

European Integration as a Party Cleavage? A Conceptual Debate¹

Draft Version

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Abstract: The paper deals with the issue of European integration as it relates to contemporary European party politics at national/state level. The author comments upon the possibility of an emergence of “European” cleavage in party politics. The debate starts with a demonstration of changes that European party politics have undergone during the period of development in European politics and societies since the time when the famous concept of cleavages was presented by Stein Rokkan. The paper will present a re-conceptualization of cleavages to fit into this new political environment. The paper further argues that even if we apply a loose political concept of cleavages, there are still important obstacles for transforming the EU-related issue into a fully-fledged party cleavage.

Keywords: cleavages; European integration; political parties; “post-Rokkanian” politics

Within the context of transforming patterns of party politics in the “post-Rokkanian” world, the question as to whether issues connected with the European integration process can represent a potential line of conflict (*cleavage*) in domestic/national party systems is a very interesting one. It is not only a question of the development of the EU itself, about the conflict between supranational and intergovernmental paradigms, but also a question of the further enlargement of the EU or of deepening the integration process. But the aim of this contribution is not an empirical study of how the issue of European integration supplements the traditional sources of party identification, links between voters and parties, and electoral mobilization. This paper is a contribution to the conceptual discussion of political parties and party systems. The aim is to show that the “European” issue can, under certain conditions, potentially represent a distinct cleavage in contemporary “post-Rokkanian” politics.

This short contribution will therefore begin by attempting to define the situation of “post-Rokkanian” politics and the consequences this perspective has for conceptualizing cleavages as such. First, Rokkan’s concept of cleavages will be briefly presented. Drawing on the discussion of the various conceptions of cleavages that followed Rokkan, the author will then show the foundations upon which a conceptualization of “European” cleavage ought to be based. In short, it will be shown that cleavages in the “post-Rokkanian” world are not simply products of social divisions; rather, the political parties play an active role in their formation. The links between certain socio-structural, normative and organizational elements must be preserved, however, if one is to speak of a fully-fledged cleavage in the political and social meanings of the word. The conclusion will discuss the “European” issue itself as a potential cleavage on the level of national party systems.

1. Politics in the “post-Rokkanian” world

The concept of “post-Rokkanian politics” is a metaphor for a situation in which the standard assumptions underlying the study of the structures of political community and party system, as envisaged in Stein Rokkan’s work, are no longer valid. A new dynamic is

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contemplated encompassing the relaxation of traditional cleavages in society, the dealignment of traditional voter groups from their party representations (Bürklin – Klein 1998: 81–84), increasingly fluid (volatile) behavior of the electorate (cf. Poguntke 2005), creation of new parties which establish their profiles in new conflicts rather than through traditional cleavages, entrance of new actors into the process of mediating interests (Dogan 2001), and, last but not least, the potential territorial restructuring of politics in the European Union.³ The “post-Rokkanian” world is, simply put, less transparent, which create new challenges for parties in party politics and electoral mobilization. The parties seek to answer these challenges by shifting themselves towards the cartel party model, for instance, or by increasingly applying political marketing, methods of medialization and personalization of politics, etc.

This of course does not mean the absence of any tangible structures in the political space, nor does it imply that Western European politics has descended into chaos, anomy and pragmatic unpredictability. What happened was that social mobility both within and without (national) societies increased, and the sources of political socialization became more individualized. This results in citizens making more individual political choices and the sources of political mobilization having to correspond to this development. The parties need to create new and often more complex strategies to lure the voters. In such an environment, the development of the relation between the party and the voter is more complex and individual, and is subject to various conditions and metamorphoses. Although the category of voters aligned with their party “from cradle to grave” has not entirely disappeared, it is increasingly losing importance, and can no longer help to explain the basic movements within the party systems of contemporary European democracies. Moreover, the dissatisfaction with politics (*Politikverdrossenheit*), which is related to the decrease in (traditional) forms of political participation and to the transfer of some decisions that were traditionally political into the sphere of administration, certainly does not help to preserve the socio-cultural and socio-political structures of the Rokkanian world.

2. Cleavages in the “post-Rokkanian” world

More than forty years have now passed since Lipset and Rokkan’s famous article (Lipset, Rokkan 1967) delimiting the cleavages in (Western) European democracies as they developed in the process of inception and establishment of modern mass democracy, and it is therefore fitting to ask what of this legacy remains applicable to the conditions of the contemporary European Union. In the Rokkanian perspective, cleavages appear primarily in society as a result of the territorial and functional dimensions of large-scale social conflicts, which produce social contrasts (cf. Flora 1999: 34-39). At critical junctures of historical development, these are then translated into diverse political conflicts. In this process Lipset and Rokkan acknowledge the role played by the socio-cultural factors that structure the society, but they also allow for an active part of political parties in creating the voter alignments (Lipset, Rokkan 1967: 3-5). The processes of national and industrial revolutions led, according to Rokkan, to the establishment of four fundamental cleavages in Western European countries (Lipset, Rokkan 1967: 9-23):

Table 1: National and Industrial Revolutions and Cleavages

	Territorial Dimension	Functional Dimension
National Revolution	Centre-Periphery Cleavage	State-Church Cleavage
Industrial Revolution	Rural-Urban Cleavage	Worker-Owner Cleavage

³ Peter Flora believes that the issues of European integration present the greatest challenge to Rokkan’s approach (Flora 1999: 88-91).

Using this generic model, Rokkan described the differing developments of the individual Western European countries from a comparative perspective. He explained how in diverse countries various types of political parties have appeared in opposition to the ruling elite, and he also explained how the links between the parties and their segments of the electorate worked.

The aim of this paper is not to describe in detail the development of cleavages in Western European political science. Generally speaking, endeavors to conceptualize cleavages anew can be summarized into several main directions. Andrea Römmele (1999: 5-7) points out the distinction between *social* and *political* understanding of the cleavages.

Social cleavages are defined primarily in terms of social attitudes and social behaviors, the stratification of which reflects the stratification of society. In a way, political contrasts therefore only reflect social stratification. The original concept as articulated by Rokkan (and Lipset) is close to such an understanding of cleavages.

Political cleavages are defined in terms of political attitudes and political behaviors. The authors who opt for this approach emphasize the stable patterns of political polarization, in which certain groups of voters support certain political parties. The voter groups so defined are not necessarily social groups as well.⁴

Clearly not all scholars adhere strictly to the distinction between political and social conceptions of cleavages outlined above. Concepts which do not significantly heed this distinction also appear (for example Dalton 1988), whose authors argue with the transformation of social structure and the consequences this entails. Indeed, even this paper employs an approach which is on the boundary between the social and the political conception of cleavages.

At the end of the 1980s, Peter Mair and Stefano Bartolini (Bartolini, Mair 1990) re-evaluated the concept of cleavages. While mostly employing the Rokkanian approach, they took into account the consequences of the transformation of politics in the “post-Rokkanian” world. Bartolini and Mair distinguish political conflict from cleavage by arguing that the latter must fulfill three criteria of their definition (Bartolini, Mair 1990: 215-216; cf. Bartolini 2004: 1-3). First, an empirical socio-structural element of the cleavage must be found, as the cleavage must be grounded in a closed social relationship of some form (Bartolini, Mair 1990: 216).⁵ Second, a normative element must be present: a group of shared ideas that produce within the given social group a consciously shared identity.⁶ Third, an organizing element is required which produces a network of interactions resulting in a political representation of the relevant cleavage, ideally in the form of a political party.⁷ This conception represents a certain compromise between political and social approaches to cleavages in that it expects the appearance of cleavages in the process of state building and evolution towards the capitalist society, yet it also emphasizes that the cleavage as such is a product of political factors: democratization and the electoral mobilization of socio-cultural conflicts associated with it. It

⁴ One example of such a conception is Inglehart’s famous concept of cleavage distinguishing between material and post-material values (Inglehart 1971, 1981).

⁵ The authors do not understand the concept of social structure in a rigid fashion, however. At a later point, Bartolini explicitly states that the social structure refers not only to economic or demographic characteristics, „but to the whole range of differentiation criteria of social groups such as lineage, property, class, education, credentials, power, status.“ (Bartolini 2004: 3).

⁶ The relationship between the social structure and the shared value system is not necessarily linear and it cannot be assumed as a matter of course that the shared socio-structural characteristics imply sharing of certain values – cf. Kriesi 1998.

⁷ Bartolini reserves the concept of *cleavage* for the political dimension and not for the original social conflict. The three-pronged structure of the cleavage provides the citizen-voter with support (furnished by the respective social group), ideological orientation (*appeal*) and, finally, organized representation (Bartolini 2000b: 11).

is the political sphere and the political actors who organize the initially unstructured social base of the cleavage (Bartolini-Mair 1990: 216-218; cf. Bartolini 2000b: 15-25). Stefano Bartolini also points out the fact that once established, the cleavage is more stable than the social groups which gave birth to it and itself plays an active role in stabilizing politics (Bartolini, Mair 1990: 218-219).

According to Bartolini, cleavages appear in situations where various types of social boundaries are highly institutionalized,⁸ and as such they limit the space for activities both of individuals and of collective actors. Bartolini employs the concepts of Albert O. Hirshman (*exit* and *voice*) and shows that only where the option of “exit” is unavailable, is “voice” opted for, and able to assume the form of a cleavage. Presence of obvious and strong social boundaries is a necessary but not sufficient condition, as the process of establishing cleavages is always a process of historical demarcation of opposition against a political authority within a territorially and economically closed authority arena. Historically, cleavages which appeared were thus expressing (1) protest of the periphery against the process of *establishing the centre*, (2) opposition against the *system-enabling* activities of the centre which produce shared loyalty and identity, and (3) functional differentiation of interests *within* an already-consolidated system (Bartolini 2004: 4-14; Bartolini 2005: 95-103).

Drawing on Bartolini’s and Mair’s arguments, we believe that although it is necessary to preserve the specific contents of the concept of cleavages and thus to prevent conceptual confusion, we must also overcome certain conceptual limitations inherent in Rokkan’s original notion. Rokkan assumed that social conflicts are transformed into political cleavages. One could thus say that the social structure precedes the political sphere. The question is, however, whether this perspective does not excessively curtail the space for actors’ activities in transforming the social contrasts into political conflicts.

In contrast to Bartolini and Mair, we would like to emphasize much more strongly the *active participation of the political actors*, above all the *political parties*, in the process by which cleavages are formed and structured. Parties, or political elites, respectively (Bornschieer 2009: 9–10, Enyedi 2008: 295–297) can, subject to external limitations (Sitter 2002a: 429 and 435), affect the structuring of the political space and articulate the cleavages through their activities and preferences. If these cleavages draw sufficiently populous and stable social groups, they can exert a long-lasting influence in the given political system. This creates a new mechanism in which the cleavages are (re)formulated, in which process the social contrasts and conflicts, the transforming value preferences, and obviously also the political elites or political parties, respectively, all play a part.⁹

We must also not forget the potential of social cleavages to transform themselves into political ones. The transformation of the worker-owner cleavage can serve as an example here. The social and economic status of an individual in contemporary post-industrial society is not determined by class in the real sense of the word. This is accompanied by a shift in meaning from the original worker-owner cleavage to the new socio-economic cleavage. On the one side of the new cleavage we would usually find conservative and liberal parties supporting liberal economic and social policies. Social-democratic and socialist parties which emphasize the social consequences of policies stand on the other side. The voters then decide

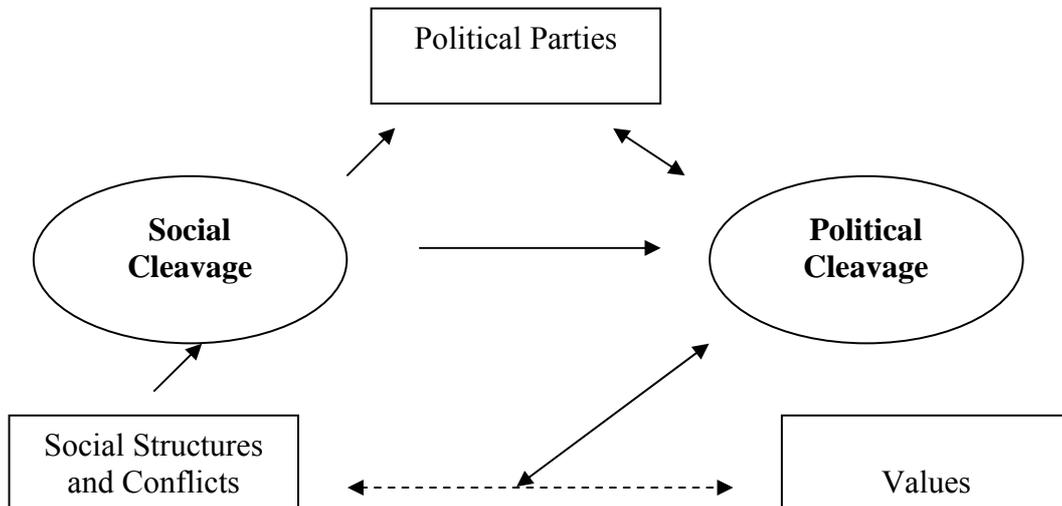
⁸ Of course, social (functional) boundaries can be variously related to the geographic boundaries of territoriality and the normative boundaries of shared identity. Where the various types of boundaries overlap a strong polity is established (cf. Rokkan et al. 1987: 17-25).

⁹ Such a conception of cleavages has an undeniable heuristic advantage in that it can also be used outside the sphere of traditionally stable democracies (Bornschieer 2009: 10). For that matter, the active participation of political actors (among whom political parties have a privileged position) in the formation of cleavages can be demonstrated through the example of countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe following the fall of “real socialist” (Communist) regimes in the 1990s (cf. Hloušek, Kopeček 2008: 519-526).

not on the basis of their class affiliation but rather upon whether they profit or not from the economic growth.

The shift from Rokkanian to “post-Rokkanian” conception of cleavages is illustrated in Scheme 1:

Scheme 1: Social and Political Cleavages



Unfortunately we do not have sufficient space here to analyze the potential new political cleavages. As far as developed industrial democracies are concerned, a number of authors consider various aspects of these issues, such as attitudes towards the market economy (pro-market economic policies versus redistributive policies), post-materialism, authoritarian versus libertarian policies, the ideologization of the right-left dimension, etc. (cf. Kitschelt 2004, Krause 2007). Many authors claim that in the countries of the European Union a new cleavage could appear, grounded in the varying attitudes towards European integration (for example Hooghe – Marks 2004), but as we shall see this issue is much more complicated than it might seem, both empirically and conceptually.

3. The “European” cleavage in its territorial and functional dimensions

Let us put aside the interesting speculation as to whether establishing a real political system in the European Union could create a structural cleavage over European integration at the level of “Europarties”,¹⁰ and focus on the impact of integration on domestic party systems and electorates. We believe such reduction is justified because political parties do not operate in fully multi-level settings, as the main sources of support and electoral mobilization are produced on the level of EU member states and not on the level of the EU as such (cf. Caramani 2005a); the latter therefore cannot be considered a fully-fledged political system. The fact that factions exist in the European Parliament and there are European federations of political parties need not come into consideration when evaluating the structures of “domestic” cleavages,¹¹ as these factions neither explicitly formulate the *strategy* of political

¹⁰ Philippe C. Schmitter (2004) and Knut Heidar (2003) are among those who offer an interesting but fairly futurological extension of the Rokkanian cleavages on the level of the EU political system.

¹¹ The situation would obviously be different if we were to examine the organizational and power mechanisms within the national parties, as in such a case it would be necessary to take into account, at the very least, multi-level party elites.

parties on the national level, nor do they represent *mobilization and identity sources* for their electorates.¹²

Many scholars will certainly concur with Robert Ladrech (Ladrech 2002: 397-398) that the issues related to the development of European integration and the European Union as such are *one out of the possible* consequences of the Europeanization of the party competition patterns.¹³ At the same time, many researchers, and those working in the area of comparative political science in particular, will agree with the skepticism voiced by Peter Mair (Mair 2000), who claims that *direct* influence of Europeanization or European integration in the transformation of the format and mechanism of party systems in European countries is almost negligible.¹⁴

Hanspeter Kriesi points out, however, that already in 1992, in connection with the result of the referendum in Denmark on the Maastricht Treaty which itself meant a clear shift towards *political* integration, a permissive consensus on European integration of sorts was broken, and some political parties had begun intensively to mobilize their voters using the issues of European integration. There had been earlier manifestations of this. According to Kriesi, the case of European integration is part of the globalization agenda which divides Western European societies into “winners” and “losers”, or champions of globalization and defenders of traditional national values, respectively (Kriesi 2005: 2-4; Kriesi 2003; Kriesi, Lachat 2004: 2-14). Kriesi explicitly deals with the phenomenon of Euro-skepticism and shows how it can be used in party mobilization in the spheres of both economy and culture (Kriesi 2005: 4-9). Research undertaken by Kriesi and his colleagues (see Kriesi et al. 2008) has shown the increasing importance of the European issue in Western European electoral campaigning since the 1970s. The discussion varied across the countries, however, and combined differing degrees of Euro-skepticism and Euro-optimism. The research has also shown that anti-European attitudes are most often endorsed by parties on the extremes of both the right and the left parts of the spectrum. But this statement is not universally valid; the attitudes change over time, and many parties are also divided internally over European issues (see Szczerbiak, Taggart 2003). In countries where the conflict potential of European integration issues is the highest, it is the cultural domain, connected particularly with Euro-skepticism, that gains importance (Kriesi 2005: 15-23).

It is questionable, however, whether the potential European cleavage could be reduced to instances of party mobilized Euro-skepticism. Kriesi’s research, but also other studies, show that it cannot be so reduced (see Sitter 2002b: 7-9) and that Euro-skeptic opinions are often associated with a rejection of immigrants and cultural liberalism, and form part of a wider process of establishing cultural and political values.

Daniele Caramani’s research has shown how during the second half of the nineteenth and in the twentieth centuries the cleavages became deterritorialized in Western Europe and electoral behavior homogenized (Caramani 2005b). Bartolini describes Europeanization in

¹² In post-communist countries a specific phenomenon could be observed: political parties explicitly claimed allegiance to supranational party federations and attempted to join their structures as much as possible. The successful attempt of the Croatian Democratic Union to become a member of the Centrist Democrat International and to associate itself with the European Union of Christian Democrats / European People’s Party can serve as an example here. It was caused by the party’s endeavor to show that it has a “normal” Christian-Democratic identity and is therefore not an extremist nationalist entity, but these associations equally helped the party to articulate its program and also shaped its identity as perceived both by its members and the electorate. The European identity, however, has in this case been employed as a tool in the *national* political competition and the link with “Europarties” has had an indirect effect only.

¹³ Arend Lijphart considered conflicts over European integration to be an important dimension of party politics in Western European countries as early as the 1980s (Lijphart 1990).

¹⁴ It is symptomatic that Ladrech more or less ignored this dimension in his more recent summarizing account of the consequences of Europeanisation on political parties (cf. Ladrech 2005: 328-333).

similar terms, as a historical process of “territorial de-differentiation” in Europe which impacted not only the European system of states, but also the nations, the economies, the democracies and the welfare state systems (Bartolini 2006: 3-6). If the process of European integration is to be a successful political process, moving from the stage of establishing the centre towards the stage of system building, and begin to structure European politics (cf. Bartolini 2005: 116ff.), the issue of the formation and functioning of European cleavages will appear not only in the national party systems but equally in the overlapping arenas of multi-dimensional party competitions on the regional, national and European levels. Although to date European integration has not been carried out this far, in the future European integration could impact the national political level.

Bartolini (2000a: 24-27; 2005: 402-405) believes that there are four possible scenarios of interaction between “European” cleavage and cleavages on the national level. He distinguishes two models of *Europeanization of cleavages*: (1) the structure of national cleavages would be transferred to the EU level, or (2) the national and European levels would be decoupled, with European issues being a cleavage at the EU level but not manifesting themselves on the level of national systems; two important but separate arenas of party political competition would thus appear. Another scenario (3) would see European issues included in the existing structure of cleavages by means of an *internalization* mechanism, but this could lead to splits *within* the parties and increase the effect by which European elections classify as second-order elections. Finally, (4) *externalization* scenario would see the formation of a fully-fledged “European” cleavage even on the national level. This scenario envisages the politicization of the “European” issues to the extent that a cleavage going across the structure of existing cleavages would appear.

What conditions must be fulfilled, then, in order for the theme of European integration to transform itself into a cleavage connecting socio-structural, normative and organizational elements?

Bartolini explicitly assumes that the European issue will combine territorial and functional dimensions, with the latter defining a dividing line combining the cultural and material interests of “nomadic” and “standing” values. According to Bartolini, the integration cleavage could assume various forms, from a variation on the conflict between the centre and the periphery through the functional economic cleavage between “winners and losers” of integration, to a cultural opposition against Brussels and its bureaucracy (Bartolini 2005: 399-402).

The notion of “Brussels” as the European centre, which embodies the symbolic adversary of Euro-skeptic parties in particular, would speak in favor of the first possibility. The fact that “Brussels” can be conceived more as a place of the cultural-political imagination rather than as the only real centre of the European Union speaks against it, however. In such a case one could consider the possibility that the cleavage (European) centre vs. (European) periphery has a functional as well as a territorial dimension, and even that the former dimension could be much more explicit. This combination of functional and territorial elements inherently present in the issue of European integration does not allow much space for the possibility that the European cleavage would only modify already-existing cleavages (even if the individual components of the European issues can be related to existing social-political contrasts – see Marks, Wilson 2000).

By combining the territorial and functional dimensions one can outline a matrix of social conflicts connected with the issues of European integration. At the same time it can be shown how the various party families employ different dimensions of the European issues to mobilize voters. The outline is provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2: European Issues in Territorial and Functional Dimensions

	Societal Opposition	Party Channel of Electoral Mobilization
<i>Territorial Dimension</i>	Regional/Peripheral Territorial Identity vs. Identity of a State	Regionalist Parties Using the EU in Mobilization against the Nation State
	State Territorial Identity Defenders vs. European Identity	Populist Parties of the New Right Traditional Nationalist Parties Conservative Parties (partially)
<i>Functional Dimension</i>	Winners vs. Losers of Economic Integration	Populist Parties of the New Right Part of Old and New Left Parties
	Cultural Opposition against Diminishing of National Differences	Populist Parties of the New Right Traditional Nationalist Parties Conservative Parties (partially)
Dispute among Different Paradigms of European Integration		

This scheme attempts to express the various aspects of the territorial and functional dimensions which can lead to the mobilization of political protest (*voice*) on the matter of European integration. As the scheme shows, faced with the territorially de-differentiating effect of the European integration, the territorial dimension is relatively weak. In addition to the territorial protest of parties that strongly emphasize territorial sovereignty (for instance the Polish parties League of Polish Families and Self-Defense), one can only consider here regional entities of periphery-based protest which can employ the European Union as a tool in their struggle against the centre of the nation state, whether in a normative-symbolic sense (Europe with strong emphasis on respecting regional diversity) or in terms of “circumventing” the authorities of the nation state (European Union as a window of opportunity).

The functional dimension provides greater opportunities for mobilizing the conflict potential of the European issues. In addition to the economic side (expressed in the conflict of winners versus losers of the economic consequences of European integration), a cultural conflict is apparent that is in many ways complementary to the one which concerns the prevailing territorial identity. Extreme right parties and some populist parties (for instance the Free Party of Austria and the Alliance for the Future of Austria) are among those who most often pick up on this theme. In addition, disputes between adherents of various European integration paradigms could be included in the same classification. However latent they are, these disputes have neither a specific social dimension nor an appropriate party representation outside the narrow circle of the political elites.

Let us return to the first two aspects of the functional dimension. Whereas the economic consequences of European integration can affect social stratification (especially in

terms of sectors) and can be translated onto the political level both by the parties of the so-called new (populist) right and by the parties of new and “old” left (for instance the Czech Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia), the social grounding and the political representation of the cultural aspects is more complicated. Cultural issues connected with European integration do not arouse the interest of one coherent population segment only and can be mobilized by different kinds of parties/party families. The conflict between “the nomads” and “the settled” can produce very varied schemata of social contrasts and political positions. The defense of traditional values of the national culture is usually in the agenda of traditionalist nationalist parties (especially in the new member states of the EU) but also of certain conservative entities and populist parties of the new right, at least partially. Parties as diverse as the Polish Law and Justice party, the British Conservatives, the Czech Civic Democratic Party and the Free Party of Austria devote some attention to this topic. We should also bear in mind the possibility that the economic and cultural aspects of the European issues can reinforce each other. Indeed, only in situations where they do become intertwined (and their intertwining can be further enhanced by territorial matters), can one speak of the possibility that a fully-fledged “European” cleavage will appear. Isolated aspects of the territorial and functional dimensions can be partially absorbed into the existing structure of national cleavages.

4. Conditions for the appearance of a “European” cleavage

How active are the parties themselves? Research undertaken by Gary Marks and Carole Wilson (2000) on the party families in the countries of the original EU-15 has shown that many parties attempt to integrate individual European issues into their existing ideological, programmatic and mobilization schemes. The newly established theme allows certain parties, especially those from the margins of the party systems, to grasp the opportunity to establish their profiles in an area not already occupied by the existing parties.

In addition, what we often see is that European integration and attitudes towards integration generate a conflict *within* political parties. Examples include the conflict of party elites within the British Conservative Party, but also the strong discrepancy in the Czech Civic Democratic Party, between the mildly Euro-skeptic attitudes of an important part of the party elite and the decisively pro-European attitudes of the bulk of its electorate.

Cleavages are mostly transferred into the party system by parties which stand in opposition to the established elite, in our case represented by the EU itself. And this is the reason why the European issues are often adopted in electoral mobilization by anti-European or Euro-skeptic parties of diverse provenance (for example the Swedish party *Junilistan*).

Combining “top down” and “bottom up” perspectives on cleavage structuring and heeding the functional and territorial dimensions in which this structuring manifests itself leads us to the following definition of the general conditions that would enable the structuring of a “European” cleavage.

(1) Parties must be present that actively mobilize the voters by means of themes connected with European integration. These issues are not necessarily the sole theme of the given party (as it is with certain Euro-skeptic groupings such as the United Kingdom Independence Party). Parties equally use other topics to establish their profile, however the European issue must be one of the key sources of their identity (for example the Swedish party *Vänsterpartiet*). Such actors actively introduce European issues into electoral contests, but they might also help create alignments for citizens whose political identity is connected with European integration, whether positively or negatively. This can be studied by content analysis of manifestos or of electoral campaigns, for instance.

(2) A re-structuring must be apparent within the electorate, which depends on the results of the integration process; this re-structuring creates specific segments in the population. It does not matter whether these segments consciously understand their identity as derived from the influence of European integration or not; what is essential is that the elementary stability of this segmentation is confirmed and sources of group identity arising from European integration are carefully distinguished from their other sources. It is necessary to establish whether stable patterns of electoral support grounded in European themes are appearing or not and to study voters and their decisions accordingly.

These two conditions are necessary if one is to claim that *political* European cleavage is taking place. The following two steps are necessary for evaluating the stabilization of political (or *social*) European cleavage and its relevance vis-à-vis other cleavages structuring the party system.

(3) Only at the point when the above-mentioned segments of population appear and their need to be represented meets the parties' mobilization activities that take place primarily on the axis generated by the "European" issues, can we say that the structural, normative and organizational components are present and hence also that "European" cleavage is constituted. Research in this area must focus on combining the methods of political science and sociology, which will help to establish the political and social stratification of the society and relate it to the characteristics of the party system.

(4) Such a cleavage becomes politically relevant if the social segment is sufficiently profiled and numerous and the political party representing it meets the classic criteria of party relevancy. The possibility then appears for such a party (or parties) to at least partially disrupt the one-dimensional character of the party competition, as well as the alignments between voters and parties which are primarily structured by socio-economic cleavage. Here we would refer to the classic criteria of political party relevancy as defined by Giovanni Sartori, which expect a party to have either coalition potential or a strong opposition potential (Sartori 1976: 121-125).

5. Conclusion

The aim of this contribution was to discuss the potential that issues connected with European integration have for creating a specific cleavage that would influence the operation of parties and party systems on the domestic level. Given the need to find an adequate conception of cleavages, I have discussed the issues relating to the development of this concept since Rokkan's original article in order to update it to reflect the transforming social and political conditions of the "post-Rokkanian" world. I have chosen a "narrow" conception of cleavages drawing on the work of Stefan Bartolini and Peter Mair as the optimal way of embracing both political and social understanding of cleavages, without explicitly preferring either option. Combining the active approach that parties take towards structuring the electorate with the influences exerted by the structure and the segmentation of society, I then defined the theoretical prerequisites to forming and successfully establishing the "European" cleavage that would affect the party systems of EU member countries. *Only the combination of a strong (relevant) political party which establishes its profile on the "European" issues and a sufficiently stable segment of the electorate can lead to the formation of an important political (or even social) cleavage.*

Interdisciplinary research on "European" cleavage which combines methods of sociology and political science but also historiography can produce interesting results. The mostly negative answer to the question as to whether such a cleavage is already present in contemporary European party systems should not in itself lead to closing the debate on this issue. Cleavages are products of long historical development and the process of European

integration only began about half-a-century ago. Methodological skepticism is certainly warranted but pessimism is not.

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