

**Bressanelli, Edoardo:**

**EUROPARTIES AFTER  
ENLARGEMENT:  
ORGANIZATION, IDEOLOGY  
AND COMPETITION.**

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*Europarties after Enlargement* embarks upon the impact of the Eastern Enlargement in 2004 and 2007 on the 'Europarties' from both the organizational as well as ideological points of view. Framing the research problem in terms of the political parties' institutionalization and drawing on the theoretical works of the classics of political parties' research (Rokkan, von Beyme, Sartori, Duverger etc.), Bressanelli aspires to contribute to the field of enlargement studies, to the study of political parties and a broader concept of party democracy and its possible application in the context of the European Union (EU) and finally to the research on voting behaviour in parliaments.

Title of the reviewed book is slightly misleading. Potential readers could easily get the impression that the book will expand their knowledge about the impact that the Eastern enlargement had on the political parties at the European level. That is however not the case, as the author focuses almost exclusively on the political fractions in the European Parliament (EP), which is of course legitimate and not any less valuable for the discipline. What might be perceived as confusing is the fact that, based on his research dealing mainly with the political groups in the EP, the author draws conclusions about the possible contribution of the European political

parties on the development of a democratic political system in the EU. Although the link is implicitly obvious, it might have been more transparent to address it in more explicit terms.

The author assesses the expected impact of enlargement on Europarties based on the general theory of comparative party politics, i.e. draws a parallel between the political catch-all parties on the national level and the parties on the European level. According to this assumption, the Europarties were expected to become challenged concerning both the organizational as well as ideological dimensions of their functioning. For identifying these dimensions, Bressanelli expands on the work of Randall and Svåsand (1999; 2002), who recognize its structural and attitudinal components and assess both of them from both external and internal perspectives. Slightly departing from their original labelling of the researched categories, Bressanelli then assesses the impact of enlargement in four categories: organization, (decisional) autonomy, ideological cohesion and reification. Accession of a high number of political parties, mainly from the countries of the Central and Eastern Europe, was expected to cause organizational problems resulting from the increase in Europarty members, as well as lack of ideological cohesion, resulting from the differing character of political competition in the post-communist countries and their different ideological setting, not compatible with Rokkan's classic theory of cleavages. Even before getting into deeper detail about the individual chapters, it can be stated that the above mentioned expectations were not confirmed.

The book consists of two parts (Context and Theory, Empirical Analysis), which are further divided into eight chapters. While in the first part Bressanelli clarifies the theoretical concepts of party institutionalization and the expected impact of enlargement, the

second part is devoted to his own empirical research on the topic. He uses both qualitative and quantitative methods, reasoning convincingly about the use of each of them while at the same time providing an overview of their limitations.

Chapter 3 thus focuses on the challenges which the parties were expected to face in the organizational dimension. Using semi-structured interviews and document analysis, Bressanelli concludes that the three/four researched political groups in the EP (EPP, PES/S&D, ALDE and G-EFA, included as a control) did not experience any serious trouble concerning their organizational functioning after the enlargement, mostly as a consequence of the reforms they undertook even prior to the actual enlargement in order to ensure a smooth transition phase after the accession of a number of new members. The decision making had been centralized to a higher degree and new coordination mechanisms had been introduced. While the PES and ALDE groups introduced these measures directly before the enlargement (2003–2004), the EPP had already made steps in the same direction in 1990s as a reaction to modifying its membership policy and accepting a number of new parties from the 'old' EU15.

In Chapter 4 and 5, Bressanelli focuses on the ideological cohesion of the Europarties after the accession of the members from the Central and Eastern European countries. To identify the ideological position of individual parties as well as the Europarties, the author uses data from Euromanifestos and the EU Profiler and places them into the two main EP ideological dimensions – left-right and EU-integration; this proved to remain valid in the research of ideological space in the institution. The research did not confirm the expectations about lesser ideological cohesion of Europarties resulting from the different ideological backgrounds of their new

member parties. The transition seems to be rather smooth, especially in case of the EPP and PES groups, with slightly more problems in ALDE, especially on the pro-contra integration axis.

Chapter 6 continues its focus on the ideological cohesion of the parties, using the multinomial logit model and tries to predict which particular political group in the EP the political parties in the accessing states will most likely become members of. The results of the research show that, despite various expectations counting on strong pragmatic incentives leading the parties in choosing their membership, ideology remains the most important factor in explaining the parties' membership in the individual groups, both in the 'old' and the 'new' members of the EU. Pragmatism also matters insofar as the political parties on the national level tend to choose the bigger political group, but its impact is smaller. The overall conclusion of the chapter thus is that the political groups in the EP remained ideologically coherent.

In Chapter 7, the author moves his focus to the study of the behavioural patterns of the members of the political groups. Based on the roll-call votes from the parliamentary period 2004–2009, Bressanelli concludes that the MEPs from the new member states do not vote differently from the main line of the political group more often than average members from the EU15. In accordance with the previous chapters, these conclusions stem from the ideological cohesion of the EP political groups.

In the last chapter, Bressanelli aims to assess the level to which the enlargement had an impact on the competition in the EP. He focuses on the two biggest political groups, i.e. the EPP and PES. His findings again do not confirm the original expectation about the enlargement leading to internal ideological diffusion of the groups and thus the blurring of

the ideological differences in the Parliament. The voting patterns of EPP and PES have remained the same after the enlargement as they were before. Given the concept of two main ideological cleavages in the EP – the left-right and integration – the results have shown that while the two major political groups tended to vote alike when it came to issues connected to the level of integration among the member states, they differed on the left-right issues.

The author's approach to individual chapters and the partial research problems can be considered to be correct, well explained and reasoned. He is aware of the potential limitations of the methods used and comes up with alternative explanations for the results of the research. His research technique is rigorous, transparent and could be quite easily replicated. In this respect, Bressanelli's publication is not one of those whose primary goal is to present new methods or approaches. Instead, the main contribution of his work lies in the persuasive attempt to apply the classic theoretical framework of party families, ideology and competition on the level of the political system of the EP. The argument that to extend the breadth of the discipline of comparative politics, it is necessary to climb up the ladder of abstraction and thus perceive the Union as a developing political system, regardless of its sui generis character and how it differs from the political systems of national states (p. 6–7), can only be agreed with. Even more commendable in this respect is the fact that the analysis is not limited to the 'old' EU member states but clearly shows that the accession of the 'new' member states and the presence of their political parties has not had any major negative impact on the political groups' organization, ideological coherence and level of competition. Consequently, Bressanelli's conclusion which contains a clear and by no means subtle policy message concerning the

capability of the political parties to constitute a key pillar in the developing political system of the Union can be considered reasonable and well-founded.

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**Cramme, Olaf  
and Hobolt, Sara B., eds.**

**DEMOCRATIC POLITICS  
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*Democratic Politics in a European Union under Stress* is the first comprehensive political analysis of the Euro crisis that erupted in Greece 2010 and has subsequently been a dominant issue in national and continental debates. The intervention in monetary policy by the union has left a profound mark on democratic politics all over Europe. Dr. Olaf Cramme, Director of the Policy Network and a Visiting Fellow at the European Institute of LSE alongside Professor Sara Hobolt, who is the Sutherland Chair in European Institutions and Professor at the European Institute of LSE, bring together some leading academic minds to analyze a union which is under stress and very much threatened for survival. The changing public attitudes and voting preferences, institutional and societal norms and political traditions of the member states bring forth the valid question: Is the EU politically sustainable?