

# **The Right in the European Parliament since 1979**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the development of the representation of the Right in the European Parliament (EP) since 1979. The Right in Europe has always been more complexly structured than the Left. In particular, the Right remains divided on both culture and economic policy. Developments in the past decades have not significantly weakened this complexity. While urban-rural and church-state cleavages may have weakened, economic and centre-periphery divisions remain strong. Moreover, the Right has become more diverse with the rise of extreme parties and democratisation in Southern and Central/Eastern Europe. To what extent has this diversity been mirrored in the EP? Paradoxically, one strong trend has been the rising dominance of the European People's Party. This has been due to the growing institutional power of the EP and internal rules that mean size itself has become an attraction. Declining divisions within the mainstream Right have also played a role. At the same time, the Right has remained diverse within the EP, with a plethora of smaller groups based around Liberals, Conservatives, Eurosceptics and the extreme Right. These divisions have persisted due to the complexity of the European Right and the simultaneous fluidity of these divisions.

## **Introduction**

Like any major democratic assembly, the political life of the European Parliament (EP) is dominated by its parliamentary groups. According to Raunio (1997, p. 45), they are the 'backbone' of the institution, and life in the EP revolves around them. Yet these parliamentary groups are unusual entities: they are made up not just of individual Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), but also of a series of national parties (Hix, 2002). These come from (by now) 27 different party systems, each with their own history and characteristics. This paper

examines how the parliamentary party system of the EP is formed from the diversity of these national party systems.

In doing so, the focus lies on the Right in Europe.<sup>1</sup> This has always been more diverse and more complex than the Left: the main cleavages identified by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) divide the right half of the ideological spectrum, and these divisions have persisted over time. There are thus numerous party ‘families’ on the Right: Conservatives, Christian Democrats, Liberals, Regionalists, the Extreme Right and Eurosceptics. The developments over the past decades in national party systems have not led to a strong diminution of this complexity. While parties of the mainstream Right may have become more similar to each other, the rise of the extreme Right and the democratisation in Southern and Central/Eastern Europe have led to increasing diversity both within and across party systems.

This paper examines how these national parties have been represented by party groups in the EP. The focus lies in particular on two developments. First, the main centre-right parliamentary group, the European People’s Party (EPP), has grown in size and has come to dominate the Right. The institutional advantages of size, coupled with the rising power of the EP and the declining divisions on the mainstream Right, have supported the EPP’s growth strategy. Second, the Right has nevertheless continued to be more complex than the Left. This is due to the diversity of Right parties in national parties systems, but also due to the fact that the divisions between party families are less hard and fast on the Right. This latter feature has supported the continuing fluidity of parliamentary groups on the Right.

This paper is structured as follows. First, the development of the Right in national party systems across Europe since 1979 is surveyed. Moving on to the EP, the representation of the

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘Right’ is defined in this paper as all parties that are situated to the right of centre on economic policy matters, usually the primary cleavage in European party systems.

Right is examined next, concentrating first on the increasing dominance of the EPP and then on the continuing complexity on the Right in the Parliament..

## **The Complexity of the Right in Europe**

The party system of the European Parliament is based on the individual systems found in each of the 27 member states of the European Union. In the absence of true transnational parties, the EP's parliamentary groups are thus made up of national parties. In order to trace the development of the Right since 1979, it is therefore worth first analysing the changes that have affected these parties across all member states.

A good starting point is Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) influential analysis of the key cleavages that characterise European party systems. They argue that parties emerged and confronted each other in a series of conflicts: church-state, rural-urban, centre-periphery and owner-worker. These cleavages amount to a conception of party competition as structured around four dimensions, which may or may not find expression in any given (Western European) country (Stoll, 2005). The key here is that parties can capture support by reflecting one or more societal conflicts, with their core voters fundamentally isolated from the electoral marketplace. The only one of these four cleavages that is directly and indisputably a division between Left and Right is the last, which pitted owners against workers. This cleavage is most strongly identified with the rise of Socialist, Social Democratic and Communist parties in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The other three cleavages are all to be found within the Right itself; they respectively opposed secular and religious spheres, landed interests and the urban bourgeoisie, and the dominant centre and subject populations. Importantly, these three cleavages all rose to prominence before the owner-worker cleavage, which became dominant only as a consequence

of the Industrial Revolution and the extension of suffrage. This means that by the time the left-wing parties arrived on the scene, the Right in many countries was already divided along important economic and cultural lines. These often proved difficult to resolve, leading to a Right that is more complexly structured than the Left: there has as a result historically always been a greater variety of parties on the Right than on the Left (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Rokkan, 1970, p. 158; Boix, 1999). There is thus a series of party families that can historically be located on the Right (von Beyme, 1984). The main families are the Christian Democrats and the Conservatives, both represented in many European countries. Two other long-standing families, Liberals and Ethnic-Regionalists, are primarily located on the Right as well.

This greater ‘untidiness’ on the Right can be seen in Figure 1. This plots the policy positions of parties in 14 pre-enlargement EU countries<sup>2</sup> in 2006 on two dimensions, economic policy and green/alternative/libertarian versus traditional/authoritarian/nationalist views; the latter is usually summarized as gal/tan (Hooghe et al., 2008). Kriesi et al. (2008a) argue that Lipset and Rokkan’s four cleavages actually boil down to two core conflicts, economics and culture, so this two-dimensional graph should summarize the competitive situation in European countries well. A vertical line has been added at 5 on the economic policy axis in order to separate Right from Left. What is clearly visible is that the Left is relatively coherently aligned, with more moderate positions on economic policy associated with more moderate positions on gal/tan matters (i.e. ‘culture’). The relationship between the two positions is strongly significant on the economic Left ( $r=.48$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $n=66$ ); the equivalent regression line has been added to the figure. The Right is in contrast far less clearly aligned: there is no association between the economic policy position of a party and its cultural views ( $r=-.03$ ,  $p=.85$ ,  $n=52$ ). The relevant regression line, also added to the figure, is virtually flat. This means that the Left can more

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<sup>2</sup> Luxembourg was not included in the survey.

successfully be summarised by a single dimension that contains positions on economics and culture. On the Right, these two issues need to be distinguished to understand party positions and party ideologies. As already noted by Rokkan (1970), the structure of party competition is thus more complicated on the Right.

It is worth remembering that these positions refer to party locations in 2006, so indicate well the persistence of internal divisions on the Right (Marks and Wilson, 2000). However, the competitive situation on the Right in the EU has of course not stood still in the 40 years since Lipset and Rokkan analysed the main lines of cleavages. Four developments in particular need to be highlighted. First, two of the cleavages have reduced significantly in terms of their strength, that is, their ability to divide parties effectively into two camps.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the urban-rural cleavage has declined strongly in its salience across Europe, mostly due to the lower number of farmers and the relative economic irrelevance of landed interests. This development can be most clearly seen in the re-orientation of the Agrarian parties in Nordic countries, which have now universally rebranded themselves as ‘Centre Parties’ and no longer situate themselves as prominently on one side of an urban-rural divide. The second cleavage that has declined in strength is the opposition of church and state. In most European countries, religious observance has become less widespread, and voters base their political opinions less on support or opposition to the views of the church. In party-political terms, this change can be seen in the secularization of Christian Democratic parties, which have tended to move towards a catch-all approach instead of remaining narrowly sectarian. The prime example of this is of course the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the party that inspired Kirchheimer’s (1990 [1966]) description of catch-all parties in the first place. Other examples are the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) and the

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<sup>3</sup> I here refer to cleavages mainly to the extent that they structure party systems and put to one side the question of the link between social structure and voting behaviour.

Dutch Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), though the actual ideological evolution of each particular party is of course complex (van Kersbergen, 2008). Overall, though, Christian Democracy has tended to become more like traditional conservatism in its programmatic orientation, tracking the decline of religiosity across Europe.

Second, two cleavages have either remained stable or increased in importance. The conflicts emanating from the owner-worker cleavage are now undoubtedly the dominant dimension of political opposition in Europe. Economic policy is consistently one of the most highly salient issues in any party system. Indeed, the meaning of Left and Right overall is closely associated with this topic (Downs, 1957). Of course, while economic policy has become and is likely to remain a primary line of conflict between parties, the social basis of this cleavage – class – is generally seen as weakening (Enyedi, 2008). The class cleavage as a sociological phenomenon has as a result become less relevant to the economic policy dimension. The centre-periphery cleavage is the second line of conflict that has remained highly salient in many European countries. Parties that campaign on a regional basis and for greater regional independence have gained in strength over the past decades. Examples are not hard to find: one need only cite the continuing relevance of the Scottish National Party (SNP) and Plaid Cymru (PC) in Scotland and Wales, the impact of Vlaams Blok/Belang (VB) in Belgium and the strength of various sub-national parties in Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia. Many regionalist parties are located on Right (e.g. in Spain, Belgium and Italy). Some regionalist parties cannot of course be classed as Right parties: for example, there are moderate left regionalists in both Catalonia (Republican Left, ERC) and the Basque Country (Eusko Alkartasuna, EA), while the UK's SNP and PC are also of the Centre-Left (and indeed to the left

of Labour). Overall, the continuing relevance of the centre-periphery cleavage has meant that the complexity of the Right remains on this line of conflict.

Third, the last decades have experienced the rise of new political parties on the extreme Right. These parties, which are diverse in their actual views and structure, are generally characterised by their intense nationalism and their opposition to immigration. Examples of extreme-right parties that have gained prominence include Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ), France's National Front (FN) and Belgium's VB. Other countries that have experienced relatively strong far-right parties include Italy, the Netherlands and Denmark. While all extreme-right parties are very restrictive on 'cultural' topics, their economic policy position is far less distinct (Kitschelt, 1995; Kriesi et al., 2008). While some such parties have also espoused free-market policies – examples are the FN and the FPÖ – others have exhibited economic policies closer to the centre, or at least of a more populist vein. The emergence of these parties has further complicated the make-up of the Right in Europe.

Finally, a fourth key development is the establishment of (or return to) democracy in large parts of Europe. When the EU's predecessors were founded in the 1950s, Central and Eastern Europe were of course just beginning their time under Communist rule. Spain and Portugal were also still governed by dictatorships, while Greece would experience its own period of authoritarian rule in later decades. The 'Europe' considered by Lipset and Rokkan was thus actually just one part of today's EU. The near-complete democratization of Europe has also led to an increase in the number of party systems. Because of the distinct history of these newly democratic regions, it could not be expected that Lipset and Rokkan's cleavages would be replicated in Southern and Central and Eastern Europe. In Southern Europe, the main change has been an increase in the number of large conservative (rather than Christian Democratic) parties:

examples are the Spanish Popular Party (PP) and the Greek New Democracy (ND). In Central and Eastern Europe, there are more parties that take up policy positions similar to the (West) European Liberal family. To illustrate this, Figure 2 presents the policy space for the EU27, again based on the expert survey carried out by Hooghe et al. (2008).<sup>4</sup> When comparing this figure to Figure 1, it is immediately obvious that the two-dimensional space is more fully occupied. The top-left corner, previously empty, now contains a number of parties that combine positions on the economic Left and on the cultural Right. In addition, there are also more parties that to Right on both economically and socially topics (bottom-right corner). Indeed, in Central and Eastern Europe, there is a positive association between such economic and cultural liberalism (Marks et al., 2006). The increase in the number of democratic European countries has thus also meant that the overall shape of the European party-political space on the Right has been altered.

To gain a final overview of the European Right, Figure 3 presents all parties that can be situated on the economic Right, identified by their score of 5 or above in the Hooghe et al. survey (all EU countries are once again included here). Instead of the names of the parties, only the party family name is shown. It is clear that the Liberals are all at the ‘gal’ end of the gal/tan dimension, though their economic policy position varies. The exact opposite is true for radical Right parties, which are all extremely conservative on the gal/tan spectrum but differ greatly in their economic views. The Christian Democrats and Conservatives share the centre-right space: they are mostly found between five and eight on both scales. What is also visible from this figure is that there is perhaps no obvious way of sorting these parties into EP parliamentary groups. How the empirical diversity of Right parties in Europe has been present within EP groups, and how these have evolved since 1979, is the focus of the next section.

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<sup>4</sup> Only parties in 24 EU countries were in fact included in the survey (Luxembourg, Malta and Cyprus are excluded).

## **The EP Parliamentary Groups of the Right since 1979**

The parliamentary groups formed on the Right in the European Parliament have been characterised by the permanent change in their number, members and even names. The general ‘messiness’ of the competitive situation led Christopher Lord to argue that there is an ‘untidy Right’ in the EP (Lord, 1997). However, there have in fact been two overall tendencies in the development of organization of the European Right in the EP. First, the parliamentary group associated with the European People’s Party (EPP) has increased its dominance among right-wing parties in the EP despite the trends towards growing ideological complexity outlined in the previous section. Second, the diversity of the Right has nevertheless found expression in the continuing variety of smaller parliamentary groups, which tend to be short-lived or have changeable membership.

### *The growing dominance of the EPP*

In the 1950s, the party systems of the six founding members of the European Union – Belgium, France, Italy, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands – all shared at least one common feature: the Right was characterised by the existence of strong Christian Democratic parties. In its first meetings of the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1953, the delegates from the six original member states already formed alliances along ideological (rather than national) lines, and it was only natural that one such group was set up by these Christian Democratic parties. The European People’s Party parliamentary group in the EP can thus trace its history back to the earliest days of European integration (Kreppel, 2001). The origins of the EPP’s parliamentary representation therefore lie within one particular party family in Europe, the Christian Democrats.

The forerunner group of the EPP was thus founded in a situation where Christian Democrats were the dominant player on the Centre-Right in all member states. However, as the European Union grew, it began to include countries without a strong Christian Democratic tradition. In 1973, the enlargement to Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom did not provide many new recruits to the group.<sup>5</sup> While Ireland's Fine Gael joined the Christian Democrats, its larger competitor Fianna Fail did not (Hanley, 2008, p. 90). Moreover, the UK and Danish Conservatives chose to form their own parliamentary group, later to be called the European Democrats.

However, the Christian Democratic group did not remain limited to one sub-group of moderate right-wing parties for long. Its name was changed to the European People's Party in 1979, the same year as the first direct EP elections, perhaps already indicating a desire to move beyond the confines of Christian Democracy. Soon, the parliamentary group indeed began to follow a conscious strategy to take in a broader range of members (Jansen, 1998, p. 115). In the 1980s, the EPP group thus opened its ranks to generally conservative rather than narrowly Christian Democratic parties. The start was made by the Greek New Democracy in 1981 (Hanley, 2008, p. 90), followed by the Spanish Popular Party in 1989. Both of these parties make no claim to be Christian Democrats and should be seen as classically conservative parties. In 1992, the UK and Danish Conservatives also finally joined the EPP, though the relationship of the Tories to their parliamentary group remained very tense.<sup>6</sup> After the 1995 enlargement, the EPP group gained not only its natural members, the Austrian ÖVP, but also the conservative parties of Sweden and Finland. The final major addition to the EPP in the 1990s came from Italy,

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that 'the EPP' refers to the parliamentary group (rather than the extra-parliamentary transnational party) through this paper.

<sup>6</sup> The EPP was renamed EPP-ED only in 1999 at the insistence of then Tory party leader William Hague (Maurer et al., 2007).

whose Forza Italia was admitted to the group in 1998. More recently, of course, the EPP group has absorbed a large number of new members from the twelve countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007.

The evolution of the EPP in the EP since 1979 can be traced by looking at Figure 4. This presents the proportion of the seats in the Parliament occupied by the EPP compared to the seats of all right-wing groups as a whole. The growth of the EPP is easily visible. In the 80s and early 90s, it was by far the largest group on the right, always taking up between 44 and 51 per cent of the Right's representation in the EP. This increased dramatically in 1999, to nearly 70 per cent, and remained similarly high after both the 2004 and 2009 elections. The other main groups on the Right – the Liberals, the European Democrats (1979-1992) and the UEN (1994-2009) – do not come close to the EPP in terms of seat share of the Right in the EP. Even the UK Conservatives' probable desertion in 2009 will not affect the relative supremacy of the EPP on the Right. The dominance of the EPP has increased consistently over the past thirty years: the growth strategy was clearly effective.

What explains this rising dominance of the EPP's parliamentary group on the Right? A series of factors are important. First, it is necessary to stress that size itself is attractive, both for the parties already within the parliamentary group and for the parties considering joining it. For the existing EPP members, increasing the group's membership meant that it could continue to rival the Socialist group in size (Hanley, 2008, p. 97). As already noted, the enlargements of the 1970s and 1980s did not bring strong Christian Democratic parties into the EP. In contrast, the ranks of the Socialists were immediately bolstered by Labour and the Danish Social Democrats and later the Greek, Spanish and Portuguese Socialist parties. In order to keep up with the Socialists in size, the EPP had no choice but to open itself up to new members. Increasing group

size is attractive because this rewards national parties both in terms of office and policy benefits (Budge and Laver, 1986; Strom, 1990). For the EPP, there were clear office benefits to maintaining a large group in the EP. Under the Parliament's institutional rules, large groups have a greater proportion of parliamentary offices to distribute among their member parties than small groups (Maurer and Wessels, 2003, pp. 185-94). For example, the chairs of the most important committees are generally nominated by the two largest groups, which also dominate the Conference of Presidents. The policy benefits of enlarging the EPP were also clear. The leaderships of the large groups are obviously more attractive negotiation partners for the other EU institutions as they have a greater impact on the outcomes of votes within the Parliament. The fact that they dominate the key parliamentary offices also means that large groups can wield disproportional influence. Finally, the larger the group, the greater also the ability to secure the responsibility to draft parliamentary reports (Mamadouh and Raunio, 2003). The inherent attraction of size means that the existing group has an incentive to grow, but this also coincides with an incentive on the side of potential new members to seek out the largest potential group to join (Maurer et al., 2008).

The importance of belonging to a large group has taken on greater relevance with the increase in the EP's power. This institution has grown from a largely toothless consultative body into a true Parliament with significant legislative influence and power to control the Commission (Hix et al., 2007). The EP's legislative power increased substantially with the 1987 Single European Act, which introduced the cooperation procedure, and then again with the 1993 Maastricht Treaty and the 1999 Amsterdam Treaty, which respectively introduced and reformed the co-decision procedure. On most socio-economic policies, the EP is now an equal co-legislator with the Council. It has also increased its power to control the Commission, in particular due its

larger influence in the nomination process and its evident willingness to hold the Commission to account. In this context of the rising political relevance of the EP, it became important to be able to exert influence within the Parliament. When the EP had less influence, it was less essential to be a member of a large group, but this changed together with the Parliament's stature.

At the same time, small groups became less viable within the Parliament. Until 1999, groups could even come from just one member state if they had enough MEPs. For example, Berlusconi's Forza Italia set up its own group, Forza Europa, after the 1994 elections (Corbett et al., 2005, p. 70). Similarly, the UK Conservatives sat with just their Danish and (briefly) their Spanish partners between 1979 and 1992, forming a group called the European Democrats. This would not be possible today: since 1999, all groups need to include representatives from at least a fifth of the member states. Rule 29 of the Rules of Procedure thus currently states that: 'A political group shall comprise Members elected in at least one-fifth of the Member States. The minimum number of Members required to form a political group shall be twenty.'<sup>7</sup> Until 2004, this meant that parties from three out of the EU15 could form a group, but enlargement meant that this number rose to five in 2004 and to six in 2007. From 2009, group status will require parties with in total 25 MEPs from a minimum of seven countries.<sup>8</sup> It has therefore become much harder for small groups to survive as entities separate entities within the EP, which may help explain the attraction of the EPP to potential members.

Finally, the expansionary success of the EPP is also the fruit of a conscious strategy to increase group membership. Of course, the growth of the EPP group was also facilitated by the ideological convergence occurring among the mainstream Right in Europe from the 1970s. This applied in particular to the Christian Democrats and the Conservatives. Their similarities

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<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+RULES-EP+20090309+RULE-029+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN&navigationBar=YES> (accessed 3 June 2009).

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.elections2009-results.eu/en/seats\\_by\\_group\\_en.html](http://www.elections2009-results.eu/en/seats_by_group_en.html) (accessed 10 June 2009).

increased especially on economic policy, but the EPP also decided to put less emphasis on its strong pro-Europeanism and its Christian roots in order to appear a better fit with its new members (Hanley, 2002, 2008). In the 1990s and the early 2000s, the EPP put a lot of effort into recruiting potential new members in Central and Eastern European countries (Hanley, 2008, p. 96f.). As noted, few of these future partners would have Christian Democratic roots, further weakening the former core of the EPP. Today, with among its larger members there are parties such as the French UMP, Berlusconi's People of Freedom (PdL) and the Polish Civic Platform (PO), all of whom are best described as Conservative rather than Christian Democratic. In the 2009-2014 term of the EP, the EPP will remain strong even with the defection of some of its members, most importantly the UK Conservatives. Nevertheless, the fact that the EPP has not managed to retain some of its group members shows that there may be some limits to the expansionary success of the EPP despite the attraction of size and ideological flexibility (Lynch and Whitaker, 2008; Maurer et al., 2008).

Overall, one of the main developments on the Right in the European Parliament has been the growing dominance of the EPP group. This has partly been based on the decline of ideological differences between Christian Democrats and Conservatives, facilitating the construction of a large, ideologically coherent grouping. Yet, even more important are factors relating to the institutional rules and overall power of the EP, which have increased the attraction of size and rendered the establishment and survival of small groups difficult. However, the strength of the EPP does not mean that the complexity of the Right across the EU is not mirrored at all in the Parliament, and it is to the continuing 'untidiness' of the Right that we now turn.

### *The continuing complexity of the Right in the EP*

While the EPP may be dominant among the Right, it is by no means the only group of importance. Since 1979, the number, names and membership of other right-of-centre groups have varied greatly, but there is nevertheless a strong underlying pattern to their development over time. While there has thus been a sometimes bewildering diversity of groups on the Right, there have in fact only been four major types of groups apart from the EPP. These can be broadly associated with major party families: Liberals, Conservatives/Nationalists, Eurosceptics and the extreme Right.

The most important other group is that of the Liberals, which once went under the name European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ELDR) but since 2004 is called the Alliance of Liberal and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). The Liberals are consistently the third-largest force in the EP. They have taken their membership mainly from the classically liberal parties across Europe. The group was considerably reinforced in 2004, when the French Union for French Democracy (UDF) and the Italian Daisy (Margherita) joined the group. This also meant that the group was enlarged to include members somewhat outside the direct liberal tradition. In any case, we saw above that while these parties are united by their social liberalism, they vary quite a lot in their economic views. Overall, this group has been remarkably consistent over the 30 years of the EP's existence and has adapted well to the successive waves of enlargement.

A second type of group tends to gather various parties of conservative or nationalist orientations under its wing. The current representative of this type of group is the current Union for a Europe of the Nations (UEN); previous incarnations include the Progressive Democrats (PD, 1979-84), the European Democratic Alliance (EDA, 1984-1994) and the European Democratic Group (EDG, 1979-1992). The EDG was the group set up by the UK and Danish

Conservatives; the group was dissolved in 1992 following the absorption of the members into the EPP. The PD, EDA and UEN, while also conservative in outlook, have had different parties at their core: these have been the groups where Ireland's Fianna Fail and France's Gaullists found a home, joined by various other parties along the way. The UEN thus also contains representatives from Italy (AN) and Poland (Law and Justice). Compared to the EPP, these four groups have therefore always been more conservative, nationalist and Eurosceptic.

The third type of group collects together Eurosceptic parties. This group thus has the distinction of having as its long-term goal the hope that it will no longer exist. Since 2004, this group is called Independence/Democracy, with earlier versions called Europe of the Nations (1994-1999) and Europe of Democracies and Diversities (1999-2004). Its main representatives are from the UK, France, Italy and Denmark.

The final type of Right party to be represented in the EP is the far right. These have generally not been able to form a long-lasting group, perhaps reflecting the difficulty of setting up an transnational party of extreme nationalists (Hanley, 2008, p. 179). Nevertheless, from 1984 to 1994 several extreme-right parties did form a group, the European Right. Members included the French FN, Belgium's VB, Italy's National Alliance and the German Republicans. In 2007, a group of 20 far-right MEPs again tried to form a group, this time called Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty (ITS) (Maurer et al., 2008). It gathered together representatives from France (FN), Belgium (VB) as well as Romanian, Bulgarian and Italian parties. It quickly fell apart, however, after the Romanian members withdrew in reaction to remarks made Italian ITS member Alessandra Mussolini.<sup>9</sup> This meant that the ITS group no longer had the 20 MEPs then necessary to remain a group in the EP.

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<sup>9</sup> See Honor Mahoney, 'MEPs welcome fall of far-right group', 14/11/2007, <http://euobserver.com/9/25148> (accessed 3 June 2009).

The evolution of the EP groups is traced in Figure 5. This presents the mean left-right position of each parliamentary group, weighted by the seat share of each component party (Castles and Mair, 1984; Huber and Inglehart, 1995; Ray, 1999; Benoit and Laver, 2006; Steenbergen and Marks, 2007; Hooghe et al., 2008). Only groups present in more than one term are included. This graph gives a broad indication of the location of the main groups during the history of the elected EP. First, it is worth noting the difference between the Left and the Right. On the Left, the three main groups are clearly ordered, with the Communists at the extreme, the Greens next and the Socialists the closest to the political centre.<sup>10</sup> On the Right, however, the situation is more disorganized. The first difference is that the number of groups over the past thirty years is far larger – seven compared to three.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the lines representing the groups are close together and often cross over each other. The Right in the EP is clearly less distinctly structured and more ‘untidy’ than the Left.

Turning to the individual groups, the EPP’s position has remained largely stable despite its changing membership over the past thirty years. As expected, the smaller conservative/nationalists groups (PD/EDA/UEN) are also consistently more extreme than the EPP, even if the distance is quite small. (The UK Conservatives’ new group is shown as replacing the UEN as it is expected to include many of that latter group’s former members.) The Liberals have shifted towards a more centrist position over the last thirty years and now clearly occupy the middle ground between the EPP and the PES. Originally, though, the Liberals were to the right of the EPP, with the Liberals becoming more centrist only in 1994. The two groups have not always been as visibly separate as today. In contrast to the conservative groups and the

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<sup>10</sup> The Greens’ centrist position in 1989-1994 stems from the fact that at this point regionalist parties formed a larger proportion of this group. The group also seems to have become more moderate in 2009.

<sup>11</sup> This number only includes groups present in at least two terms of the EP.

Liberals, the UK and Danish EDG (1979-1994) was always clearly distinguishable from the EPP. Even more distant was the far-right group (1984-1994).

What explains this consistent complexity on the Right? The main explanation lies in the patterns identified in the first section of this paper: the Right has historically been far more diversely structured than the Left. On the Left, there tended to be two main parties, Socialists/Social Democrats and Communists. Recently, these have been joined by Green parties, building on the rise of postmaterialist values (Inglehart, 1977). On the Right, the number of families was always greater, with Conservatives, Christian Democrats, Agrarians, Liberals and Regionalist parties present across Europe. These have been joined by the extreme Right and (in the EP) by Eurosceptic parties. It is not surprising that this Left-Right difference has also manifested itself in the parliamentary groups within the EP. The greater diversity and number of right-wing parties has thus also meant that the groups on the Right have been more numerous and more varied.

A second explanation lies in the nature of ideological divisions on the Right. On the Left, the camps are easily identified, with Socialists/Social Democrats generally eager to distinguish themselves from the Communist and New Left parties (and vice versa). The different agenda and voter base of Green parties has generally separated these parties from their other Left competitors, even if in some countries there has been overlap with other parties (in particular with the New Left). Nevertheless, the three main groups are mostly easily distinguishable and form distinct camps. This is not true of the Right to the same extent. As we have seen, there has been considerable flux in the membership of the main groups. The French Right exemplifies this in particular. Until 1999, the Gaullists sat in the smaller conservative groups (PD/EDA), a result of their relatively nationalist views. Since then, they have been members of the EPP group.

Conversely, their right-wing competitors, the UDF, which in the past has tended to be more of a coalition of parties, tended to split its MEPs among several groups, but settled on EPP membership in 1999. In 2004, it moved to the Liberal group (Corbett et al., 2005; Hanley, 2008, p. 126f.). It is hard to imagine Left parties going on similar journeys through the EP party system. Other examples of ideological flexibility abound. The conservative EDG was thus slowly amalgamated into the EPP, finally disappearing in 1992. Ireland's Fianna Fail has long sat among the conservative/nationalist groups (PD/EDA/UEN), but will now switch to the Liberal group.<sup>12</sup> Portugal's Social Democrats (the main centre-right party) originally sat with the Liberals but is now an EPP member. While there are more divisions on the Right than on the Left, these are also less ideological and less permanent. This also helps explain the diversity of the groups on the Right since 1979.

Finally, the complexity of the Right in the EP appears to be lessening. Looking at the 1999-2009 terms of the EP, there was a clear order among the right-wing groups, with the Liberals at the centre, the UEN the most conservative and the EPP in-between the two. Only the small Eurosceptic group has recently proved more variable in its positions. From 2009, this seems set to continue, with the ALDE, EPP and the Eurosceptics now complemented by a new grouping set up by the UK Conservatives. In this light, there may be a process of sorting at work within the EP, and perhaps parties are beginning to find more permanent homes for themselves within the Parliament. However, at the same time, the UK Tories' efforts to form a new group, together with the weakness of the UEN, serve a reminders that the Right's organisation remains flexible.

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<sup>12</sup> Information from [www.predict09.eu](http://www.predict09.eu) (accessed 3 June 2009).

## **Conclusion**

The Right in Europe has historically been more complex than the Left. Three of the four cleavages that provided the foundation for most European political parties were divisions that separated voters on the Right. The parties emanating from these cleavages have persisted despite the declining relevance of these social divisions, while democratisation and the rise of New Politics have added new complexity to the European Right and Centre-Right. This paper has investigated how this complexity has been represented in the European Parliament. Two trends were identified. First, the EPP has been growing in dominance. This reflects the declining divisions between mainstream right-wing parties across Europe: the ideological difference between centre-right Conservative and centre-right Christian Democratic parties has greatly diminished. Yet, even more important have been the institutional incentives within the EP: the Parliament has become ever more powerful, making effective organization an important goal, while at the same time the institutional set-up of the Parliament and the EU rewards size in itself. The second trend is the continuing complexity of the representation of the Right, especially compared to the clarity of group division on the Left. The causes of this lie in the larger number of divisions on the Right across Europe, coupled with a lower degree of actual ideological opposition. Nevertheless, there are signs that the organization of the Right in the EP may be becoming clearer, for the same reasons that the EPP has been increasing its dominance within the Parliament.

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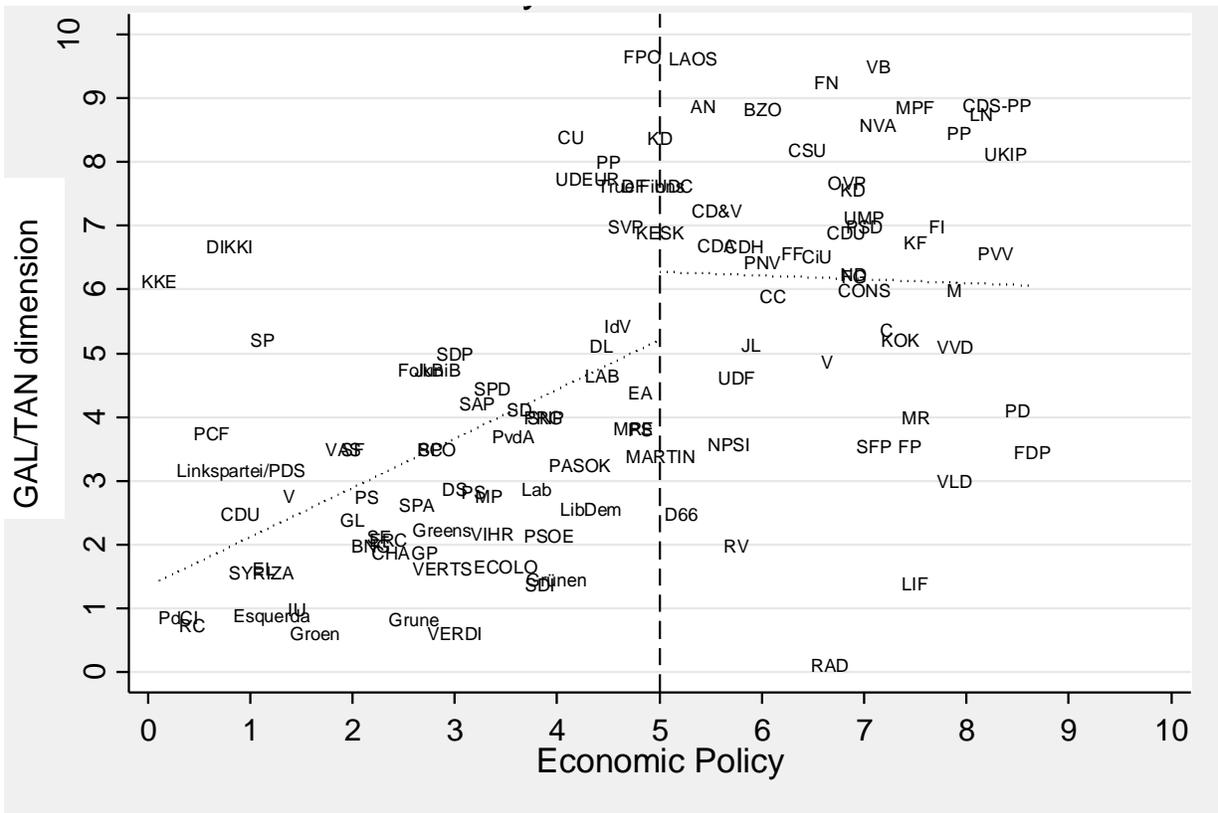
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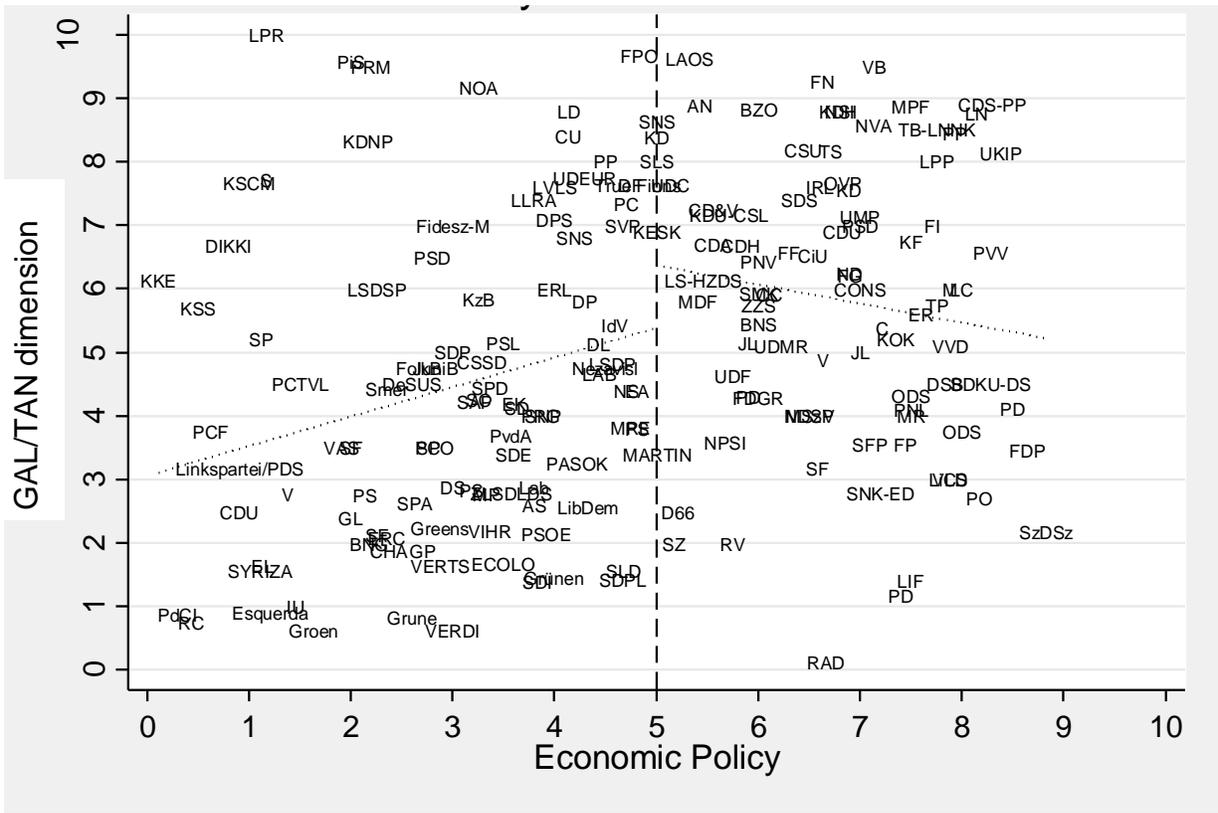
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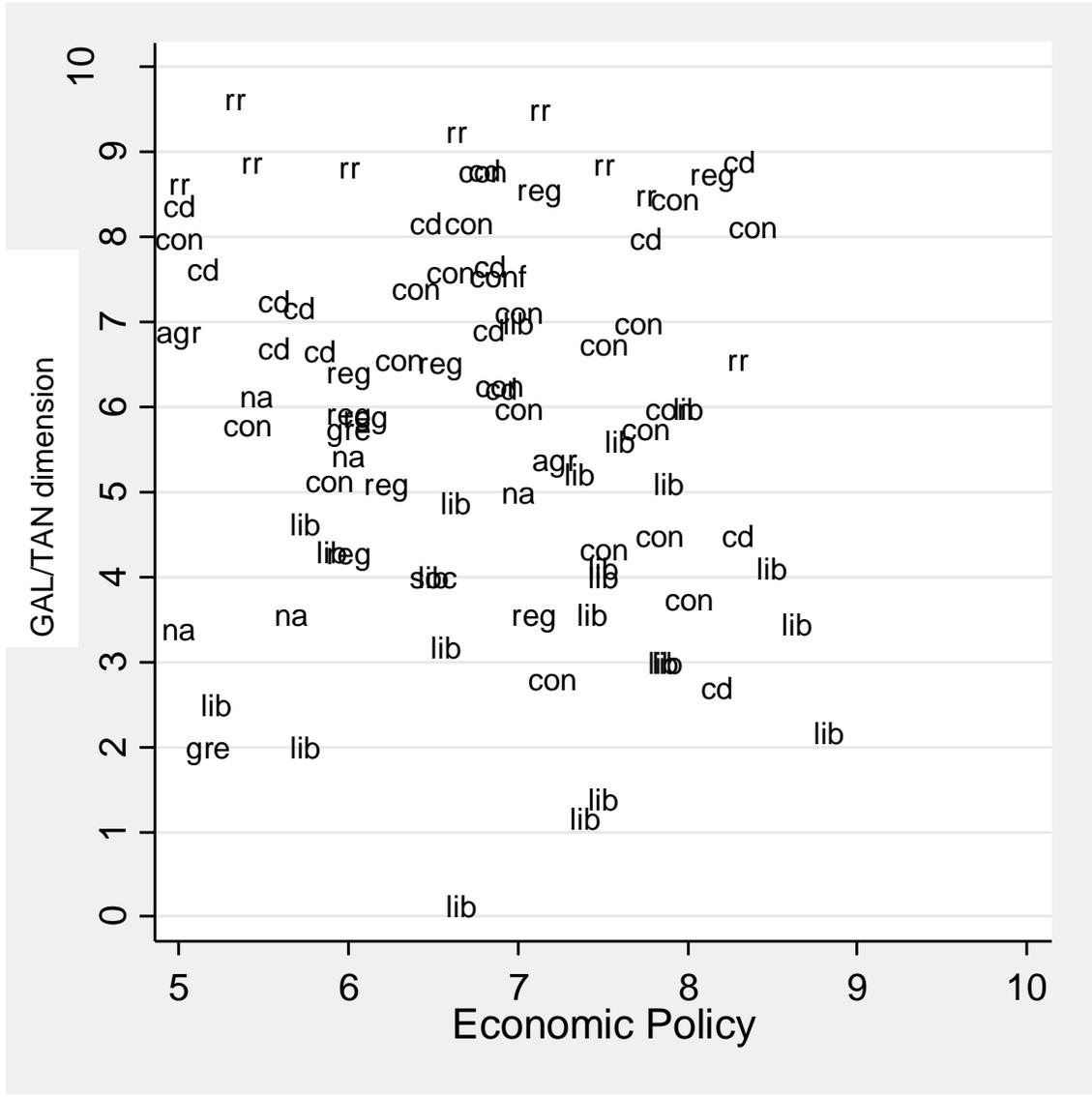
**Figure 1.** Party positions on economic policy and gal/tan, ‘old’ EU countries, 2006

*Note:* Luxembourg not included; gal/tan=green/alternative/libertarian and traditional/authoritarian/nationalist; vertical line is at 5, the midpoint of the 0-10 economic policy scale; regression lines shown are for separate regressions for the parties at  $\leq 5$  and  $\geq 5$  on economic policy (see text for details); data from Hooghe et al. (2008).



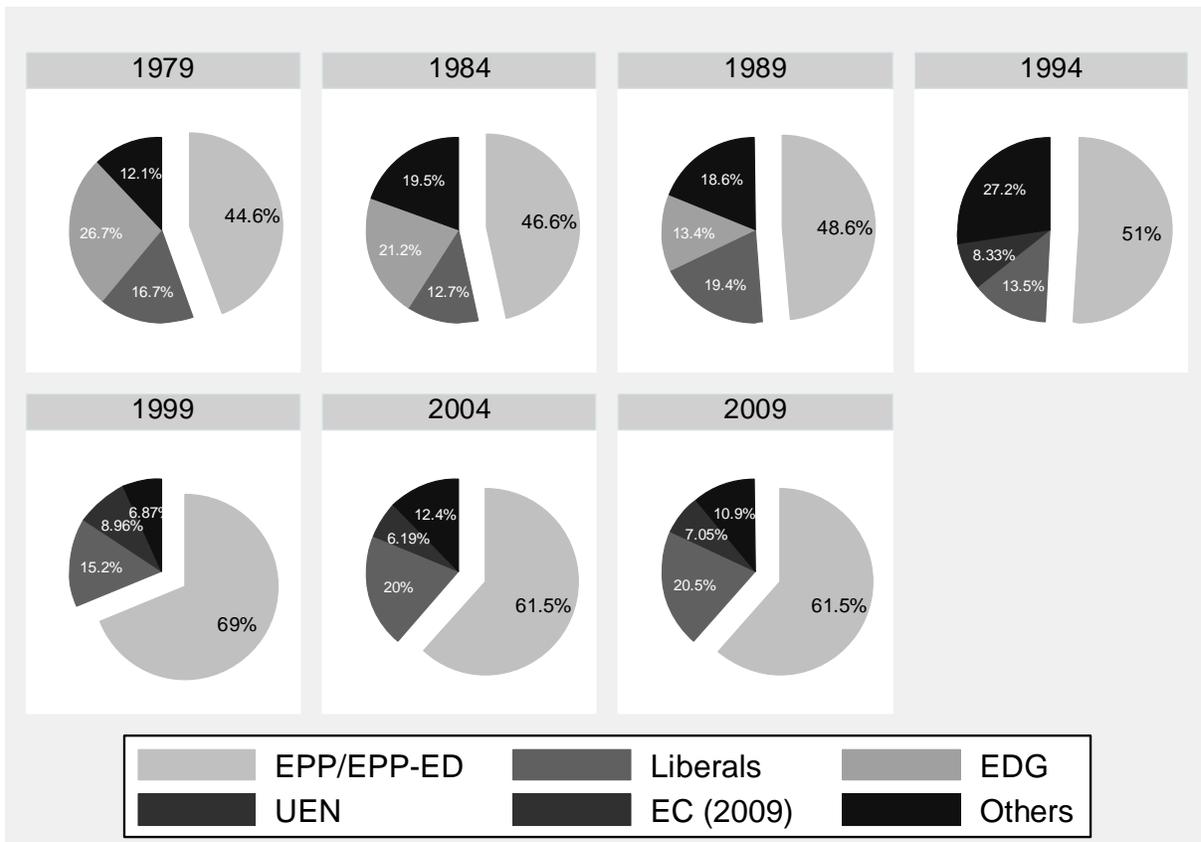
**Figure 2.** Party positions on economic policy and gal/tan, all EU countries, 2006

*Note:* Luxembourg, Cyprus and Malta not included; gal/tan=green/alternative/libertarian and traditional/authoritarian/nationalist; vertical line is at 5, the midpoint of the 0-10 economic policy scale; regression lines shown are for separate regressions for the parties at  $\leq 5$  and  $\geq 5$  on economic policy (see text for details); data from Hooghe et al. (2008).



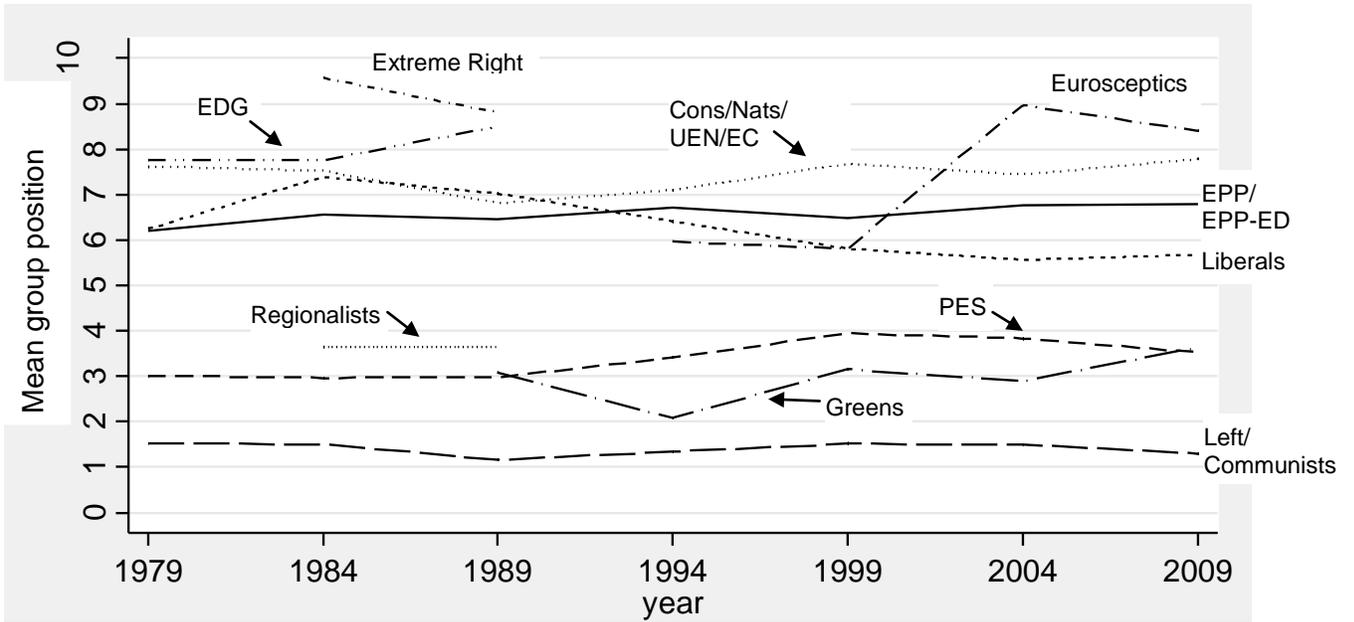
**Figure 3.** Party families on the Right, economic policy and gal/tan dimension, all EU countries, 2006

*Note:* Luxembourg, Cyprus and Malta not included; only parties at  $\geq 5$  on economic policy shown; gal/tan=green/alternative/libertarian and traditional/authoritarian/nationalist; con=Conservative, cd=Christian Democratic, lib=Liberal, rr=Radical Right, reg=Regionalist, gre=Green, agr=Agrarian, conf=Confessional, na=no party family; data and party family definitions from Hooghe et al. (2008).



**Figure 4.** Proportion of seats on the Right by parliamentary group

*Note:* ‘Liberals’ shows the ELDR (1979-1999) and ALDE (2004) seat shares; ‘EDG’ includes the EDG seat share (1979-1989); UEN includes the seat share of the UEN (1994-2004) and its predecessors PD (1979) and EDA (1984-1994); EC includes the projected seat share of this new group, to be set up by the British Conservative Party (see [www.predict09.eu](http://www.predict09.eu)); ‘others’ includes the seat shares of the European Right (1984-1994), Forza Europa (1994), Independence/Democracy (1994-2004), Europe of Nations (1989-1994) and non-aligned members with an economic policy score  $\geq 5$ ; data from the ‘Mannheim documentation of the results of the European elections 1979 to 2004’, available at [http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/sprache.php?oben=titel\\_d.html&links=n\\_daten\\_d.php&inhalt=/projekte/euro\\_elections/Homepage.html](http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/sprache.php?oben=titel_d.html&links=n_daten_d.php&inhalt=/projekte/euro_elections/Homepage.html)



**Figure 5.** Policy positions of the main EP parliamentary groups, 1979-2009

*Note:* only groups existing in two or more terms included; party group positions are means of left-right scores in expert surveys weighted by seat share.

EDG=European Democratic Group;

Extreme Right=European Right;

Regionalists=Rainbow Group;

Eurosceptics= Independence/Democracy (1994-2004), Europe of Nations (1989-1994);  
 Cons/Nats/UEN/EC= PD (1979), EDA (1984-1994), UEN (1994-2004); EC (2009)

Liberals=ELDR(1979-1999), ADLE(2004);

Greens=Greens (1989-1994), Greens/EFA (1999-2004);

Left/Communists=Communist Group (1979=1984), GUE (1989), Left Unity(1989), GUE/NGL (1994-2004);

Probable EC membership taken from [www.predict09.eu](http://www.predict09.eu) (accessed 9 June 2009).

1979 and 1984 party positions are from Castles and Mair (1984); for 1989 are from Laver and Hunt (1992), taxes vs. spending score used; for 1994 to 2004 from Marks and Steenbergen (2007) and Hooghe et al. (2008); 2004 scores are the mean of 2002 and 2006 scores; Luxembourg, Cyprus and Malta scores added from Benoit and Laver (2006).

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