996: 229) notes: 'If taken at face value, however, the reinforcement of the EP is clearly at odds with state sovereignty: any reinforcement of supra-national institutions can only be to the detriment of the state powers.' The same is true for decentralization. A party opting for national sovereignty or for decentralization will by definition oppose binding decisions to be taken at the European level even if it might not say so in its program. These three dimensions are general ones, because parties can prefer binding decisions for all specific policy issues to be taken on each of the three levels. In this sense, the parties' positions on the three levels have an impact on all other specific policy positions.

The Left-Right dimension is a general dimension because it combines specific issues from all relevant policy areas. Left-Right positions of parties as estimated by content analysis of election programs have been shown to capture the basic conflict lines of industrialized societies (Budge et al. 2001). The growing importance of the Left-Right dimension on the European level of governance is shown by empirical tests of the dimensionality of the manifestos of party federations written prior to European elections between 1979 and 1999. These tests indicate that the EU political space is increasingly one-dimensional and similar to the national Left-Right dimension (Gabel/Hix 2002). Roll-call analysis and surveys of MEPs have also confirmed that the behavior of party groups and the preferences of MEPs' are ordered according to the Left-Right dimension (Hix/Lord 1997).

However, parties may be very close in one policy area, but diverge in another one. By looking at five specific policy dimensions – economic policy, societal policy, social policy, environmental policy, and external relations – we can tell whether Left Socialist parties agree on policy positions in some policy areas, but differ more in others. For each of these policy areas, specific policy dimensions are created by defining policy area specific Left and Right poles (see Appendix 3 for details).

The fifth step of the content analytical procedure computes the EP party group means by adding up the index values for all (available) parties of a party group and dividing the sum by the number of parties in a group. In a sixth step, standard deviations, the variation of parties' positions around the group mean, are computed as a measure for programmatic compatibility.

3. Policy Positions of Left Parties and Party Groups

A first look at the results of the content analysis and computations, described above and given in Tables 1 and 2, reveals that most of the pessimistic propositions on programmatic differences between members of the United Left can be rejected.

Table 1: Programmatic Positions of Left Party Groups in the European Parliament: General Policy Dimensions

	Left-Right		European Integration		Centralization		National Sovereignty	
Left Party Groups	Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.
Socialists	−10	8	+4	2	−2	2	−3	1
Green Group	−12	13	+2	4	−6	6	−4	3
Green Federation	−12	14	+0	5	−2	2	−4	3
United Left	−26	8	+0	5	−2	1	−2	7

Table 2: Programmatic Positions of Left Party Groups in the European Parliament: Specific Policy Dimensions

	Economic Policy		Societal Policy		Social Policy		Environm. Policy		External Security	
Left Party Groups	Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.	Mean	Std.
Socialists	−2	6	+3	5	−23	5	−5	4	−0	1
Green Group	−3	4	−3	6	−15	6	+11	13	−2	3
Green Federation	−4	3	−1	6	−17	7	+17	11	−3	3
United Left	−9	5	+0	5	−26	9	+2	5	−2	2

As expected, the Socialists are the most homogeneous group in many respects, but on two general policy dimensions – the Left-Right and the centralization dimension – and on two

specific policy dimensions – economic and societal policy – the Left Socialists are as homogenous or even a bit more homogenous than the Socialists.

However, two hypotheses hold: First, the Left Socialists are as divided as the Greens with respect to the European integration dimension; and second, the Left Socialists are divided with respect to the National sovereignty-internationalism dimension, although the group is more in favor of internationalism than the other two groups. In addition, the Left Socialists are more divided in social policies than the Socialists and the Greens, although the differences in the degree of programmatic compatibility between the three groups with respect to social policy are small.

Which are the deviating parties with respect to European integration, national sovereignty, and social policy? Tables 3 and 4 show the positions of the member parties of the Left Socialist group on the general and specific policy dimensions.

Table 3: Programmatic Positions of United Left Parties: General Policy Dimensions

Parties of the United Left	Left-Right	European Integration	Centralization	National Sovereignty
DEN: SF	–34	n.p.	n.p.	–12
FIN: VAS	–15	n.p.	n.p.	n.p.
FRA: PCF	–18	+8	–1	0
GER: PDS	–30	+8	–2	–7
GRE: KKE	–34	–7	n.p.	+14
GRE: SYN	–25	+1	–2	–1
GRE: DIKKI	–17	–2	–3	+5
ITA: RC	–32	–2	+1	–3
NET: SP	–17	–0	–1	–2
POR: PCP	–29	+0	–2	–0
SPA: IU	–27	–0	–4	–1
SWE: VP	–36	–3	–3	–7

n.p. no position taken in national election program

Table 4: Programmatic Positions of United Left Parties: Specific Policy Dimensions

Parties of the United Left	Economic Policy	Societal Policy	Social Policy	Environm. Policy	External Security
DEN: SF	–9	+11	–33	–2	0
FIN: VAS	n.p.	0	–47	+2	n.p.
FRA: PCF	–1	+1	–26	+1	–3
GER: PDS	–10	–1	–21	+2	–4
GRE: KKE	–20	+2	–19	–1	–4
GRE: SYN	–3	–5	–30	+3	–3
GRE: DIKKI	–3	+2	–18	–5	–0
ITA: RC	–10	–4	–23	+7	–3
NET: SP	–6	+1	–20	+2	–1
POR: PCP	–12	–1	–27	–3	+0
SPA: IU	–10	–5	–15	+8	–3
SWE: VP	–10	n.p.	–29	+10	–2

n.p. no position taken in national election program

A first glance at Tables 3 and 4 reveals that not all parties take positions on all dimensions and in all policy fields. There are four possible reasons why parties do not mention certain issues in their programs. First, the issue may not be relevant either for a party or for the country as a whole; second, the parties' voters are divided over an issue; third, party elites may deviate from voters. In the last two cases parties may avoid the issue because they do not want to alienate their voters. Fourth, the party itself may be divided and unable to come up with a joint position. Therefore, it is no surprise that neither the Danish nor the Finnish Left Socialists mention European integration in their national election programs. In both countries, European integration is a highly salient issue. The Danish Socialistisk Folkeparty avoids the issue, because its voters' are highly opposed to the EU, although the members of the national Danish parliament are more pro- than anti-European (Pedersen 1996). In Finland, no party advocated EU membership in the late 1980s, but the party leaders did not officially oppose the EU either – they remained quiet and did not take any position at all. Even in the 1994 EU membership referendum, the Left Alliance party took no official decision on the party lines (Johansson/Raunio 2001). This is also the case in the 1999 election program which is shown here. Therefore, the group means for the United Left are calculated without taking these two parties in account. This procedure may underestimate the real amount of programmatic differences within the group, but should not have an impact on the sequence of party groups because the Finnish and Danish Socialist parties do not take stands on European integration either.

There are two parties which are highly in favor of more European integration: the French PCF and the German PDS. But most parties of the group detect good as well as bad sides in European integration and take a middle position. The party which comes out as most opposed to European integration is the major Greek Communist Party KKE. At the same time the Greek Communist Party is the party most in favor of national sovereignty. As was hypothesized, this deviating position may be due to the competitive situation of three relevant Left Socialist parties in the Greek party system.

The Swedish Left Party is known to be a party which wants Sweden to leave the EU altogether (Wehr 2001). Nevertheless, it does not seem to be particularly hostile to the EU, although its election program lists more negative than positive statements. In the 1994 Swedish referendum on EU membership, the official party line was a clear cut 'no' (Johansson/Raunio 2001) and even the most recent publications note that the Swedish Left party is the only party in the United Left group fundamentally opposed to the EU (Neubert 2001). Most Left Socialist parties want an 'alternative Europe' (Bell 1996: 230) and are opposed 'to the current turn of events and not a root and branch condemnation of the institutions as a whole' (Bell 1996: 231).

The policy area in which the United Left is more divers than the Socialists and the Greens is social policy. In this policy area, there is a tendency of a north-south divide between member parties of the United Left with the Danish and especially the Finnish Left Socialists on the far Left and the Spanish as well as two of Greek parties on the Right wing of the group. This north-south divide may be due to differences in the status quo of countries. Some authors argue convincingly that differences in the status quo of the European member countries can lead to dissent between parties of the same party family: 'Common standards, adopted by a qualified majority of national governments, are inevitably lower than the standards in some member states and higher than in others. As a result, from the perspective of a member state with a relatively liberalized economy and low levels of welfare and environmental protection, such as Britain, the EU regulatory regime is "socialism through the back door", as Margaret Thatcher famously put it. Alternatively, from the perspective of a member state with a highly regulated economy and high levels of welfare and environmental protection, such as Denmark, the EU regulatory regime is "Anglo-Saxon capitalism through the back door"' (Hix/Goetz

2000: 4–5). In principle, differences between the status quo of the member countries can appear in every policy area, but this problem should plague all EP party groups to some degree.

The European integration dimension is considered to be the most relevant by many political scientists. Therefore, a closer look at changes over time in European integration positions is taken (Table 5).

Table 5: Changes in European Integration Positions

Parties of the United Left	Current Election	Previous Election	Election Before Previous Election
13230 DEN: SF	n.p.	+0	–4
14223 FIN: VAS	n.p.	n.p.	–
31220 FRA: PCF	+8	–4	–1
41221 GER: PDS	+8	+5	+0
34210 GRE: KKE	–7	–8	–9
34211 GRE: SYN	+1	–1	+1
34314 GRE: DIKKI	–2	–	–
32212 ITA: RC	–2	–4	–1
22220 NET: SP	–0	–0	–
35229 POR: PCP	+0	+1	+2
33220 SPA: IU	–0	–0	+1
11220 SWE: VP	–3	–5	–

-     not a member of EU/program missing/party not existent at respective point in time
n.p. no position taken in national election program

The table clearly shows that many parties of the United Left became either more pro-European or at least less anti-European during the last years. This is particularly true for the German PDS and the French PCF, but also for the Danish and the Swedish Left Socialist parties. The only party being today a little more anti-European than in former elections is the Spanish Izquerida Unida.

Conclusions

This paper investigated the compatibility of the three Left party groups in the EP based upon positions of parties as taken in their national party programs. The results of the empirical analysis can now be summarized with respect to the question whether Left Socialist parties will be able to agree to a joint Euro-party program. Most results yield an optimistic outlook because the United Left is more homogenous than the Greens in most respects, although as a rule less homogenous than the Socialist group. Changes in EU positions over time show that many parties of the United Left became less opposed to the EU; some even became much more pro-European in recent years. Today, the Left Socialists are neither more opposed to European integration nor more divergent on the European integration dimension than the parties from the Green federation. Therefore, a feasible model for the United Left may be a party federation in which the national member parties will keep their independence.

On the other hand, there are two problems with writing a joint program. First, the major Greek Communist Party, KKE, is highly in favor of national sovereignty and opposed to European integration and, second, a north-south divide appeared in social policy: Nordic parties are more in favor of the welfare state than the southern communist parties. This, however, should not cause major obstacles because the new proposal for financing Euro-party federa-

tions only requests parties to agree on freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law as the basic goals of the EU. Examples of Socialist and Green Euro-party federation developments have shown that the writing of fully-fledged party programs with specific goals for each and every policy area is a long-term project and can not be achieved at once.

Whether the Left Socialists can come up with a joint program will thus depend on the willingness of the parties to cooperate. Even with the given degree of programmatic compatibility, they do not stand a chance if they choose to see the glass as half-empty. To write a common manifesto often means to reach a compromise at the level of the lowest common denominator, to be vague whenever parties diverge, or even to leave out some issues. The Socialists and the Greens choose to see the glass as half-full, although these two groups suffer from similar difficulties for united actions as the Left Socialists. But they dwelled on similarities and therefore managed to come up with joint Euro-programs.

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Appendix 1: Analyzed Parties in the Three Left Party Groups

Country/Election	Party	Party Group (Federation)
Austria 1999:		
SPÖ	Sozialistische Partei Österreichs	Socialists
GA	Die Grüne Alternative	Greens
Belgium 1999:		
SP	Socialistische Partij	Socialists
PS	Parti socialiste	Socialists
ECOLO	ECOLO	Greens
AGALEV	AGALEV	Greens
VU	De Volksunie	Greens (EFA)
Denmark 2001:		
SD	Socialdemokratiet	Socialists
SF	Socialistisk Folkeparti	United Left
Finland 1999:		
SDP	Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue	Socialists
VIHR	Suomen Vihreä Liitto	Greens
VAS	Vasemmisto Liitto	United Left
France 2002:		
PS	Parti socialiste	Socialists
LV	Les Verts	Greens
PCF	Parti Communiste Français	United Left
Germany 2002:		
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Socialists
Grüne	Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen	Greens
PDS	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	United Left
Greece 2000:		
PASOK	Panhellinio Socialistiko Kinema	Socialists
KKE	Kommounistikon Komma Ellados	United Left
Syn	Synaspisnos	United Left
DIKKI	Dimokratiki Kinoniku Kinima	United Left
Ireland 1997:		
Lab	Irish Labour Party	Socialists
GP	Ecology Party	Greens
Italy 2001:		
DS	Partito Democratico della Sinistra	Socialists
Verdi	Federazione delle Liste Verdi	Greens
RC	Rifondazione Comunista	United Left

Country	Party	Party Group (Federation)
Luxemburg 1999:		
LSAP	Parti ouvrier socialiste luxembourgeois/ Letzeburger Sozialistisch Arbechterpartei	Socialists
Gre	Greng Lëscht Ekologesch Initiativ - Di Grëng Alternativ	Greens
Netherlands 2003:		
PvdA	Partij van der Arbeid	Socialists
GL	Groen Links	Greens
SP	Socialistische Partij	United Left
Portugal 1999:		
PS	Partido Socialista Portuguêsa	Socialists
PCP	Partido Comunista Português	United Left
Spain 2000:		
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español	Socialists
PNV	Partido Nacionalita Vasco/Euskadi Alberti Jetzale	Greens (EFA)
EA	Eusko Alkartasuna	Greens (EFA)
ERC	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya	Greens (EFA)
PA	Partidu Andalucista	Greens (EFA)
IU	Izquierda Unida	United Left
Sweden 1998:		
SDA	Sveriges Socialdemokratistiska Arbetareparti	Socialists
Grö	Miljöpartiet de Gröna	Greens
VP	Vänsterpartiet	United Left
United Kingdom 2001:		
Lab	Labour Party	Socialists

Notes:

Greens	Group of Greens/European Free Alliance
Greens (EFA)	Parties of Green Group belonging to the European Free Alliance (EFA)
Socialists	Group of the Party of European Socialists (PES)
United Left	Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left
Year	Election year of included election programs

Appendix 2: Missing Party Programs

1. Socialists

SDI	Socialisti Democratici Italiani	Italy
SDLP	Social Democratic Party	Northern Ireland

2. Greens

BNG	Bloque Nacionalista Gallego	Spain
Gre	Greens	United Kingdom
PC	Plaid Cymru	United Kingdom
SNP	Scottish National Party	United Kingdom

3. United Left

LO-LCR	Lutte ouvriére – Ligue commiste révolutionnaire	France
CI	Comunisti Italiani	Italy

Appendix 3: Definitions of General and Specific Policy Dimensions

Left	Right

A. General Policy Dimensions

A.1 Left-Right-Dimension

	Left		Right
103	Anti-Imperialism: Positive	104	Military: Positive
105	Military: Negative	201	Freedom and Human Rights: Positive
106	Peace: Positive	203	Constitutionalism: Positive
107	Internationalism: Positive	305	Political Authority: Positive
202	Democracy: Positive	401	Free Enterprise: Positive
403	Market Regulation: Positive	402	Incentives: Positive
404	Economic Planning: Positive	407	Protectionism: Negative
406	Protectionism: Positive	414	Economic Orthodoxy: Positive
412	Controlled Economy: Positive	505	Welfare State Reduction
413	Nationalization: Positive	601	National Way of Life: Positive
504	Welfare State Expansion	603	Traditional Morality: Positive
506	Education Expansion	605	Law and Order: Positive
701	Labor Groups: Positive	606	Social Harmony: Positive

A.2 European Integration

108	European Union: Positive	110	European Union: Negative

A.3 Centralization

301	Decentralization	302	Centralization

A.4 National Sovereignty

107	Internationalism: Positive	109	National Sovereignty

B. Specific Policy Dimensions

B.1 Economic Policy

403	Market Regulation: Positive	401	Free Enterprise: Positive
404	Economic Planning: Positive	402	Incentives: Positive
405	Corporatism: Positive	414	Economic Orthodoxy: Positive
409	Keynesian Demand Management: Positive	702	Labor Groups: Negative
412	Controlled Economy: Positive	704	Middle Class and Professional Groups: Positive
413	Nationalization: Positive		
415	Marxist Analysis: Positive		
701	Labor Groups: Positive		

B.2 Societal Policy

602	National Way of Life: Negative	601	National Way of Life: Positive
604	Traditional Morality: Negative	603	Traditional Morality: Positive
607	Multiculturalism: Positive	605	Law and Order: Positive
705	Underprivileged Minority Groups: Positive	608	Multiculturalism: Negative

B.3 Social Policy

503	Social Justice: Positive	505	Welfare State Reduction
504	Welfare State Expansion	507	Education Reduction
506	Education Expansion		

B.4 Environmental Policy

501	Environmental Protection: Positive	411	Technology and Infrastructure: Positive
416	Anti-Growth Economy: Positive	410	Productivity/Growth: Positive

B.5 External Security

105	Military: Negative	104	Military: Positive
106	Peace: Positive		