

**THE TRANSFORMING STRUCTURE OF THE EU AND
ESTONIAN POLITICS:
SOME ASPECTS OF THE FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION
AT EUROPEAN LEVEL**

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Abstract. The article explains normative and political aspects of the freedom of association exercised by European parties. After an overview of theoretical and historical background, the article opens scientific and normative concepts of political party and political party operating at European level (Europarty), views the Europarties comparatively to political parties of the EU member state Estonia, and to political representation in the European Parliament. The author, who has legal research background, has aimed at politically contextualizing normative developments.

Keywords: European politics, human rights, political parties, Europarties, Estonia

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1. Introduction

Demonstrating the importance of political parties operating at European level mainly through their functions of shaping the political landscape of Europe by organizing elections and reflecting the political landscape of pluralist Europe, the article opens scientific and normative concepts of “political party” and “political party operating at European level”, distinguishing Europarties from political foundation at European level. The author in parallel explains political-historical background of Europe and Estonia, views political parties operating at European level comparatively to political parties of a EU member state, Estonia, and political representation in the European Parliament, gives an overview of Estonia’s representation in Europarties, and tries to connect the analysis with attempts to coordinate European politics.

The importance of the research underlying this article lies in contextualising the relevant normative developments with explanations of the nature of politics

and representation in Europe on historical background, of transformation of Estonian politics on the European political landscape from communist one-party system toward plurality, and of the inner trend toward greater cooperation in the framework of discursive plurality or even features of duopolism in political competition that may sometimes refer to political opposition as known from the Cold War era that may very generally be understood as the East-West opposition.¹ Political competition and political opposition are different phenomena – while one can see continuity in party competition, one may see discontinuity in political opposition. Continuity and discontinuity here could be understood similarly to their meanings in the history of human rights, where continuity marks the more permanent values, while discontinuity marks politicization of human rights. Being a lawyer with human rights research background, I could also explain as follows: discontinuity refers to the political nature of human rights – the existence of political mechanisms is required for their validation and implementation, politicians have used and use human rights for achieving political aims, while continuity refers to emanation of human rights from something more continuous than pure political processes, being connected with human nature and inner moral rules of societal-political co-existing.

Concerning the research methods, I have tried to apply scientific and normative concepts and understandings of political party toward political parties at European level, in order to understand how the features that are characteristic to political parties show with the political parties at European level.

This article aims at offering a structural analysis of transformation of political parties in Europe rather than at content analysis of political ideologies. The author has used several internet sources because not all of the manifestos and other documents of all the Europarties have been published on paper. The use of internet sources seems also justified in the rapidly developing information society, where it is difficult for traditional publications to adequately reflect all of the most recent developments.

The article focuses on the registered political parties at European level, whereas one should also be aware of the existence of other political movements and groups as a source of direct legitimacy, the latter do not constitute an object of this research.

The analysis of manifestos and other documents at European level allowed the following contextualizing findings: the European People's Party (EPP) determines itself as representing centre-right and the idea of federal Europe; the Party of European Socialists (PES) determines itself as a left-wing party, bringing together in the EU the socialist, social-democrat and labour parties; the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe (ALDE) supports liberal democrat values; the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR) determines itself as a conservative, non-federalist political entity; the Party of the European Left (EL) claims to represent non-socialist left-wing; the European Democratic Party (EDP)

¹ Here not connected with a State government solely but applicable toward World governance.

determines itself as a transnational political movement combining federalist and social aspiration; the European Alliance for Freedom (EAF) does not define itself on the left-right political scale, allowing members with wide political spectrum, but at the same time looking at the content of its activities, it opposes centralized, supranational control; the Alliance of European National Movements (AEMN) determines itself as a Christian confederalist party; the European Christian Political Movement (ECPM) determines itself as a Christian-democratic political party, representing Christian socialists, embracing European Christian-democratic and Christian-social parties, NGOs and think tanks; the EU Democrats (EUD) does not take a position on left-right policy issues, although it considers itself a pan-European EU-critical alliance; etc.

These findings, in turn, allow further conclusions, indicating that sometimes the ideological borders of the Europarties are blurred, allowing to talk about mixed parties. One should look at the content of the manifestos or actual practice or impact of a political party rather than how the party defines itself – a good example could be the European Alliance for Freedom. Sometimes the names of the Europarties do not clearly demonstrate the Party's reliance on a basic ideology.

The general conclusions are: first, although the citizens of the member states put forward and elect their representatives to the European Parliament, political parties at European level participate in organizing election campaigns to the European Parliament, which means that Europarties have a significant role in forming European political awareness and thus shaping European politics; second, the political parties at European level have grown out of the European countries' historically formed political parties and their dynamics, thus, similarly to national political parties, the Europarties can be generally divided into rightist, centrist and leftist parties, whereas sometimes such ideological borders are blurred. It is also possible to distinguish between liberals, radicals, social democrats and conservatives – according to general classifications of ideologies by political scientists (Heywood 1997, Hagopian 1978), although the names of several Europarties clearly demonstrate their reliance on different basic ideologies. The system of Europarties can be characterized as a multi-party system, with features of catch-all parties, pluralism, information society, other postmodernist features. Europarties reflect pan-European political ideologies, religions, national ideologies and ideological tension, they shape the pan-European public opinion through media channels. Characteristic features of mass party can be found in the system (Kalev 2010). Europarties can be considered constitutional rather than revolutionist parties. Some of the Europarties increasingly try to reflect public concern as characteristic to representative parties, while some seem willing to mobilize, educate and inspire the electors as characteristic to integrative parties.

Although the EU institutions are committed to serving the EU interests, their workers and the groups in the European Parliament frequently stress their political belonging.

2. Political parties and party systems in Europe

2.1. Theoretical background and general definitions

By general definition in political science, a political party is a group of people that is organized for the purpose of winning government power by electoral or other means (Heywood 1997:230). Heywood indicates four characteristics for distinguishing political parties from other interest groups or political movements as “Parties aim to exercise government power by winning political office [... ;] Parties are organised bodies with a formal “card carrying” membership [... ;] Parties typically adopt a broad issue focus, addressing each of the major areas of government policy. To varying degrees, parties are united by shared political preferences and a general ideological identity,” although Heywood indicates some differences concerning small parties (Ibid.).

Understood that way, political parties – as organized political actors willing to win elections – are considered a recent phenomenon from the beginning of the 19th century (Heywood 1997:229, Fox 2000:52²) helping individuals to exercise the right to freely form associations. That way, political parties represent modern democracy and, as major organizers of politics between governors and societal interest, make today’s democracy unthinkable without them (Chrysochoou 2011:5). As elements of crucial importance for modern democracy, political parties have also an important role in the EU, a union explaining itself as a democratic actor. Otherwise, democratic states would be governed by non-democratic international actors (Marks 2001).

By definition of the Venice Commission, a political party is “a free association of persons, one of the aims of which is to express the political will of citizens, including through participation in the management of public affairs and the presentation of candidates to free and democratic elections” (Guidelines on Political ... 2010:6). The Guidelines on Political Party Regulation by OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission understand political parties as “a collective platform for the expression of individuals’ fundamental rights to association and expression and have been recognized by the European Court of Human Rights as integral players in the democratic process” (Ibid.:6). The document further clarifies that political parties are the most widely used means for political participation and exercise of the related rights and that political parties are foundational to a pluralist political society and that they play an active role in ensuring an informed and participative electorate, often constituting a bridge between the executive and legislative branches of government, whereas they can effectively prioritize the legislative agenda within a governmental society (Ibid.:8).

The European Court of Human Rights has defined political parties as a form of association essential to the proper functioning of democracy (Case of the *Refah Partisi*), having stated that:

² According to Fox, participatory rights were first formally expressed in 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, although a normative act, was not adopted as a legally binding act but as a declaration.

“It is in the nature of the role they play that political parties, the only bodies which can come to power, also have the capacity to influence the whole of the regime in their countries. By the proposals for an overall societal model which they put before the electorate and by their capacity to implement those proposals once they come to power, political parties differ from other organisations which intervene in the political arena” (Guidelines on Political ... 2010:9),

and that political parties hold an “essential role in ensuring pluralism and the proper functioning of democracy” (Ibid.).

2.2. Historical development and new dynamics

On historical scale, political parties can generally be ideologically divided into right, centre and left parties, whereas sometimes a party can be based on several ideologies. An example of a left-wing party is a socialist party, generally understood as addressing liberty, equality, fraternity, economic and other social concerns, the poor, disadvantaged, working-class, reform, whereas an example of a right-wing party could be a conservative party, supporting continuity or existing social order, authority, hierarchy, duties, tradition.

The most common distinction of parties according to Heywood is the distinction between cadre parties and mass parties – and he explains it so that while cadre parties offer ideological leadership to the masses, mass parties aim at constructing and achieving a wide electorate. The related catch-all-parties try to win as many voters as possible (Heywood 1997:231).

Parties may also be understood as representative parties and integrative parties. And according to Heywood, the basis of distinction is that while representative parties aim at reflecting public opinion rather than shaping it, and thus use market research and convincing and rational choice arguments in order to win votes, parties of integration wish to mobilize, educate and inspire the masses, rather than merely respond to their concern (Ibid.:232).

By emergence, parties may be divided into elections-oriented or constitutional parties and revolutionist parties (e.g. socialist parties). The constitutional parties operate in a framework of rules, whereas revolutionist parties are anti-system or anti-constitutional aiming to seize power and constitutional change (Ibid.).

Although the communist systems recognized one-party system, the liberal states know competitive two- or multi-party systems and correspondingly, in the post-communist Eastern Europe, party systems have developed from one party rule toward plurality. At the same time, the “Western” European states can be characterized by the trend of approximating the left-wing and right-wing into a consensus at the centre – meaning the emergence of centre-right and centre-left instead of contrasting right and left (Mouffe 2012). At the same time, political forces have been antagonistic (known, for example, from the French Revolution era, or already from the ancient societies, though concerning the latter we can talk about political movements not political parties) and according to Mouffe, as explained in the next chapter, political parties should remain antagonistic (Ibid.).

A classic example of antagonism is the emergence of socialism as utopian and revolutionary reaction against industrial capitalism, aiming to end capitalist economy and replace it with common ownership (Heywood 1997:49), which movement was in the 20th century divided into revolutionary socialism that developed into communism, and reformist constitutional socialism that has turned into social-democrats.

2.3. *Discursive Europe or consensus-based globalization?*

Political scientists see political parties as competitive shapers of society. Also Mouffe is of opinion that the antagonism will remain there, although in today's Europe, the party ideologies are not that easily distinguishable anymore, because centrism in politics means that also the right uses left-wing arguments for populist aims, whereas the left is using right-wing arguments, and in addition have emerged "new" political issues – environment, animal rights, feminism, etc., which issues most political parties would address.

Mouffe explains the consensus at the centre between centre-right and centre-left with political parties' belief that there is no alternative to neoliberal globalization – to unipolar governance – which, according to her, can be explained with the former socialist or social-democrat parties' belief that they have to manage the neoliberal globalization "in a human way" (Mouffe 2012), not with revolutionist change.

According also to Koskenniemi, political realms remain diverse until one hegemonic consensus could be possible but the biggest problem is that such hegemonic consensus (as Christianity or communism) could only be possible when growing out and being identical with everyone's morals (which is an idealistic idea of democracy) – thus this is deemed a utopian ideal (Koskenniemi 2000:436–440). Still, the author of this article supports the utopian idea of ideal society – to the extent possible for a scientist in the sense of the Weberian claim that scientists think differently from politicians (Weber). Maybe the non-existence for politicians of the utopian horizon that scientists are trying to envision, makes them think, as Mouffe refers, that there is no rational solution to their conflict and just accept legitimacy of their opponent (Mouffe 2012).

The previous confirms a simplified conclusion: until political parties remain competitive, at least two-dimensional party systems continue existence.

Estonian political scientist, Tõnis Saarts, sees two dimensions also in Estonian politics – on the one hand, there is the Estonian Reform Party with *Pro Patria* and *Res Publica* Union, forming the right, and on the other hand, there are the Estonia's Social Democratic Party with the Estonian Centre Party, forming the left (Saarts 2014), although the number of registered political parties has even grown during the last years, indicating pluralisation. At the same time, according to the study on how to create a transnational party system conducted by the Directorate General of the European Parliament for internal policies, the wide variety in the numbers of parties at national level can constitute an obstacle for the development of a single EU party system (European Parliament Directorate ... 2010), which in itself is a sign of coordination.

The party system at the EU level can be characterized as giving rise to duopolistic (not to say polarized) pluralism – on the one hand, there are the liberal political parties, such as the European People’s Party and the European Federalist Party, and on the other hand, there are socialist political parties. Mouffe indicates that today most of the social-democratic parties are still naming themselves socialists, and she explains their behaviour again by their probable acceptance of the fact that there exists no way in which they could offer an alternative to neo-liberalism (Mouffe 2012).

Maybe two-party system could be a solution instead of wide pluralism, because according to Heywood, wide pluralism also has its dangers, although on the other hand, a two-party system might limit choice³, thus it might possibly endanger the freedom of association and its inter-dependent rights of freedom of expression and opinion and assembly as recognized by the European Court of Human Rights as interdependent rights.

Also, what concerns the alternative of transformation of politics into agreement at the centre, Mouffe is of opinion that although many people might understand that if there would be no more antagonism, democracy would change more mature, this option, according to her, is problematic because if the difference between centre-left and centre-right would be minimal, that would give no alternative to people but to accept, thus making any real fair democratic choice between left and right impossible (Ibid.), which also may hinder the freedom of association. Mouffe understands politics as partisan, always with antagonistic dimension that she names agonistic confrontation (Ibid.).

3. The concept of the political party operating at European level

3.1. Conceptualizing through normative definitions

Within a state, the political parties control state power, whereas the political parties operating at European level control supranational power in Europe. That way, the political parties at European level contribute to shaping supranational policies that determine a state’s policies, and this is one reason why knowing the basis of their action is important.

According to Article 10(4) of the Treaty on European Union (hereinafter “TEU”), political parties at European level contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of the citizens of the Union.

Article 224 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (hereinafter “TFEU”) empowers the European Parliament and the Council under the ordinary legislative procedure and by means of regulations to lay down the regulations governing political parties at European level, especially the rules regarding their funding.

³ Included the possibility that the people disappointed in one party have no alternative but to elect the opposite party.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (hereinafter “Charter of Fundamental Rights” or “Charter”) defines political parties at Union level in Article 12(2), using part of the general definition given by the TEU, stressing the part that the political parties at Union level contribute to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union. The definition lies in Article 12 of the Charter, headed “Freedom of assembly and of association”, with the aim to guarantee everyone the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association at all levels, in particular in political, whereas the rights to vote and stand as a candidate at elections lie under a distinct Chapter of the Charter. As Article 12 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights contains rights that correspond to the rights guaranteed by the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, according to the General Provisions in its Article 52, the meaning and scope of those rights shall be the same as those laid down by the said Convention, whereas the EU is allowed to provide more extensive protection. As the Preamble of the Charter of Fundamental Rights refers to the Explanations prepared under the authority of the Presidium of the Convention that drafted the Charter, and updated under the responsibility of the Presidium of the European Convention as the source for interpretation by the courts of the EU and the member states of the Charter, the author of this article also looked at the referred Explanations but concluded that about the political parties at Union level they say directly only that Paragraph 2 of Article 12 corresponds to Article 10(4) of the TEU.

The EU Treaties do not give further definition nor explanation of a political party at European level, therefore this article finds such definition for the EU from Article 2 of Regulation (EC) No. 2004/2003 as follows:

- “1. ‘political party’ means an association of citizens:
 - which pursues political objectives, and
 - which is either recognised by, or established in accordance with, the legal order of at least one member state;
2. ‘alliance of political parties’ means structured cooperation between at least two political parties;
3. ‘political party at European level’ means a political party or an alliance of political parties which satisfies the conditions referred to in Article 3.”

The scope of the definition is explained in the Preamble of the same Regulation, referring to experience that has demonstrated that a political party at European level may have as its members either citizens gathered together in the form of a political party or political parties which together form an alliance, for which reason also the terms “political party” and “alliance of political parties” have been clarified by the Regulation.

Article 3 of the same Regulation sets the conditions which a political party at European level must meet:

- “(a) it must have legal personality in the Member State in which its seat is located;
- (b) it must be represented, in at least one quarter of Member States, by Members of the European Parliament or in the national Parliaments or

regional Parliaments or in the regional assemblies, or it must have received, in at least one quarter of the Member States, at least three per cent of the votes cast in each of those Member States at the most recent European Parliament elections;

- (c) it must observe, in particular in its programme and in its activities, the principles on which the European Union is founded, namely the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law;
- (d) it must have participated in elections to the European Parliament, or have expressed the intention to do so.”

3.2. Contextualizing normative definitions

The importance of such normative definitions is that they give political parties operating at European level a legal status and legal personality separate of that from national political parties and according to Chryssochoou such separation makes Europarties less dependent on national party structures, at the same time it increases Europarties’ capacity to act as “representative agents of EU citizens” (Chryssochoou 2011:6).

It is also important that Regulation (EC) No. 2004/2003 defines in Article 2(4) political foundation at European level and that it in Article 3(2) stipulates the conditions a political foundation at European level must meet.⁴

⁴ According to Article 2(4) of Regulation (EC) No. 2004/2003, as amended by Article 1(1) of Regulation (EC) No. 1524/2007, political foundation at European level means an entity or network of entities which has legal personality in a Member State, is affiliated with a political party at European level, and which through its activities, within the aims and fundamental values pursued by the EU, underpins and complements the objectives of the political party at European level by performing, in particular, the following tasks:

- observing, analysing and contributing to the debate on European public policy issues and on the process of European integration,
- developing activities linked to European public policy issues, such as organising and supporting seminars, training, conferences and studies on such issues between relevant stakeholders, including youth organisations and other representatives of civil society,
- developing cooperation with entities of the same kind in order to promote democracy,
- serving as a framework for national political foundations, academics, and other relevant actors to work together at European level,

whereas according to Article 3(2) of Regulation (EC) No. 2004/2003, as amended by Article 1(2) of Regulation (EC) No. 1524/2007, the conditions a political foundation at European level must satisfy are:

- (a) it must be affiliated with one of the political parties at European level recognised in accordance with paragraph 1, as certified by that party;
- (b) it must have legal personality in the Member State in which its seat is located. This legal personality shall be separate from that of the political party at European level with which the foundation is affiliated;
- (c) it must observe, in particular in its programme and in its activities, the principles on which the European Union is founded, namely the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law;
- (d) it shall not promote profit goals;
- (e) its governing body shall have a geographically balanced composition.

The few of the listed by social scientists functions that dominate election campaigns and influence political competition are: building legitimacy through shaping public opinion, educating people, giving citizens the opinion that they exercise power over the government – thus encouraging citizens to participate in politics and mobilizing active consent providing justifications, influencing the formation of governance, strengthening elites, directly influencing policies (Heywood 1997:255–256). Heywood refers to political discursiveness, claiming that education only means providing information, engaging public interest and stimulating debate, whereas candidates and parties attempt rather at persuading than scientific educating, therefore they may spread incomplete and distorted information (Ibid:255). The author of this article understands and names such as political discourses.

According to an economic theory of democracy, voters select parties in much the same way as purchasers select goods (Ibid:256) – thus if a party is willing to win, it can try to organize a campaign corresponding to the interests of the largest group of voters, whereas the voters may be interested in visual advertising or other less contentious factors, thus Heywood says that election results may rather reflect the resources and finances available to a competing party (Ibid:256) and that the influences upon voting can be psychological, sociological, economic and ideological (Ibid:266).

Heywood also characterizes elections as means through which governments and political elites can control and govern people (Ibid:255).

In such context is understandable that the European Parliament's Directorate General for Internal Policies has been interested in governing Europarties and has established that subjection of Europarties to the same legal regime may favour the development of the EU party system (European Parliament Directorate ... 2010).

4. Europarties and political parties of the member states

4.1. The structure of political parties at European level

At the time this article was being written, there were 13 registered political parties at European level according to the European Parliament's official data: European People's Party (EPP), Party of European Socialists (PES), Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), European Green Party (EGP), Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR), The Party of the European Left (EL), Movement for a Europe of Liberties and Democracy (MELD), European Democratic Party (EDP), European Free Alliance (EFA), European Alliance for Freedom (EAF), Alliance of European National Movements (AEMN), European Christian Political Movement (ECPM), and EU Democrats (EUD).

4.2. The structure of Estonian politics

The political parties at European level do not directly correspond to the names of or division in member states of political parties. For example, at the time this

article was being written, Estonia had the following registered political parties: *Eesti Reformierakond* (Estonian Reform Party), *Eesti Keskerakond* (Estonian Centre Party), *Erakond Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit* (*Pro Patria* and *Res Publica* Union), *Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond* (Estonia's Social Democratic Party), *Eesti Iseseisvuspartei* (Party of Estonian Independence), *Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond* (Conservative People's Party of Estonia), *Eesti Vabaduspartei – Põllumeeste Kogu* (Estonian Freedom Party – Farmers' Assembly), *Eestimaa Ühendatud Vasakpartei* (Estonian Associated Left), *Erakond Eestimaa Rohelised* (Estonian Greens), *Rahva Ühtsuse Erakond* (Party of People's Unity), *Eesti Vaba Erakond* (Estonian Free Party) (*Erakondade Register*) – from which parties many belong to Europarties or to other international political groups. For example, *Eesti Reformierakond* (Estonian Reform Party) belongs to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), to which Alliance also belongs *Eesti Keskerakond* (Estonian Centre Party). *Erakond Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit* (*Pro Patria* and *Res Publica* Union) is associated with the European People's Party (EPP), *Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond* (Estonia's Social Democratic Party) is associated with the Party of European Socialists (PES), *Eestimaa Ühendatud Vasakpartei* (Estonian Associated Left) is associated with the Party of the European Left (EL), *Erakond Eestimaa Rohelised* (Estonian Greens) is associated with European Greens (EGP).

Some Estonian political parties have not been willing to join Europarties but the author of this article would rather believe that the reasons are not connected with unacceptability of direct form of interference into the domestic public spheres (Chryssochoou 2011:4) because internal parties and Europarties are interrelated, and because Europarties also express the political will of the EU citizens (Ibid.) similarly to internal parties.

One can infer already from the names of the Estonian political parties that by ideology they are divided into right, centre and left parties, while according to their political programmes they may represent mixed ideologies, and liberal, social-democrat and conservative politics. One can also infer that Estonian political parties are generally willing to cooperate with political parties at European level, as they also do with other international groups with whom they share values.

4.3. The structure of European politics

4.3.1. The European People's Party

The European People's Party (EPP) was founded in 1976 and represents centre-right and the idea of federal Europe (European People's ... 2012). The EPP is considered the largest political organisation in Europe – at the time of writing this article, it had 70 member-parties from 40 states from both the EU and Third States, thus most heads of state and government of the EU member states were being represented (European People's ... 2014).

In addition, although there is a requirement for the Members of the European Parliament and the Commission, as well as for the employees of any other EU

institution, to be impartial and independent, the political parties at European level stress, for example, the following facts: they have 13 European Commissioners (including the President) in the European Commission which is an independent collegiate body; and although it has also been generally stated that the political parties at European level do not correspond to the groups in the European Parliament, the political parties themselves stress such facts that they (the EPP, in the concrete case) constitute the largest group in the European Parliament – the Group of the European People’s Party. In order to demonstrate the direct and indirect influence of a political party at European level on institutions may be relevant that since 2007, the EPP has organised EPP ministerial meetings prior to the meetings of the Council of the EU; that the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, is from the EPP family and was the EPP candidate for President of the European Commission in the 2014 European elections; that the EPP Summit is being held prior to the European Council gathering EPP heads of state and government and other major leaders of the party; that the EPP has the largest political group in the Committee of the Regions and it holds key positions within this Committee, thus considering itself the Committee of the Regions’ driving force in the EU decision making process. The EPP acts in the EU’s international relations, holding since 2007 Foreign Affairs ministerial meetings prior to the Foreign Affairs Council; in 2012, the EPP established an Expert Group on Foreign Policy; since 2009 are held Defence Ministers’ ministerial meetings. The EPP has actively participated in the Eastern Partnership, Middle East and North-Africa, and transatlantic relations where it strengthens relations with Republicans (Ibid.).

Beyond the EU, the EPP is represented in the Council of Europe as its largest political group; in the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), where it has been active in Parliamentary Assembly and constitutes the largest political group; the EPP is also present in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly with one of the largest political groups of the organisation. The EPP participates in international political party organizations, being member of centre-right international party organisations - the Centrist Democrat International (CDI) and the International Democratic Union (IDU) (Ibid.).

Generally, the EPP’s values are reflected by the Party’s four working groups - European policy, Economic and social policy, EPP membership, and Climate change and energy; and from the Party’s policy areas: Europe; economy, competitiveness and finances; justice and security; social and demographic issues, energy, agriculture, environment and climate change, family and society, foreign affairs, religion (Ibid.).

4.3.2. The Party of European Socialists

The Party of European Socialists (PES) stresses its roots dating back to the 19th century, while its history as a Europarty began in 1957 (Hix, Lesse 2002). This left-wing party brings together the socialist, social democratic and labour parties in the EU (Party of European Socialists. Manifesto 2014). The number of member parties is 32, representing the 28 EU member states and Norway. In

addition to member parties, there are eleven associate parties and ten observer parties (Party of European Socialists 2014).

The PES is represented in the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. The European Commission has eight Commissioners from the PES. The PES is also represented in the European Council – the PES Prime Ministers and leaders meet before the European summits and discuss the policy goals that the European Council could achieve; the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy who chairs the Foreign Affairs Council and conducts the common foreign and security policy is from the PES, the PES is represented in the ministerial formations of the Council of the EU, and has the PES Group in the Committee of the Regions. The PES also acts through political foundation – Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) (Ibid.).

Beyond the EU, the PES acts through associated organizations – the Socialist International, Socialist group in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and Socialist Group in the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE. The PES also cooperates with its observer organizations – Socialist International Women, International Union of Socialist Youth, European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, the Joint Committee of the Nordic Social Democratic Labour Movement, International Falcon Movement – Socialist Educational International, Rainbow Rose LGBT Network, Union of Socialist Local and Regional Representatives in Europe, European Senior Organization, and International Social Democratic Union for Education (Ibid.).

4.3.3. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

The creation of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) dates back to 1976 and the ALDE was allegedly the first cross-border European political family, although bearing initially a different name – the European Liberal Democrat and Reform (ELDR) party (Alliance of Liberals ... 2014). The ALDE supports liberal democrat values and has 57 member parties from Europe.

The ALDE's areas of priority are: energy, environment and agriculture; culture, education and research; EU single market and economics; European democracy; foreign affairs, fundamental freedoms and human rights; social policy (Ibid.).

In the European Parliament, together with the Members of Parliament from the European Democratic Party, the ALDE forms the third largest political force - the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group. Liberal democrats are also represented by the European Commissioners. The ALDE accepts associate members (Ibid.).

4.3.4. The European Green Party

Founded in 2014, the European Green Party (EGP) is a transnational political party with 46 national Green party members, candidates and associates from European states. The EGP cooperates with regional and global networks – Balkan

Network, Global Greens, European Network of Green Seniors, Gender Network, Individual Supporters Network, Local Councillors Network (European Green Party 2014).

The EGP's working groups for the 2014 elections were: Common manifesto, Common campaign plan and strategy, Future of the EU, Youth empowerment, Climate change, Common foreign and security policy, Digital rights, Financial advisory board, Green New Deal, Social dimension/pensions, Human rights/civil rights and liberties, LGBT, Membership review, Migration, Shale gas (Ibid.).

Deriving from the EGP's manifesto, the author of the article sees shared values with the European Parliament's group Green / European Free Alliance (European Green Party. Manifesto 2014).

4.3.5. The Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists

The Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR) has 16 members from European states and two regional partners from Canada and Mexico, and the Party determines itself as a conservative, non-federalist political entity with values such as individual liberty, national sovereignty, parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, private property, low taxes, sound money, free trade, open competition, and the devolution of power (Alliance of European Conservatives ... 2014).

In the European Parliament, the AECR is represented by the group European Conservatives and Reformists, created in 2009, and according to the available data, being the third largest group in the Parliament. Since 2014, the AECR has an affiliated partner – the European Conservatives (EC) Group in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In 2013, the European Conservatives and Reformists Group has been established in the Committee of the Regions (Ibid.).

Beyond the EU, the AECR is represented by the European Conservatives and Reformists Group in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (Ibid.).

The AECR has its think-tank – New Direction, which is a free market, euro-realist foundation, established in 2010, based in Brussels, and the AECR also has youth wing, and a leading centre-right youth movement – European Young Conservatives (EYC) embracing 20 political youth organisations from 16 different countries and territories (Ibid.).

4.3.6. The Party of the European Left

The Party of the European Left (EL) represents non-socialist left-wing and has both national party and individual members from the EU Member States and associated states. The EL's member parties are socialist, communist, red-green and other democratic left parties (Party of the European Left. Statute ... 2014).

Deciding upon its values, the author of this article would connect the EL with the European Parliament's confederalist politics group the European United Left – Nordic Green Left.

The EL's Working Groups are: Economic policy, Education, EL FEM, Energy and climate policies, Freedom and civil rights, LGBT queer, Latin America, Middle East, Trade unionists, Youth. The EL is a networking party, cooperating with the Permanent Forum of the European Left of Regions, platform "8th of May2 (Party of the European Left 2014).

4.3.7. The Movement for a Europe of Liberties and Democracy

The Movement for a Europe of Liberties and Democracy (MELD) supports the principles of democracy, freedom and cooperation, being against bureaucratization and democracy deficit in Europe, supporting freedom of political expression and association, fundamental democratic principles and accountable representation (Movement ... 2014).

4.3.8. The European Democratic Party

The European Democratic Party (EDP) is a transnational political movement combining federalist and social aspiration (European Democratic Party. From ... 2014) with ten member parties and seven individual members from European states (European Democratic Party 2014).

The EDP's working groups are: An industrial policy for Europe, A European area of solidarity, Transnational policy for a new European democracy, The green economy, Identity and diversity in the EU, The condition of women in Europe and the Mediterranean, The EU and the emerging countries – EU and China, The EU and the emerging countries – EU and India, The EU and the emerging countries – EU and Latin-American countries, The EU and the emerging countries – EU and Russia and Belarus, The EU and the emerging countries – EU and Moldova and Ukraine, The EU and the emerging countries – EU and the Muslim and Arab countries, The EU and the global governance, The EU and the fight against poverty: the poverty in Europe, The EU and the fight against poverty: the Millennium Goals and the development, Europe and immigration. Need and uncertainty, New demographic challenges, Global warming and sustainable growth, Globalization / de-localization (Ibid.).

The EDP is represented in the European Parliament together with the ALDE in the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group.

4.3.9. The European Free Alliance

Established in 1981, the European Free Alliance (EFA), a pro-European party, consists of 40 nationalist, regionalist and autonomist parties from 17 EU member states, having also observer members – Bloc Nacionalista Valencia, For Human Rights in United Latvia, L'Altro Sud, Nueva Canarias. The EFA cooperates with the political foundation at the European level – the Centre Maurits Coppieters, and with the European Free Alliance Youth (European Free Alliance 2014).

The EFA values the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, the right of self-determination of

peoples, human, civil and political rights, democracy, internal enlargement, multi-level governance, devolution of powers, cultural and linguistic diversity, nationalism, regionalism, autonomy and independence (Ibid.).

The EFA is represented in the European Parliament's group the Greens / European Free Alliance.

4.3.10. The European Alliance for Freedom

The European Alliance for Freedom (EAF) defines itself as follows: “[the EAF] is a pan-European alliance of Members of the European Parliament, together with national and regional parliamentarians and parties, united under a political platform calling for national freedom and democracy in opposition to centralised, supranational control” (European Alliance for Freedom. Political ... 2014). The EAF does not define itself within the left-right political scale and thus allows members with wide political spectrum. The EAF values national and regional parliamentary democracy aimed at international cooperation and free European nation states, and is of opinion that nations and their constitutional democracies are endangered by supranational power (European Alliance for Freedom 2014).

4.3.11. The Alliance of European National Movements

The Alliance of European National Movements (AEMN) was established in Budapest, Hungary, in 2009 by nationalist parties and national movements from European states. The AEMN is a Christian confederalist party, supporting such values as diversity, traditions, freedom, independence and equality of sovereign nations (Alliance of European National ... 2014).

4.3.12. The European Christian Political Movement

Having come together in 2002 and established in 2005, the European Christian Political Movement (ECPM) is a Christian-democratic political party, representing Christian-socialists and embracing European Christian-democratic and Christian-social parties, NGO's and think tanks with 14 members and 28 associates (European Christian Political Movement 2014).

Five members of the ECPM were elected to the European Parliament in 2014 but the ECPM is not affiliated to any of the groups in the European Parliament. The foundations “Christian Political Foundation for Europe”, the “European Christian Political Youth” cooperate with the ECPM (Ibid.).

The values promoted by the ECPM are: a Europe of human dignity; an economy that works for people; priority for family and marriage; freedom of faith, conscience and expression; human trafficking; fighting modern-day slavery (Ibid.).

4.3.13. The EU Democrats

The EU Democrats (EUD), founded in 2005, considers itself a pan-European EU-critical alliance, consisting of members, movements and member parties. The

EUD does not take position on left-right policy issues and its core values are transparency, accountability, subsidiarity, and budget control (EU Democrats 2014).

According to the EUD's political platform, the party is supporting political independence of the EU member states, is monitoring the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, working against certain new EU institutions' initiatives of policy governance, and against the development of a EU Foreign Service for the reason that they consider it undermining the member states' foreign, security and defence policy, against the expansion of the euro zone, and for complete transparency in all EU institutions (Ibid.).

4.4. Political analysis of the Europarties

Having grown out of the European countries' historically developed political parties and reflecting their ideologies and dynamics, the Europarties can generally also be divided into right, centre, left and "mixed" parties. It is also possible to distinguish between liberals, radicals, social democrats and conservatives, while the names of several Europarties clearly demonstrate their relying on different basic ideologies.

Deriving from the previous, one can generalize that the system of political parties operating at European level can be characterized as a multi-party system, from where one can find several characteristic features of catch-all parties – pluralism, information society and other features characteristic to postmodernism. In today's integrated Europe, the political parties at European level reflect besides pan-European political ideologies also the spectrum of Europe of religions, green ideologies, national ideologies, attitude towards minorities (national groups), racism, resistance movements, other ideological tensions – and shape the all-European public opinion through media channels. Because of the large number of members, the characteristic features of a mass party can be found in the system, whereas the citizens have the possibility of following and influencing the work of the political parties through global networks (e.g. the Internet). The Europarties are rather constitutional than revolutionist parties, although it was difficult to determine the nature of Europarties being representative or integrative, as some parties growingly try to reflect public concern as characteristic to representative parties, while some also wish to mobilize, educate and inspire the electors, which is characteristic to integrative parties – thus one could conclude that of these features both are at present.

At the same time, the Europarties should not be assessed from the viewpoint of reflecting European pluralist landscape but also from the viewpoint of organizing elections and shaping politics – although the Members of the European Parliament are elected by the citizens of the EU, the Europarties participate in organizing electoral campaigns, work of the European Parliament and EU institutions, the roots of the latter's proceedings reach to the EU member states' political parties who are members of the Europarties and who present the candidates to the European Parliament, as well as State representatives to the EU institutions, while

at the same time allegations have been made about growing politicization of even the European Security and Defence Policy, and therefore questions have been posed about who finances and determines European politics, and whether the EU might lose its leading position in deciding its own political matters due to the influence from Third States, not to talk about party competition broadly understood as competition between the right-wing and left-wing European political parties.

5. Political representation in the European Parliament

While the citizens of the member states put forward and elect their representatives to the European Parliament, political parties at European level participate in organizing election campaigns to the European Parliament, thus being able to shape European politics.

The role of the European Parliament alone and in cooperation with other EU institutions and national parliaments is crucial.

There are seven groups in the European Parliament – Group of the European People’s Party (Christian Democrats), Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, European Conservatives and Reformists, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, European United Left – Nordic Green Left, the Greens / European Free Alliance, Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group.

The political group chairmen together with the President of Parliament form the Conference of Presidents, which is the political body in the European Parliament, meeting once in a month, organizing the work of the European Parliament and its bodies, and being consulted on all matters relating to legislative planning and relations with other EU bodies and institutions. The political groups co-draft EU legislation in the Parliament’s Committees.

As seen from Chapter 4.3. of this article, although the people working in the EU institutions serve EU interests, their workers and the groups in the European Parliament stress their political belonging. Thus, one may read from the website of the European Parliament that also Tunne Kelam who represents Estonia in the Group of the European People’s Party in the European Parliament, comes from *Erakond Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit* (Party of *Pro Patria* and *Res Publica* Union); Kaja Kallas and Urmas Paet who in the European Parliament belong to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, both come from *Eesti Reformierakond* (Estonian Reform Party); whereas Yana Toom who in the European Parliament also belongs to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, comes from *Eesti Keskerakond* (Estonian Centre Party); Marju Lauristin who belongs to the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, comes from *Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond* (Estonia’s Social Democratic Party); and Indrek Tarand who in the European Parliament belongs to the group of Green / European Free Alliance, has in Estonia been an independent candidate.

Another comment may be that according to the study on how to create a transnational party system conducted by Directorate General of the European Parliament for internal policies, the presence of two or more national political parties within the same European Parliament group is considered to hinder the development of the EU party system (European Parliament, Directorate ... 2010).

6. Conclusions

The article explained political parties as a normatively regulated source of legitimacy in the EU, on three levels: first, the political parties of the EU member states, second, the political parties at European level, and third, the political representation in the European Parliament. That way, the article referred to two levels of legitimacies – legitimacy of international organizations / institutions through national governments, and direct legitimacy of international organizations / institutions.

The article did not explain other direct sources of legitimacy beyond the registered political parties, such as the political movements and groups, which is an emerging general trend in Europe but does not aim at participating in the procedures of formal governmental power, having instead developed substantial popular consent networks indicating social problems and reacting against those. These movements and groups may or may not develop into new and more effective political parties.

Concerning normative definitions of political parties, I tried to explain their importance by stressing some significant fragments in some normative definitions, such as – the “political will of citizens”; “participation in management of public affairs”, “free and democratic elections” in the Venice Commission’s definition; “capacity to influence the whole of their states’ regime”, “difference” in the European Court of Human Rights’ definition based on Freedom of Association in Article 11 of the ECHR; “political awareness”, “will of EU citizens” in Article 10(4) of the TEU; powers of the European Parliament and the Council to lay regulations governing political parties under ordinary legislative procedure in Article 224 of the TFEU; “political will of the EU citizens”, “elections” in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. I mentioned also legally relevant EU regulations of political parties, such as the Regulation EC No. 2004/2003 with amendments, which regulation gives also many powers to states, and a normative attempt at governance of the European Parliament’s DG Internal Policies.

Considering continuity, the article argued that party competition as political antagonism continues to exist until one utopian hegemonic consensus could be possible. As for party opposition understood as conflict related to socialist and liberal values as understood in the Cold War context, such opposition marks discontinuity, being for example especially relevant in the context of politicization of the European security and defence policy. Here also the importance of financing of political parties in the European context comes crucial as an issue of whether

the EU might lose its leadership position to Third States through political party influence (developments known from the history of Latin-America and Africa) or, in some of its dimensions, as an issue of whether such could amount to spread of incomplete and distorted information.

Concerning the Europarties' relation with the EU member states, I reached the conclusion that the Europarties' names do not directly correspond to the names of the member states' political parties.

With regard to the Europarties' relation with the European Parliament – the article explained that the political groups in the European Parliament do not directly correspond to the Europarties nor to national parties, although similarly to Europarties, the groups in the European Parliament stress their political belonging.

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