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Austrian Parties' Organisational Adaptation to European Integration

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Austrian Parties' Organisational Adaptation to European Integration

Abstract¹

There has to date been no systematic study of national political parties' organizational adaptation to European integration. This paper reports the Austria-specific findings of the first major comparative study of the 'Europeanization' of national party organizations. It investigates the hypotheses that European integration would a) enhance the intra-party significance of 'EU-specialists' and b) further the intra-party empowerment of party elites active in EU-level executive bodies. Two main types of data were used. The first comprises party documents, including party statutes. Second, the author conducted 31 in-depth interviews with senior staff, functionaries and public office-holders of the ÖVP, SPÖ, FPÖ and Greens.

The paper finds that the internal life of Austria's political parties has indeed changed in response to European integration, albeit not dramatically. EU-specialists have not enjoyed the hypothesised strengthening of their intra-party power, but all parties have experienced a growth in the number of EU-specialists and formally adapted their structures to the exigencies of European integration. Moreover, EU-specialists and party elites involved in decision-making at the supranational level enjoy in part considerably higher levels of autonomy from – and lower levels of accountability to – their national parties than is the case in analogous national arenas. These adaptive responses enhance existing trends for the party in national executive office to be strengthened vis-à-vis both the party on the ground and the parliamentary party. The intra-organizational changes identified in this paper thus pose challenges for notions of intra-party democracy. However, they also raise important questions for classic notions of party democracy.

INTRODUCTION

This paper reports the findings of an investigation into the extent to which the internal life of Austria's four main political parties has changed in response to the country's 1995 accession to the European Union (EU).² Although the impact of membership upon domestic politics figures

¹ The research underpinning this paper was supported by ESRC Grant No R000 239793 'The Europeanisation of National Political Parties', awarded to Thomas Poguntke (principal applicant), Nicholas Aylott, Robert Ladrech and Kurt Richard Luther (co-applicants); and by a grant made under the Keele University Research Investment Scheme. This working paper comprises an early draft of the author's contribution to the following volume, scheduled to be published by Routledge in late 2006: Poguntke, Thomas; Aylott, Nicholas; Ladrech, Robert and Luther, Kurt Richard (eds.) *The Europeanization of National Political Parties*. Much of the primary research for this contribution was undertaken whilst the author was a guest researcher at the Institut für Europäische Integrationsforschung (EIF) of the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften in Vienna. He would like to express his thanks to the members of the Institut for their generous hospitality.

² The research underpinning this chapter includes 31 interviews, conducted between July 2004 and June 2005, with staff, functionaries and public office holders of the Social Democratic Party of Austria (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs* - SPÖ), Austrian People's Party (*Österreichische Volkspartei* - ÖVP), Freedom Party of Austria (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* - FPÖ)

prominently in recent research by Austria specialists (Tálos and Falkner 1996; Dolezal and Müller 2001; Neisser and Puntischer Riekman 2002; Gehler et al. 2003), surprisingly little research exists on how integration might have impacted upon the country's political parties (Riekman et al 2001; Pollak and Slominski 2002). It is the contention of the research project of which the Austrian case study being reported here forms a part that European integration is likely to have enhanced the intra-party power of two partially overlapping categories of party actors: 'EU-specialists' and party elites.³ To investigate these hypotheses, we will initially seek to establish whether Austrian parties have undertaken any structural adaptation to European integration that advantages these actors. Examples would include EU-specialists' greater presence on party bodies and the allocation to EU-related activities of more party resources over time. We will then consider whether EU integration has privileged EU-specialists in processes of intra-party decision-making such as manifesto formulation and if so, which sub-categories of EU-specialists have benefited most. The last substantive section reports our findings regarding the degree of autonomy from their parties which EU-specialists and party elites enjoy when acting at the EU-level. It also considers the nature and extent of their accountability to their parties for those actions. Before commencing our detailed analysis of these issues, we shall briefly discuss the historical background to and conflicts over Austria's EU membership, domestic institutional reform pursuant to Austria's EU membership and key organisational features of Austria's political parties.

AUSTRIA, EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Historical background

Austria's late accession to the European Union has much to do with foreign policy constraints associated with the 1955 State Treaty. These included not only the prohibition in Article 4 of 'political or economic union with Germany in any form whatsoever', but also Austria's declaration of permanent neutrality. Austria thus opted instead to play a leading role in the creation of the European Free Trade Area and in the early 1970s negotiated with the EC a series of Free Trade Agreements that granted opt-out clauses in the event of conflicts that might compromise its treaty obligations (Lantis and Queen 1998). The EC's later move towards the Single European Act caused Austria to reconsider its position and in July 1989 the SPÖ-ÖVP coalition applied for full membership. Negotiations were successfully concluded in April 1994 and the governing parties predictably campaigned for a yes vote at the obligatory EU referendum of June 1994 (Pelinka 1995). Of the three opposition parties, only the Liberal Forum (*Liberales Forum*, or LiF) followed suit. In the event, an unexpectedly large majority (66.6%) of the 81.3% who voted supported membership. The highest proportions of 'yes' voters were amongst LiF and SPÖ supporters (75

and Greens (*Die Grünen- Die Grüne Alternative[Grüne]*). The prime target interlocutors were these parties' current or recent leaders; general secretaries; parliamentary party chairpersons; chief representatives on the parliamentary Standing Subcommittee for EU Affairs; European Parliament delegation leaders; EU-specialist staff and international secretaries (where these exist). About 90% of these persons were interviewed. The author appreciates their supporting his research in this way. Where not otherwise specified, this account of Austrian parties' organisational adaptation to European integration derives from information provided in these interviews.

³ For a detailed explanation of those hypotheses and the research design which the project adopted to test them, see the introductory chapter of the forthcoming volume detailed in footnote 1.

and 73% respectively). Of those expressing a preference for the FPÖ, or the Greens, only 41 and 38 per cent respectively voted for accession (Plasser and Ulram 1995; Ogris 1995). Austria joined the EU on 1 January 1995 and its' parties' subsequent strengths in the European Parliament (EP) are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Austrian Party Strengths in the European Parliament, 1995-2004: Votes & Seats

	Turnout (%)	Greens % S	SPÖ % S	ÖVP % S	FPÖ % S	LiF % S	Hans-Peter Martin List % S	Total Seats
01.01.1995*	n/a	- (1)	- (7)	- (6)	- (5)	- (1)		20
13.10.1996	66.7	6.8 (1)	29.2 (6)	29.7 (7)	27.5 (6)	4.3 (1)		21
13.06.1999	49.4	9.3 (2)	31.7 (7)	30.7 (7)	23.4 (5)	2.7 (0)		21
13.06.2004	42.4	12.9 (2)	33.3 (7)	32.7 (6)	6.3 (1)	-	14.0 (2)	18

* Appointed by the *Nationalrat* in proportion to caucus strengths.

Source: Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior

Party conflicts over European integration

The ÖVP had been the first of the governing parties to advocate membership, arguing full access to EC markets for export-oriented firms was essential for future prosperity. Its big business interests thought single market deregulation offered the prospect of reducing organised labour's power over economic policy-making. Later, ÖVP farming and small business groups raised concerns regarding subsidies and competitiveness. Within the socialist camp, support for membership was initially confined to elements of the SPÖ leadership and Austrian Trade Union Federation (*Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund* - ÖGB). Here too, economic arguments figured prominently: greater price competition would increase economic activity and raise workers' purchasing power and residual income, whilst the growth essential for maintaining social policy benefits would be secured. More left-wing circles remained extremely sceptical about the EC 'capitalist club', favouring at most participation in the single market. Similar sentiments were to be found in the Greens, the party most consistently opposed to accession, which it was argued would result in the pursuit of growth at any cost and undermine existing environmental protection legislation. The Greens also feared the environmental implications of the expected increase in transit traffic, especially by heavy-goods vehicles. Finally, they had concerns about the EC's centralism and 'democratic deficit', and these grew as the contours of the Maastricht Treaty emerged.

Once accession had been approved in the referendum, the Greens undertook a remarkable *volte-face* and accepted membership. The FPÖ moved in the reverse direction. Historically, it had been the most steadfast advocate of European integration, a position critics ascribed to lingering pan-Germanic sentiment. The reality was less clear-cut: the party had long felt EC membership would promote Austria's Western integration and counter features of Austrian consensualism it rejected, including neo-corporatism. From the early 1980s, the FPÖ also advanced economic arguments, but in May 1993 effectively reversed its traditional position. Its rejection of membership (at least on the terms negotiated) was ascribed by most observers to the by then markedly populist party's desire to mobilise the public's anxieties.

Since 1995, the main integration-related conflicts between and within Austria's parties have been fourfold. The earlier dispute over neutrality lingered for a few years, in particular in relation to Austria's future security policy. The ÖVP (and especially the FPÖ) initially advocated NATO membership, whilst the SPÖ and in particular the Greens defended neutrality. However, this conflict has since subsided, largely because there is no pressure to make a decision and little prospect of the abandonment of neutrality obtaining the necessary two-thirds parliamentary support and a referendum endorsement. The second conflict resulted from the 'sanctions' imposed on Austria in 2000 by the other EU-members in response to the FPÖ's entry into government (Karlhofer et.al 2001). They weakened the opposition parties, which the government accused of national disloyalty, but probably increased support for the EU in hitherto more sceptical left-wing circles. A third conflict has concerned EU enlargement. Given its historic links with eastern Europe, Austria's elite was largely in favour of eastern enlargement and well placed to promote it. Yet Austria's location adjacent to the EU's permeable economic 'border' with the accession states made it vulnerable to potentially adverse economic consequences, not least for its labour market. The FPÖ milked this issue, which was also highlighted by the SPÖ's trades union wing and the ÖVP's Workers' and Employees' League. More recently, the enlargement issue has concerned Turkey's proposed membership of the EU, something only the Greens did not oppose. Finally, there is considerable unease across the political spectrum regarding the EU's allegedly excessively neo-liberal orientation. Such sentiments are strongest amongst Green and SPÖ supporters, but have also been articulated quite strongly by elements within the FPÖ (though the latter has itself been internally divided over this). They also cause some internal dissent within the ÖVP, especially between its (big) business wing and Workers' and Employees League.

The institutional framework and EU integration

Austria comprises a centralised federation with a weak territorial chamber (*Bundesrat*) and a parliamentary executive traditionally able to rely upon highly disciplined party behaviour within the lower house (*Nationalrat*) (Müller *et al.* 2001). Lacking the two-thirds parliamentary majority required to pass the constitutional amendment for EU-accession, the SPÖ/ÖVP government was reliant upon the votes of the Greens and LiF, whose price was a set of reforms that together established one of the strongest set of formal rights of parliamentary control in EU affairs of any EU member state.⁴ The reforms require the government to provide full information on EU affairs to the *Nationalrat*, *Bundesrat* and *Länder* (Articles 23e (1) and 23d (1) of the constitution). Of the three new structures they created, that in which the politically most significant encounters

⁴ For relevant changes to Austria's constitution and parliamentary Standing Orders, see in particular the *Beitrittermächtigungsgesetz* (Bundesgesetzblatt [BGBl] 1994/744), *Bundes-Verfassungsgesetz-Novelle* 1994 (BGBl 1994/1013) and *Geschäftsordnungsgesetz-Novelle* 1996 (BGBl 1996/438). See also Blümel and Neuhold (2001) and Pollak & Slominski (2003). Changes were also made to *Bundesrat* and *Länder* rights. Given the centralised nature of Austrian federalism, they will not be discussed further, but see for example the special agreement between the *Bund* and *Länder* (BGBl 775/1992) regarding *Länder* and municipalities' rights in matters concerning EU legislation; *BVG-Novelle betreffend EU-Ausschuß des Bundesrates* (BGBl 1996/437); *Beschluß auf ... Einführung des EU-Ausschusses* (BGBl 1997/65 I). Art 23e(6) of the Constitution (BGBl 65/1997) permits the *Bundesrat* also to issue binding opinions to federal ministers due to act at the EU level in respect of the few matters over which the *Bundesrat* has a veto.

regarding integration policy take place is the Main Committee on EU Affairs,⁵ which comprises parliament's pre-eminent existing committee convening exclusively for the discussion of EU matters. Parties are represented in proportion to their overall parliamentary strength, which means that during the 2002-2006 legislature, the ÖVP, SPÖ, FPÖ and Greens had 14, 12, 3 and 3 of the 32 seats respectively.⁶ In addition, any MEP may attend (§ 31c Abs 7 & GOG-NR), whilst the relevant federal ministers must. The EU Main Committee always convenes prior to European Council meetings. From 1999 to 2004, it met 4 to 8 times per annum. Its most significant power (Article 23e (2) of the constitution) is to issue ministers acting at the EU-level with binding opinions, from which they may only deviate 'for urgent foreign and integration policy reasons'. If they do, they must subsequently justify themselves before the Committee. Its tightly-worded first binding opinion is allegedly prevented the relevant minister from negotiating a better deal for Austria (Interviews 12 & 27) and the Main Committee has since issued fewer⁷ and much more loosely-worded opinions.

The second institution is the Main Committee's Standing Sub-Committee on EU Affairs, on which the parties are again represented according to their overall parliamentary strength, which in the 2002-2006 legislature translated into the following seats: ÖVP 6 (including the chair), SPÖ 5, FPÖ and Greens 1 each.⁸ It is to this committee – which deals with more technical matters than the Main Committee on EU Affairs – that the parliamentary parties tend to delegate their EU-specialists. According to the Parliamentary Standing Orders, the Sub-Committee's chairmanship in the 1995-1999 legislature should have been held by the FPÖ, but in light of the latter's EU-scepticism, the Sub-Committee's first meeting was delayed until the subsequent legislature, when the FPÖ no longer had that claim. Like its parent committee, but unlike almost all others, the Sub-Committee normally operates in public and a record of its proceedings is published. It too can require the attendance of relevant government ministers and is entitled to issue binding opinions.⁹ The third key institution is the so-called Fire Brigade Committee (§ 31e Abs. 3 GOG-NR), comprising the Chair of the Standing Sub-Committee, plus one representative chosen *ad hoc* by each parliamentary party. Its role is that of an out-of-hours link between parliament and government ministers acting at the EU-level, especially in respect of European Council matters on which parliament has issued binding opinions, or where issues are being debated that might have constitutional implications.

As of mid-2005, ministerial reports on the business of the EU Council and Commission are discussed by the relevant specialist parliamentary committee and ministers have to produce detailed papers on the EU-matters to be debated by the Main Committee on EU Affairs. Moreover,

⁵ Regulated according to the following new constitutional provisions: B-VG Art. 23 Abs. 1 & Art 23 a)-f), plus §29; 31, 31a); 31b); 31c); 31d) & 31e) GOG-NR.

⁶ During previous legislative periods, party strengths on the Main Committee on EU Affairs were as follows: 7.11.94-14.1.96: SPÖ 10 (including the chair), ÖVP 8, FPÖ 6, Greens 2, LiF 1; 15.1.96-28.10.99: SPÖ 12 (including the chair), ÖVP 8, FPÖ; Greens & LiF 1; 29.10.99-19.12.02 SPÖ 10 (including the chair), ÖVP & FPÖ 8 each, Greens 2.

⁷ In the first year this power existed (1995), the Main Committee issued 18 opinions, which is one more than the total for the subsequent ten years.

⁸ In the 1999 to 2002 legislature, the SPÖ had 5 seats, the ÖVP 4 (including the chair); the FPÖ 4 and the Greens 1 seat.

⁹ In the six years since its first meeting (7 December 1999), the Subcommittee issued only four binding opinions.

parliament now has plenary sessions devoted exclusively to EU themes.¹⁰ As the first was only held in September 2005, it is too early to tell what significance they might have.

The structural profile of Austrian parties

The four parties examined in this chapter¹¹ exhibit some formal structural similarities. They all attribute sovereign authority to a *party congress*¹² comprising a few hundred delegates. That of the Greens must meet annually, those of the SPÖ and FPÖ biennially and that of the ÖVP only once every four years. Each party also has a *national executive*¹³ of between about 30 members (FPÖ, ÖVP and Greens) and 70 (SPÖ). That of the Greens meets quarterly, whilst those of the others meet every four or six weeks. Day-to-day decisions are made by a *national executive committee*¹⁴ that convenes at least fortnightly and has as few as half a dozen members (ÖVP), or over two dozen (FPÖ and SPÖ). Finally, three parties have a *party council*¹⁵. That of the FPÖ should meet quarterly and is politically marginal, whilst the statutes of the SPÖ and Greens allow for an analogous body to be convened (typically by their national executives) to debate strategic questions and – in the case of the SPÖ – to confirm candidate lists for national parliamentary elections. There are significant differences, however, in the rules governing how the memberships of individual parties' executive committees and of the national executives of which they form a part are determined. The greatest degree of intra-party democracy is to be found in the Greens, where all executive committee members are elected by the party congress, whilst most of the additional members of the national executive are elected by the provincial party groups. The members of SPÖ national executive are all elected by the party congress, which proposes the members of the executive committee, that must include the leaders of the provincial parties, as well as two representatives of the trades union and women's organisations. The executive committees of the FPÖ and ÖVP include only two categories of persons elected the party congress: the party leader and his or her deputies. The remaining members of this body and most of the national executive are determined on an *ex officio* basis.

In practice, the parties' organisations differ significantly. The SPÖ and ÖVP are traditional mass parties. Though their membership densities have more than halved since their late 1970s peak (Katz and Mair et al 1992), they remain much greater than those of the FPÖ and Greens,¹⁶ whose basic structure are those of a cadre and new politics party respectively. Moreover, the SPÖ and

¹⁰ See Parliamentary Standing Orders §74b (GOG-NR).

¹¹ For the latest overviews of these parties (SPÖ, ÖVP, FPÖ & Greens), see Dachs et al. (2006). Two parties recently represented in Austria's parliament will be ignored: the LiF and the Union for the Future of Austria (*Bündnis Zukunft Österreich*, or BZÖ). The former split from the parliamentary FPÖ in February 1993, dropped out of parliament in 1999 and is now organisationally largely defunct at the national level. The BZÖ as yet lacks organizational institutionalization and initial electoral results (e.g. 1% at Vienna's October 2005 provincial elections) suggest it may not survive.

¹² FPÖ, ÖVP and SPÖ: '*Bundesparteitag*'; Greens: '*Bundeskongress*'.

¹³ FPÖ, ÖVP and SPÖ: '*Bundesvorstand*'; Greens: '*erweiterter Bundesvorstand*'.

¹⁴ FPÖ and ÖVP: '*Bundesparteipräsidium*'; SPÖ '*erweitertes Bundesparteipräsidium*'; Greens: '*Bundesvorstand*'

¹⁵ FPÖ: '*Parteileitung*'; Greens: '*Bundestagung*'; SPÖ: '*Parteirat*'.

¹⁶ In the late 1970s, the ÖVP and SPÖ together boasted between 1.1 and 1.4 million members, which equated to 25-28% of Austria's total electorate (Luther 1999, 46). By 2002, their combined membership had fallen to a maximum of 951,000 (Dachs et al 2006, 332 & 347), i.e. no more than 16.1% of the total electorate. For its part, the FPÖ peaked at 51,000 in 2000 (Luther 2006), whilst the Greens in 2004 had only about 3,700 members (Dachs 2006, 395).

ÖVP retain links to collateral associations, ranging from interest groups operating within Austria's extensive system of neo-corporatism, to cultural and sporting associations (Müller 1994, Luther 1999), whilst the societal rootedness of the FPÖ and Greens is much more modest. All four parties have publicly funded "academies" charged with political education (*inter alia* of party cadres) and engaged in policy development, but their size varies considerably, as does the scale of the parties' overall apparatuses. Those of the SPÖ and ÖVP are much larger than those of the FPÖ and Greens and the former are also able to access support from their auxiliary associations and neo-corporatist interest groups. The basic organisational units of the SPÖ, FPÖ and Greens are territorial, whilst the ÖVP is an indirect membership party comprising not only nine Land party groups, but also three main functional "Leagues" (of Farmers, of Business and of Workers and Employees), through which the internal working of the party are mediated. Finally, the geographical spread of the parties varies. The SPÖ and ÖVP have local units throughout Austria, yet the overwhelming majority of SPÖ members is located in Vienna and Lower Austria, whilst the ÖVP has traditionally dominated western Austria. The Greens and FPÖ are more unevenly organised, being strongest respectively in urban areas and in Upper Austria, Carinthia and Styria.

The preceding aspects help explain considerable variation in the degree of internal party coherence. The most disciplined party has probably been the SPÖ, whilst the ÖVP's complex dual structure has militated in favour of greater internal dissent and thus lower leadership autonomy, especially during the party's lengthy period in opposition (1970-1987). The FPÖ had traditionally been highly decentralized and riven by personal and regional rivalries. Haider's leadership (1986-2000) witnessed a personalization and centralization of power, but even at the height of the party's electoral success, Haider often struggled to keep a grip on the party organisation. Once the FPÖ entered government and started to lose elections, internal tensions led to an orgy of political self-destruction, the resignation of the party leadership in 2002 and the establishment by Haider in April 2005 of the rival BZÖ, to which the FPÖ's ministerial team and most of its MPs signed up (Luther 2003 & 2006). The Greens retain a strong commitment to the principles of grass-roots party democracy, as well as to the at times contradictory principle of holders of public office exercising an independent mandate. Yet after two decades in parliament, the party has abandoned rotation and the strict separation of public and party office, started to move away from the principle of collective leadership and considerably professionalised its organisation. Tensions of an ideological or strategic nature also remain, especially between the generally pragmatic national leadership and the more fundamentalist Vienna party.

STRUCTURAL ADAPTATION TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Formal management and funding of European related activities.

EU membership resulted in two new categories of party EU-specialists: MEPs and members of the national parliamentary committees on EU-Affairs. It also triggered at least two significant changes to parties' formal structures. Statutes have been amended to guarantee the presence of MEPs on national party organs. In all four parties, MEPs are entitled to participate in their respective party congresses in the same way as MPs. In the FPÖ, this derives from MEPs' *ex officio* membership of

the party council, whilst in the SPÖ (non-voting) party congress membership is guaranteed for all MEPs not elected as ordinary delegates. The ÖVP and Greens have also granted the leaders of their EP delegation *ex officio* membership of their national executives.¹⁷ Subsequent to its 2000 entry into government, the FPÖ intended to do likewise, but unrelated internal conflict meant the package of statutory changes of which this was to have been a part was abandoned (Interviews). The leader of the SPÖ's EP delegation is not an *ex-officio* member of the party's national executive or executive committee, but informal arrangements effectively guarantee his or her presence on both bodies. All four parties have also changed their parliamentary party rules to grant MEPs parliamentary party membership. The SPÖ statutes go further: they not only specify MEPs should be 'appropriately represented' on the parliamentary party executive (*Klubvorstand*) elected by parliamentary party members, but also that one of the deputy leaders of the parliamentary party (and thus one of the currently 10 members of its caucus presidium) must be the MEP responsible for the delegation's finances.¹⁸ By contrast, FPÖ MEPs are merely non-voting caucus members.¹⁹ EU-specialists have acquired greater visibility in most parties' day-to-day life. Predictably, EP delegation leaders have often acted as their parties' EU-spokespersons. This has always been the case for the Greens, whose former leader Johannes Voggenhuber has been the party's EU spokesperson since 1991. In the FPÖ, this role was usually exercised by the delegation leader, though both before and after the party entered government it would often be exercised simultaneously by its general secretary, or – after 1999 – by its key member of the parliamentary EU-Subcommittee. The situation in the two larger parties has varied over time. Until it left government (in 2000), the SPÖ's EU-spokesperson was its delegation leader, but this role has thereafter been shared with – and in the domestic political dominated by – former interior minister and current vice-chair of the parliamentary EU-Subcommittee: Caspar Einem. Until 2002, the ÖVP's EU-spokesperson was its delegation leader, but as the party has held the foreign ministry throughout Austria's EU-membership,²⁰ this role was *de facto* shared. Since 2002, it has been exercised at the parliamentary level by former defence minister Werner Fasslabend, who chairs the National Council's EU-Subcommittee. In sum, the main factors determining the allocation of the EU-spokesperson role have been party size and incumbency.

Whilst EU-specialists such as MEPs and the parties' key actors on the parliamentary EU Sub-Committee ultimately owe their positions to public election, the parties typically have (access to) party functionaries or other paid staff with EU expertise. Such persons can perhaps be regarded as part of the resources available to 'office-holding' EU-specialists. One key functionary position is that of international secretary, a category of party employee that exists in all parties bar the FPÖ.

¹⁷ See §27f of the ÖVP party statute. Formally, §14 of the Green party statute allocates that seat to one MEP elected by the party's EP delegation. That has to date been the leader of the – at most two-member – delegation.

¹⁸ See §6 & 7 of *Statut des Klubs der sozialdemokratischen Abgeordneten zum Nationalrat, Bundesrat und Europäischen Parlament (Sozialdemokratische Parlamentsfraktion)*, first introduced 13.3.1996. Those ten members also include the party's EU-spokesperson and representative on the Parliamentary Sub-Committee on EU-Affairs, but also the party's International Secretary, who happens also to be the chair of the *Bundesrat* caucus.

¹⁹ See § 5(3) of *Geschäftsordnung des freiheitlichen Parlamentsklubs*, as amended 13.10.1994.

²⁰ Until April 1995 by Alois Mock; by Wolfgang Schüssel until he became Chancellor in February 2000; by Benito-Ferrero Waldner until she became an EU-Commissioner in October 2004 and since by Ursula Plassnik.

Appointment to this position is formally undertaken by the parties' national executives, though in the SPÖ and ÖVP the decision is *de facto* made by the party leader. In the Greens, the practice has been for this role – which predominantly involves EU related activities and was only established after Austria's EU accession – to be the subject of a vote and exercised alongside that of party manager,²¹ who in the latter capacity is an *ex-officio* member of the national executive committee (Interview 16). The SPÖ's international secretariat pre-dates Austria's EU accession and its head sits on the party's national executive. Though its funding has been roughly halved since 2000, this is a consequence of the party's dire financial position and not of declining intra-party significance of EU agendas. The latter are estimated to have risen to about 80% of the total workload of the secretariat, which still comprises three persons (Interviews 1 & 26). EU membership caused the ÖVP national headquarters to establish a 'Europe Office' staffed by two persons who work closely with the party's international secretary. The latter is not a member of the party's national executive and although 80-90% of the work associated with this role is also EU related, the party's incumbent status means the international secretary constitutes just one of many – often more privileged – sources of EU expertise. However, it is expected that the role will become more important once the party leaves national office (Interview 14).

The parties vary considerably in the number of EU-specialist staff available to them. Neither of the smaller parties' central offices has ever employed a staff member charged primarily with providing specialist EU-related support. Though all four party academies occasionally organise EU-related events – inter alia to train their functionaries – only that of the ÖVP employs (three) EU-specialist staff. Most of the EU-specialist staff upon whose assistance the parties can call are externally financed. Each party caucus employs one or two, primarily to help process EU-related legislation and service their EU committee members, though they also have an important liaison role between their respective party's 'office-holding' EU-specialists and elements of the party organisation. Most EU-specialist staff are attached to the parties' MEPs, however. The EP budget finances at least one per MEP. In addition, major economic interests groups,²² operate 'training' schemes providing graduate assistants to Austrian MEPs in return for the latter paying half their salaries. The majority of these graduate assistants work in Brussels, though some are located in the offices each delegation has in Vienna, where the more senior staff typically help co-ordinate EU-related business between their EP delegation, national party caucus, party organisation and – where relevant – their party's government team. Not least since Austrian MEPs are members of their respective national caucuses, there has at times been pressure – allegedly not always resisted – for EP-funded staff to be utilised by national party organisations in ways that 'stretch' the EP's formal financial regulations (three interviews).

As they have generally had larger EP delegations and national caucuses, the ÖVP and SPÖ have clearly had access to more parliamentary EU-specialist staff than the FPÖ and especially the Greens. This imbalance has been exacerbated by the two larger parties' privileged access to EU-

²¹ Unlike the other parties, the Greens do not have a general secretary, but only a party manager (*Bundesgeschäftsführer*), whose prime responsibility relates to internal party organisation.

²² The Austrian Chamber of Commerce (*Wirtschaftskammer Österreichs* or WKÖ); the Union of Austrian Industrialists (*Vereinigung Österreichische Industrieller*, or IV); the Chamber of Labour (*Arbeiterkammer*, or AK) and the ÖGB.

experts located in their auxiliary associations and the partially overlapping interest groups of Austria's pervasive system of social partnership: the IV; the ÖVP-oriented WKÖ and LWK and the SPÖ-oriented AK and ÖGB. Finally, the Greens have been further disadvantaged by their lack of government experience, since incumbent parties not only are able to access civil service expertise, but also employ EU-specialists in their ministerial cabinets. In sum, as hypothesised in Chapter 1, the number of EU-specialists office holders and staff has generally increased. However, rather than allocating their own resources to fund EU-specialist staff, Austria's parties seek where possible to utilise those funded externally, as strategy militates strongly against small parties and those with limited experience of incumbency.

MEP candidate selection

A further interesting research question concerns how the parties' candidates for EP elections are selected (see Table 2) and in particular, whether the procedure used enhances the internal power of party elites. Three aspects of the rules governing Austria's EP elections have helped strengthen the intra-party power of party elites. For one, in the two years prior to the first EP elections, the parties delegated serving MPs and *Bundesrat* members to the EP in proportion to their strengths at the preceding national election. Not only was the candidate pool very small, but decisions about which individuals were delegated to the EP were both highly centralised and lacking in transparency (Interviews). Moreover, unlike at national elections, for the purposes of EP elections Austria is organised into a single constituency, which militates against the involvement of the 'party on the ground' in the candidate selection process. Finally, as the total number of Austrian MEPs is so small (and was reduced from 21 to 18 in 2004 – see Table X1), party elites have an even greater incentive than is normally the case at national elections to determine the top list positions. According to their respective statutes and the information of numerous interviewees, the FPÖ has the most and the Greens the least elite-dominated system of candidate selection (for both the EP and national elections). The Greens' selection process operates as follows. The national executive committee draws up a proposed list of names in a specific order and submits that list to the party congress, which votes on each place on the list. Delegates have a right to propose any additional names they wish and frequently use it. This system means successful candidates are less beholden to the party leadership, which in turn is unable to discipline them threatening their de-selection. Having said that, the leadership has in recent years deliberately sought to exercise greater influence on the candidate selection process by speaking out in favour of the executive committee's nominations (e.g. Interview 20). In the FPÖ, by contrast, MEP candidate selection has been wholly determined by the party leader, who consulted only a very small and informal group of advisors. In line with the vote maximization strategy pursued at elections up to 1999, candidates were selected on the basis of his personal estimation of their potential to increase the vote (both at the relevant EP election and – indirectly – at national elections). This frequently resulted in the selection of candidates whose party background was minimal or non-existent (Interviews 2, 3, 5 & 7). Indeed, over half the party's successful candidates at the 1996 election fit this description. This style of candidate selection was subsequently regularised by a change to the party statutes, which now

stipulate (§15[4]) that the party leader “has the final decision” on the ordering of candidate lists and thereby enshrine the dependency upon the leader of incumbent MEPs wishing to be-reselected. However, the dramatic post-2002 weakening of the FPÖ leadership means that although it was able to impose its candidate list in 2004, the order was effectively overturned by the party fundamentalists’ well run campaign of preference voting, which resulted in their candidate (Andreas Mölzer) moving from third place on the list to take the only seat due to the party. The MEP candidate selection processes of the SPÖ and ÖVP are considerably more bureaucratised, but here too there is evidence that party leaders have greater scope to determine the outcome than is the case in national elections. Both parties have more constituent units from whom a claim for representation in the EP might be expected than there are seats to be distributed. In the SPÖ, the intra-party constituencies that traditionally need to be accommodated at national elections include the nine Land party groups, the trades unions and the women’s section. Within the ÖVP, ‘claimants’ include the nine Land groups and six functional leagues. At EP elections, there are considerably fewer winnable seats to be distributed than at national elections and there are also no local constituencies at which constituent units can press their candidates. Accordingly, whilst both parties’ leaders invite their respective constituent units to submit candidate lists for EP elections, they are better placed to divide and rule at EP than national elections. It is also worth mentioning that upon assuming the ÖVP leadership in 1995, Schüssel obtained agreement that he personally determine both the first and second positions on the party’s EP candidate list (Interviews 4, 10, 12 & 14). In sum, with the notable exception of the Greens, Austrian parties’ MEP candidate selection procedures enable national party elites to exercise greater influence than they do at domestic elections. Within the SPÖ, the main countervailing influence comes from the regional party organizations, whilst in ÖVP the party’s leagues are also important.

Table 2 MEP Candidate Selection in Austrian Parties

	Greens	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ
Statute grants rights of proposal to	national executive	executive committee & national executive	executive committee	not specified
Which interests does the statute require to be reflected?	none	9 Länder; trades unions women's group	9 Länder 6 functional leagues	none
Gender balance required?	yes	yes	no	no
Statute grants final decision on list to	party congress	party council	national executive	party leader
Delegation leader de facto chosen by	delegation	delegation	party leader	party leader
Overall influence of leader	very low	medium / high	high	very high

Delegation leaders generally exercise a more significant role within both the EP and their respective parties. Though their selection is formally a matter solely for the delegation itself, it is understandable that party leaders might wish to shape that decision. The leader of the Greens has been able to exert virtually no influence on who leads the party's EP delegation. Both in 1995 and 1996, the only candidate for the single seat the party expected to win was its former leader and national parliamentary party chairman, Johannes Voggenhuber. In 1999 and again in 2004, he was joined in the EP by a new colleague unable to challenge his pre-eminent role. By contrast, the FPÖ leader had until 2004 always been able to determine the delegation leadership. The ÖVP leader's control over the leadership of his party's delegation derives from his right to determine the top two places on the party's election list. Although in 1996 there was some uncertainty about whether the person heading the list would be perceived by the other ÖVP MEPs to have an entitlement to the delegation leadership (Interview 4), that has since become the accepted wisdom. At the 1996, 1999 and 2004 EP elections, Schüssel chose former TV journalist Ursula Stenzel to head the list. As she had never been an ÖVP member, she lacked a foothold within the party and was thus doubly dependent upon him.

This kind of external candidacy was in vogue in the late 1990s, when it was seen as a potentially useful response to a widespread sense of public dissatisfaction with traditional party politics. Similar considerations underpinned SPÖ leader Viktor Klima's successful attempt to place his own

‘outsider’ – journalist Hans-Peter Martin – at the top of his party’s list for the 1999 EP election. Having apparently recruited Martin by secretly promising him the delegation leadership, Klima succeeded in getting the executive committee and party council to agree to place Martin at the top of the party’s EP list (Interviews 1, 13, 15 & 26). Once the election was over, however, the delegation refused to play ball and elected its own preferred candidate. Martin eventually resigned the party whip and in 2004 stood as an independent anti-corruption candidate, winning 14% of the vote and two seats, in part through attacking members of his erstwhile delegation. These events severely strained relations between the delegation and the national party leadership, but appear ultimately to have enhanced the autonomy of the former. For when the SPÖ’s 2004 election list was compiled by the party’s new leader, Alfred Gusenbauer, the ordering of highest placed candidates was very much in line with the delegation’s wishes.

Change in parties’ EU committees and working groups

EU-related change to internal party working groups has been least pronounced in the Eurosceptic FPÖ. Its delegation leader and chief representative on the parliamentary EU-Subcommittee attempted to establish a regular working group to include EU spokespersons in the provincial party organisations and parliaments. However, only half the 15-20 invitees ever showed up and the group had to be abandoned (Interviews 2 & 23). The Greens have been more successful. Though small, their new EU committee is apparently quite well attended and includes EU-specialists located in Brussels and in the national parliamentary party, as well as a couple from provincial party groups (Interviews 9, 16 & 18). The largest and most vibrant intra-party EU committees are those of the SPÖ and ÖVP. Since the SPÖ has been in opposition, its national executive’s EU committee (*die europapolitische Arbeitsgruppe*) has been co-chaired by party’s delegation leader and EU spokesperson. In 2002, it was halved to reduce it to the most active core and now embraces about 30 persons, some of whom are sources and others targets of EU-related information. It meets monthly and in addition to the party’s key EU-specialists includes for example representatives of the Chamber of Labour and Austrian Trade Union Federation, as well as key foreign policy practitioners. In addition, the ‘crème de la crème’ of the party’s foreign policy experts meet in the ‘*außenpolitische Koordinierung*’ to discuss broad strategic issues (Interviews 1 & 26). The ÖVP also has two partially overlapping groups: the EU working group (*EU Fachausschuss*) has usually been chaired by its Foreign Minister and concerns itself with major policy issues, as well as long-term and strategic questions, whilst the international office (*internationales Büro*) comprises in the main party staffers, is chaired by the party’s international secretary and has been oriented predominantly towards the day-to-day co-ordination of EU-related activities and policies of the party, which has been continuously in government since 1995 (Interviews 4, 12 & 14).

ACTING NATIONALLY

The overall intra-party influence of EU-specialists

To assess whether European integration has indeed strengthen the intra-party significance of those with an EU specialism, we will first focus on MEPs, the most visible of EU specialists. We will

consider the duration of this EU specialist role, as well as the extent to which MEPs' careers are preceded and/or followed by the significant national party or political office. Thereafter, we shall summarise our interviewees' assessment of the overall intra-party significance of a wider range of EU-specialists. Third, we deal with their evaluation of the EU specialists' roles in election manifesto formulation. Finally, we shall discuss the impact of European integration upon the role of the parties' parliamentary party caucus chairs, i.e. upon a key member of the parties' leadership groups, but one whose role is primarily national as opposed to supranational.

MEPs' Career Patterns

Table 3 summarises our findings in respect of the degree of continuity in the composition and leadership of Austria's EP delegations during the country's relatively brief EU membership. At least four points are worthy of note. First, within-term MEP turnover was high during the 1995-96 period, as was to be expected, since many of these 'delegated' MEPs only ever intended their stay to be temporary. Second, the infrequent subsequent mid-term departures all resulted from resignations by MEPs who had been recruited with no prior party history – or indeed membership – a practice that has since declined (see above). Third, there has been an overall increase in between-term continuity, notably within the delegations of the SPÖ (50 to 66.6%) and the ÖVP (50 to 57%), but a marked drop in the case of the FPÖ (60% to 0).

Finally, there has been growing between-term continuity in the identity of the delegation leader, whose formal role within his or her respective party is the greatest of all MEPs (see preceding section). Continuity has been 100% in the case of the Greens, but the ÖVP and SPÖ are not far behind, with each of them having had a single delegation leader throughout last eight of the first ten years of Austria's EU membership. In 2004, the SPÖ's delegation leader was replaced by his deputy (see note d below), whilst his ÖVP counterpart continued in office. By contrast, the FPÖ delegation had three delegation leaders during the first two and a half years of Austria's EU membership and though she formally retained that role until the 2004 election, the subsequent incumbent lost a significant proportion of her intra-party influence as a result of the party's implosion in the summer of 2002 and a few months thereafter, half of her MEP colleagues resigned from the delegation (see note c below).

Table 3: Continuity of Representation in Austria's EP Delegations (1995-2004)

EP Term, Party and total MEPs originally elected	Percentage of full EP term served by originally elected MEP				Number of MEPs re-elected	Outgoing delegation leader re-elected?
	0 – 25	26 – 50	51 – 75	75 – 100		
1995–1996 Greens (1) SPÖ (8) ÖVP (6) FPÖ (5)		1	1 3	1 7 5 2		
1996–1999 Greens (1) SPÖ (6) ÖVP (7) FPÖ (6)				1 6 7 6	1 3 3 3	Y N N Y ^a
1999–2004 Greens (2) SPÖ (6) ÖVP (7) FPÖ (5)			2 ^c	2 6 ^b 7 3	1 4 6 3	Y Y Y Y
2004– Greens (2) SPÖ (6) ÖVP (5) FPÖ (1)					1 4 4 0	Y N ^d Y N

Source: Authors own research

Notes:

a) But then replaced as early as 1997.

b) However, SPÖ MEP Martin resigned from the SPÖ (but not the EP) on 12.2.04, i.e. ca. 91% into the EP term.

c) MEPs Hager & Sichrovsky resigned from the FPÖ (but not the EP) on 15.02.2003, i.e. ca. 72% into the EP term.

d) The former incumbent was replaced (uncontroversially) upon assuming a leadership role in the EP's PES group.

Our second question concerns the extent to which MEPs are recruited from those that had previously held significant party or public office.²³ This is very much the case with the Greens,²⁴ whose delegation leader since 1995 (and sole MEP until 1999) had initially held not only

²³ The following comments are based on the author's research into the public and party(-related) offices of all 46 MEPs that held seats for either the Greens, SPÖ, ÖVP or FPÖ between 1.1.1995 and 31.12.2005.

²⁴ As the Greens' delegation has comprised at most two persons, it is of course difficult to draw wider conclusions from the career paths of those individuals.

provincial governmental office, but also a seat in the national parliament, where he had served as caucus chair. His former party offices include the general secretaryship and that of national party spokesperson (i.e. effectively that of leader of the national party organisation). From 1999 to 2004, he was joined by someone with no record of prior party or public office, though in 2004 that second seat was taken by a former provincial party leader, whose public office experience included membership of a provincial parliament and government, as well as of the *Nationalrat*. By contrast, all five FPÖ MEPs appointed in January 1995 had all held local political office and been members of either the *Nationalrat* or *Bundesrat*. One of the three that resigned during that first term had even been the party's general secretary and held provincial government office. Thereafter, however, the overwhelming majority of FPÖ MEPs had little or no track record of public office – even at provincial or local level – and were in some cases not even party members. The main exception to this rule was the post-1997 delegation leader, who had been a *Landtag* member.²⁵

A detailed examination of the prior careers of SPÖ MEPs shows that from 1995 to 1996, the delegation contained one and from 1999 to 2004 two former federal minister. Whilst the whole initial cohort had prior experience in the *Nationalrat* and/or *Bundesrat*, this applied to only one of the subsequently recruited new MEPs. Most of the latter have held public office at the provincial level, or in auxiliary associations such as the ÖGB, or youth organisation. An analogous pattern is to be found amongst ÖVP MEPs. All those delegated to the EP in January 1995 had been in the *Nationalrat* or *Bundesrat* and one had also been a member of a provincial parliament. The former characteristic applied to two of the four new ÖVP MEPs elected in 1996, one of whom has remained ever since, whilst the other (formerly also a federal minister) served until 2004. The two other had no experience of party or public office whatsoever and one – the delegation leader since 1996 – was not even a party member. In 1999, one of the two neophytes was replaced by a former party general secretary. Finally, a significant characteristic of most ÖVP MEPs' prior careers is a significant position within one of the party's constituent leagues, typically the WK, ÖBB, or ÖAAB, all of which are themselves rooted in provincial organisations.

Third, we sought to establish whether MEPs acquire significant roles within their national parties subsequent to their election to the EP.²⁶ That has not been the case with the Greens, but might at first appear to be so in the FPÖ, three of whose former MEPs subsequently achieved high party and national public office.²⁷ Upon closer examination, however, the moral of these individuals' stories is that becoming an MEP does not bode well for political careers within the FPÖ. All three were appointed to the EP in January 1995 and had left by 16 months later. One senior FPÖ interviewee claims the realisation that having entered the EP meant the loss of significance within the party

²⁵ A more recent case is Mölzer, elected in 2004. He had been in the *Bundesrat* and had run the party's 'academy', by virtue of which he had also been a member of the national executive.

²⁶ The presence on party bodies of MEPs and delegation leaders as a result of statutory rules or convention has been discussed in the preceding section of this chapter. Our concern in this section is more with functional roles and process rather than the formal rules, or structure of intra-party relations.

²⁷ Once became general secretary and then acting chair of the national caucus, before being appointed a junior government minister. A second had another spell in the *Nationalrat*, followed by a period as deputy governor of Carinthia and then as a federal minister, before an extremely short and politically ultimately fatal period as party leader. The most glittering career was arguably that of Susanne Riess-Passer. She returned to the *Bundesrat* before entering the *Nationalrat* and eventually becoming vice-chancellor of Austria. Her party offices included those of deputy and then acting leader, as well as the leadership itself.

resulted in a [named] MEP seeking to leave the EP ‘at all costs’ (Interview 3). Moreover, not a single FPÖ MEP has subsequently obtained national public office and only two acquired (largely symbolic) positions within the national party.²⁸ Becoming an MEP for one of the two larger parties is also unlikely to promote career progression at the national level. To date, the SPÖ has had two and the ÖVP one MEP who was formerly a minister and in all three cases, their role as MEP appears to have been the last significant role of their political career. On the other hand, MEPs of both parties who resigned during the first term have subsequently held (albeit usually modest) national office.²⁹ The career patterns of SPÖ and ÖVP MEPs elected from 1996 onwards show analogous traits. First, in neither party has a former MEP subsequently assumed national party or public office.³⁰ Second, in both parties there is evidence of MEPs pursuing career paths at the European level, in particular within the wider EP groups of which the delegations are a part. In sum, we found little evidence of an MEP role leading to a significant position in the national party, or in terms of national public office. Indeed, interviewees from the SPÖ, ÖVP and FPÖ reported that at least initially, there was a view within their respective parties that the new MEP role would permit the sidetracking of persons considered by some to have become burdensome (e.g. Interviews 1, 3 and 4). Moreover, there was in the late 1990s a tendency to select individuals with no party history whatsoever, though most of these so-called ‘*Quereinsteiger*’, proved to be politically costly mistakes. On the other hand, within all parties but the Eurosceptic FPÖ there is some evidence not only that EP membership is becoming a positive career choice for persons with a interest in European integration and/or specific related policy areas, but also that this can lead to career advancement at the European level. Accordingly, it is increasingly inappropriate to dismiss the EP as a ‘pre-retirement home’ for time-served politicians. Moreover, as MEPs are now serving for longer periods, they should be acquiring greater EU expertise, which has the potential to enhance their intra-party role in respect of EU-related issues.

The overall intra-party influence of EU-specialists

A major theme of each interview we conducted was whether EU specialists have as we expected acquired greater influence in intra-party decision-making. Predictably, the interviewees’ judgements varied. Moreover, given that the Austrian political class is relatively small and the number of EU-specialists even smaller, it is at times difficult to disentangle the effect on individuals’ intra-party influence of their personal political biographies on the one hand and their EU- specialisation on the other. However, at least three interesting patterns were revealed.

²⁸ In 1999, the party congress elected the delegation leader (Raschhofer) to the position of deputy party leader, albeit primarily to enhance the party’s EP election prospects (Interview). In 2000, another MEP (Sichrovsky) became general secretary for external relations, but this brought him virtually no significant internal party power.

²⁹ One ÖVP MEP re-entered the *Nationalrat*, where in 2000 he became deputy caucus leader and also advanced within the ÖVP’s Employees’ League, of which he became a provincial leader in 2000. Another had three more years in the *Nationalrat*, whilst a third served in the *Bundesrat* until 2000. One SPÖ MEP has since 1996 been both the party’s international secretary and the chair of its *Bundesrat* group; another re-entered the *Nationalrat*, where she had a one year spell as deputy caucus leader. Though she moved to the much less prestigious *Bundesrat* in 2002, she later returned to the *Nationalrat*.

³⁰ However, two significant caveats are in order. First, one ÖVP retiree had never been a party member and another was aged 65, whilst one of the retiring SPÖ MEPs had left the party.

For one, the relative intra-party influence of the different types of EU specialist varies. The most significant actors are delegation leaders, in part because they sit on important national party bodies, but also because of their expertise and – with the exception of the Greens – because the party leader has often had a significant role in recruiting them to the party's EP election list. The intra-party influence of other MEPs is much lower. In the case of the ÖVP and SPÖ, it is generally exercised at the provincial level, or within the parties' auxiliary associations. One of the very few ways in which such 'normal' MEPs can acquire significant influence in their national party is by being on an EP committee dealing with a topic of major domestic political significance. In the FPÖ, such MEPs have since 1996 tended to have no internal party influence whatsoever. The parties' chief representatives on the parliamentary Sub-Committee on EU Affairs are in general less influential parliamentary actors than initially envisaged. The major reason is because the committee has rarely made use of powers formally at its disposal. In addition, if an issue acquires major domestic political resonance, members lacking other significant sources of intra-party influence tend to find it is taken over by the parliamentary party leader. Accordingly, the influence of the parties' chief representatives on this committee tends to be limited to the parliamentary party. There are two exceptions, however. The first is where (as in the case of the post-1999 SPÖ incumbent), the individual has a significant prior party career, whilst the second applies to the chair of the Sub-Committee, who by dint of that role acquires a potentially very significant role in respect of supranational party decision-making (see below). International secretaries exist in all parties save the FPÖ. Not least since some are party employees, their intra-party role tends to be limited to service functions such as providing information and maintaining external contacts. This can make them very useful to the party elites, especially in government-oriented parties that find themselves out of office, but they rarely exercise independent political influence. The same applies for the general category of party staffers (albeit with the caveat made below).

Second, the interviews revealed variation by party in EU-specialist influence. This reflects the relative value parties attach to EU-affairs and has thus been lowest within the EU-sceptic FPÖ, where the roles of MEP and delegation leader in particular were at times so negatively perceived that they actually reduced the incumbents' scope for exercising intra-party influence to 'below zero'. Within the Greens, where Euroscepticism has receded and interest in the EU grown, EU-specialisation has become more valued, especially where it relates to core party issues such as nuclear energy and transit traffic. Yet it remains of limited intra-party value for two reasons in particular. First, the party has not yet held national office, and so has not been forced to engage with the breadth of the EU's agenda. Second, the small scale of the Greens' national party organisation and the limited number of national office holders places a premium on generalists. One interviewee put it thus: 'A Green politician who specialised solely on [the EU] would have no internal party weight whatsoever' (Interview 25).

The larger parties attach much greater value to EU-specialisation, in part because they have been much more Europhile in recent years, but also because their size and close links to Austria's neo-corporatist 'chambers' permit them this luxury. Within the territorially organised and more centralised SPÖ, EU-specialists are active above all at the level of the national party: in its central

office, national caucus and – when the party is in government – in ministerial cabinets. Within the territorially and functionally differentiated ÖVP, the three main leagues constitute important additional arenas of often very focused EU-specialist activity, as well as the vehicles for career progression of EU-specialist staff in particular. Finally, the interviews suggest the ÖVP's combination of greater organisational diversity and less prescriptive statutes helps explain why formal structures are perhaps less decisive for the exercise of intra-party influence. ÖVP interviewees were more inclined than their SPÖ counterparts to point to the informal bases of the intra-party influence of EU-specialists such as the delegation leader, who is a member of the weekly 'kitchen cabinet' of the current leader (e.g. Interviews 4, 11, 12, 14 & 28).

The interviews also drew attention to two significant types of change over time in the intra-party influence of EU-specialists. One relates to when parties move from government to opposition or vice-versa. *Ceteris paribus*, when a party moves from opposition to government, the intra-party power of the executive element of the 'party in public office' increases at the expense of the parliamentary element. The relative influence of parliamentary EU spokespersons, EU committee members and delegation leaders is thus reduced in favour of the party's EU-relevant ministers and their EU-specialist staffers. This transition was especially pronounced in the FPÖ, whose lack of government experience made for intense competition for EU-specialist staff, especially from ministerial cabinets (Interviews 5 & 6). Conversely, when a governing party moves into opposition it loses a lot of its sources of EU information and regularised contacts, which strengthens the intra-party significance of the parliamentary party and of EU-specialists such as delegation leaders, but also of international secretaries. In addition, the interviews highlighted change in the intra-party influence of EU-specialists as a consequence of the parties' growing experience of being in the European Union. In other words, as familiarity with EU-related processes and issues spreads, the EU-related expertise upon which EU-specialists were able to trade during (and also before) the early years of membership is no longer as scarce a commodity. The consequences of this are visible above all in the two large parties, but perhaps especially so in the ÖVP, where an interviewee likened changes in the intra-party role of EU-specialists to a series of 'waves'.³¹ In recent years, intra-party EU-discourse has become almost exclusively technocratic ('*sachlich*'), but this apparent dissipation of the wave 'masks a much more profound substantive Europeanisation than we really make apparent' (Interview 27). If EU expertise has indeed not dissipated, but instead inundated the party, this may explain why another ÖVP interviewee strongly resisted the proposition that one could differentiate between EU-specialists and others (Interview 14). Be that as it may, interviewees in both the ÖVP and SPÖ argued EU expertise is still valued within their parties and had indeed been highly beneficial for the careers of a number of relatively young party staffers in particular, since it had brought them into much closer proximity to party elites than would have been the case for many of their non-EU-specialist peers. One interviewee also pointed to the creation within the ÖVP of informal intra-party networks of such EU-specialists (Interview 4),

³¹ During the first, which comprised the two years or so prior to membership, during which the final negotiations were taking place, EU-expertise was at a premium especially for the party's provincial groups and three main leagues. In the early years of membership, that expertise was then applied above all within the provincial parties to help the provinces access the EU's various funding programmes.

which tempts one to speculate that there is the potential for a type of factional intra-party influence to develop

EU-Specialists and manifesto formulation

Our interviews revealed that in all parties, EU-specialist involvement in the formulation of general election manifestos is limited in the main to the sections on the EU. Moreover, the key EU-specialist actor is the delegation leader, though on occasion other MEPs also contribute, whilst EU-specialist party staffers' role is essentially of a technical or service nature. The two larger parties typically submit an early draft to their internal EU working groups. Of the wider group of EU-specialists thereby brought into the process, those most active in formulating the EU chapter appear to be the chief representatives on the parliamentary Sub-Committee for EU Affairs and the parties' international secretaries. In the ÖVP, the foreign minister – and his or her ministerial team – also plays an important role throughout the formulation process.

EU-specialists' role in the formulation of manifestos for EP elections is most pronounced in the Greens. In 2004, for example, the manifesto was formulated by the delegation leader 'with virtual full autonomy' from the national party and parliamentary party (Interview 20). Though he consulted with the person placed second on the party's electoral list, he retained 'the absolute final say' on the text (Interview 9). The leader of the FPÖ delegation also assumed a lead role in respect of her party's 1999 and 2004 EP election manifestos, albeit with substantive input from her EP colleagues and under the watchful eye of the party's *de facto* leadership group,³² whose prime concern was to ensure the manifesto was in tune with the party's domestic political strategy. The party's national parliamentary party – a key actor in the formulation of general election manifestos – was largely irrelevant (Interviews 2 & 7).

Lower involvement of MPs in EP manifesto formulation is also feature – albeit less pronounced – in the ÖVP and in the SPÖ, whose bureaucratic manifesto formulation process has been likened to 'sausage machine' (Interview 22). In both parties, EU-specialists are typically allocated the task of producing an initial manifesto draft and steering it through their parties' respective EU working groups. In 2004, for example, the most significant EU-specialist actor in the SPÖ's EP manifesto initiation and formulation process was its international secretary. It was only at a relatively late stage that the party leader and caucus chair got involved and they then proposed only minor change. In the ÖVP, the initial manifesto concept was produced by the delegation leader, who then discussed it with fellow MEPs and the party's campaign specialists. The first draft was produced by a small group that comprised the delegation leader, international secretary and various EU-specialists from the caucus and party central office. That draft was refined in a large round table chaired by the delegation leader and including all MEPs, the international secretary and various MPs with EU-specialist knowledge. This process was monitored by the party's pre-eminent informal body, the 'Monday Circle' of which the delegation leader is a member.³³ As in the SPÖ,

³² This so-called 'Monday Circle' comprised the party's acting chair (and first delegation leader, who had retained a strong interest in EU policy), its general secretary and caucus chair, as well as former leader Haider.

³³ In addition to the delegation leader and party leader, this body comprises the latter's two deputies (one of whom is caucus chair and the other a federal minister), the general secretary and the president of the *Nationalrat*.

however, the prime actors in the formulation of the party's EP manifestos are its EU-specialists in general and its MEPs and delegation leader in particular.

That MEPs and delegation leaders should play such a prominent role in most parties is a consequence not only of their EU-specialisation, but also of Austria's electoral system, which militates in favour of campaigns moulded around the leaders of the parties' single national lists. Considerations of electoral advantage also explain the defensive attitude adopted in particular within the SPÖ and ÖVP towards the manifestos produced by their respective Europarties.

Interviewees' comments included: 'One has to be very careful that there is nothing in these manifestos produced at the European level that could harm one at home' and 'It is practically impossible that one could be helped by the manifesto, but it is easily possible that it could harm one'. A prime consideration is to ensure that nothing developed in the [European level] manifesto impinges on national priorities.' (Interviews 14, 22 & 26).

The interviews also provided three main insights into changes over time in the nature of the manifesto formulation process and the role within it of EU-specialists. Though some SPÖ respondents suggested there had been a general increase in the role of the delegation leader, the overall picture both there and in the ÖVP and Greens appears to be one of considerable continuity between 1996 and 2004 in the extent and nature of EU-specialist involvement in manifesto formulation. In the FPÖ, however, EU-specialists such as the delegation leader and MEPs replaced the national caucus members as the key actors in the formulation of EP manifestos, the content of which also became less eurosceptic. Indeed, this trend had by 2004 so enraged the party's eurosceptics that it caused them to develop an alternative manifesto. This was distributed amongst party sympathisers, where it is likely to have made a major contribution to their third placed candidate receiving sufficient preference votes to enable him to take the single seat that would have otherwise gone to the leadership's candidate (Interviews 2 & 3).

The interviews again highlighted the impact upon internal party life of alternation between government and opposition. For example, one SPÖ interviewee explained that whilst the party was in government, much of the manifesto formulation process was conducted by the offices of the SPÖ's federal chancellor and ministers, who liaised with the party central office, but thereafter, the party caucus has taken on a much more significant role. Finally, interviewees were at pains to stress their parties attach ever less significance to election manifestos. This trend started and has been most pronounced in the FPÖ, where under Haider 'Written manifestos played no significance role. What counted was the leader's spoken word.' The other parties have also experienced a considerable decline in the significance attached to manifestos in the last 10 or so years. Thus the Greens 'no longer attach such value to this', whilst many in the SPÖ 'have become rather tired of manifestos' and one ÖVP interviewee reported that the 2004 EP manifesto was approached as a routine chore ('*Pflichtübung*') (Interviews 5, 16, 26 and 4 respectively). This seemingly universal trend suggests any increases in the role of EU-specialists in the formulation of party manifestos are perhaps less significance indicators of heightened intra-party influence than they might otherwise have been.

Conveying EU-related policy constraints

When discussing how policy constraints emanating from the EU are conveyed within their parties, numerous interviewees mention debates in the party executive bodies. Indeed, one FPÖ interviewee claimed a major aspect of their role had been ‘telling [national executive members] all the things that were not possible’ (Interview 5). Interviewees from all parties that had experienced incumbency also identified to caucus chairperson has a key conveyor of EU-related constraints vis-à-vis their parliamentary party. Caucus chairpersons neither fit our definition of EU-specialists, nor have a significant supranational role, European integration might well require them to become ‘conveyors of constraints’ vis-à-vis their parliamentary party.

In the ÖVP, EU-related issues have increasingly become depoliticised and dealt with technocratically. The caucus leader’s prime role in these matters has been to guarantee government majorities and to this end, both incumbents to date have ensured the incorporation at the earliest possible stage of the legislative process of the key parliamentary representatives of the party’s functional leagues. At times, they have both none the less had to insist such colleagues’ demands are incompatible with EU rules or political realities (Interviews 11 and 27). The impact of incumbency on the EU-related role of the caucus chairperson is most visible in respect of the SPÖ and FPÖ, who have both experienced a change in incumbency status since 1995. Prior to 2000, the SPÖ’s (acting) caucus chair’s role in EU-related matters was very much akin to that of his ÖVP counterpart. Since then, however, he is less concerned to constrain EU critics within his caucus and has increasingly adopted EU-critical positions, in large measure in order to mobilise (electoral) support in the domestic political arena (e.g. Interviews 13, 22 & 31). Such populist instrumentalisation of EU-related issues had until 1999 been expertly demonstrated by the FPÖ’s then caucus chair, who saw his role as ensuring his caucus members (including MEPs) towed the Eurosceptic line. Incumbency meant the FPÖ’s new chair had to provide caucus support for a coalition agreement containing a fundamental acceptance of European integration. This brought the him into conflict with his caucus, vis-à-vis which he often had to act as a conveyor of constraints (e.g. interviews 3, 5 & 7). Though he largely succeeded in forcing through the government’s line, growing EU-related conflict within the party as a whole – but also between the party on the ground and the party in public office – contributed to the 2002 intra-party revolt that toppled the FPÖ government team. It was also a motivation for the 2005 founding of the BZÖ. By removing grass-roots FPÖ pressure upon the party’s MPs and ministers, the BZÖ helped enhance caucus discipline – not least in EU-related matters – and thereby secure the government’s survival.

ACTING SUPRANATIONALLY

Parties and their MEPs

Virtually all interviewees rated their MEPs’ autonomy in routine EP business as high or very high and as greater than that of their MPs. Yet respondents from the SPÖ, ÖVP and FPÖ also stressed their national parties regularly seek to limit MEP discretion in two partially overlapping circumstances. The first is where the issue in question is highly contested in the domestic party system. This typically includes not only major issues of integration policy with constitutional

ramifications, such as enlargement or the EU constitution, but also policy areas of particular salience in Austria, such as traffic, nuclear power and security. The second is where issues pertain to matters of particular sensitivity within individual parties, usually because they relate to core party values, or are internally contested, typically between rival ideological factions, or client groups.³⁴ One might conclude that although Austrian MEPs' autonomy within the EP is in general very high, it is severely constrained in matters of political import. Yet at least two caveats are in order.

MEPs frequently deal with EU-related issues well before their domestic colleagues are fully aware of them and/or their implications. Accordingly, the 'routine' EP business in respect of which MEPs exercise considerable autonomy can and does contain matters that turn out to be of greater significance for domestic politics than appreciated by national parties at the time (Interview 22). Moreover, parties vary considerably in their capacity to constrain their MEPs' actions, even in 'important' issues. Such constraint has been virtually absent vis-à-vis Green MEPs, who are 'almost completely free' to act as they see fit (Interview 20). Indeed, the delegation leader's position has frequently been diametrically opposed to that of his national party. Similar conflicts have also occurred with the SPÖ, albeit less often. Some suggest the last five years have witnessed a small increase in the autonomy (Interviews 1 & 13) of SPÖ MEPs and one reported that most in the national party think it has been too high (Interview 21). The latter judgement might reflect the SPÖ tradition that, as one interviewee put it, 'at the provincial ... and national level, parliamentarians do what they are told' (Interview 26). The ÖVP has expected similar levels of discipline from its domestic parliamentarians. It is thus perhaps not surprising that one ÖVP interlocutor reported that in respect of virtually all important issues of recent years, the party's EP delegation leader has received voting guidance from the chancellor – either directly, or through his *chef de cabinet*, or foreign policy advisor. Moreover, not only has she sought to ensure compliance, but there were also numerous examples of 'pre-emptive compliance' (Interview 4). Taken as a whole, our interviews suggest that since 1995, ÖVP MEPs have generally been subjected to somewhat greater national party discipline than other parties' MEPs. The autonomy of FPÖ MEPs has been the most variable over time. A member of the FPÖ's national leadership argued that for the first two or three years, MEPs' EP actions corresponded closely with the party's policy, but then became ever more 'decoupled' from and eventually completely 'alien' to the party. The national parliamentary party thus, according to one interviewee, 'increasingly had the impression that the MEPs came to tell [it] what the party's EU policy should be' (Interview 3). The implication is that the delegation went 'native', ignoring party instructions. An alternative FPÖ interpretation is that the national party's interest in EU affairs was limited to issues it could utilise for domestic electoral advantage and in the absence of party guidance on any other issue, the delegation was left to its own devices (Interviews 3 & 6). Yet once in government, the FPÖ leadership considerably attenuated its Euroscepticism and was thus clearly more in tune with the *de facto* policy of the

³⁴ Examples of the former have included gene technology for the ÖVP, the Benesch decrees for the FPÖ and for the SPÖ the allegedly excessively neo-liberal thrust of the draft EU constitution. Examples of the latter type of conflict include Turkish accession (highly disputed within the SPÖ) and EU finances, including the Common Agricultural Policy, a classic bone of contention between the ÖVP's Farmers' and Business Leagues.

delegation, over which it sought to exercise much greater control. Conversely, the EU-policy of both the leadership and delegation became increasingly distant from the still predominantly Europhobic views of the party on the ground (Interviews 2, 3, 5 & 7).

The interviews produced a number of interesting insights into the nature and extent of MEP's linkage with – and thus potential accountability to – their national parties. For one, no national party has any formal rules requiring MEPs to report back to them, which helps explain why virtually all interviewees considered MEPs' accountability to be lower than that of MPs.

Furthermore, in the two larger parties (and to a lesser extent in the FPÖ), 'ordinary' MEPs' linkage is less with the national party than with its constituent units. In the case of the SPÖ, this means above all the provincial party organisations, some of which have in recent years become more interested in EU-related issues and thus in influencing their MEPs. (Interview 13). As provincial parties help determine the party's EP election list, it is in MEPs' interest to maintain good relations with them. Ordinary ÖVP MEPs maintain analogous linkage with their regional parties and their in part very powerful leaders. As a rule, they are also well very embedded within one of the party's three main leagues.

It is in all cases the delegation leader who maintains the most frequent and intense links to the national party. Formal linkage occurs above all in three types of site, the first of which are party bodies. Though delegation leaders routinely speak at party congresses, make occasional appearances in their parties' executive committees and in the case of the two large parties play a significant role in their party's EU-committee, the politically most important body they regularly attend is their respective national executive. The EU is routinely a significant agenda item in the national executives of the Greens and ÖVP, and one on which their delegation leaders are expected to speak (Interviews 16 & 29 respectively). Delegation leader reporting has in recent years been more *ad hoc* in the SPÖ's national executive (Interview 13). In the FPÖ, all but the domestically most emotionally charged of EU-related issues tended to be placed at the end of the agenda and nodded through, often whilst people were already packing their bags (Interviews 3, 5 & 7). A second site of institutionalised linkage are national caucuses. Though caucus linkage is considered important by both MEPs and MPs, delegation leader attendance at caucus plenaries and executive meetings tends to be infrequent; for example, it averages once every two months in the Greens and only two or three times a year in the ÖVP (Interviews 16 & 4). Though this causes resentment in some caucuses, it is largely an unavoidable consequence of the conflicting schedules of the national and European parliaments. The third potential site of institutionalised linkage are meetings of the party in national executive office. It applied to the SPÖ from 1995 to 2000, to the FPÖ from 2000 until 2004, but in the case of the ÖVP has been relevant ever since 1995. The most prestigious are the weekly pre-cabinet meetings attended by the respective party's ministerial team, general secretary, caucus chair and other key figures from its constituent units. This and the chancellor's even smaller 'kitchen cabinet' – the so-called 'Monday Circle' (*Montagsrunde*) – that immediately precedes it have been the politically most important site of party linkage for the ÖVP's delegation

leader. From 2000 until 2004, the FPÖ delegation leader also maintained regular links to the ‘party-in-government’ via the vice-chancellor’s office.³⁵

Most interviewees stressed the frequency and importance of the immensely diverse examples of informal linkage between MEPs and their national parties. These can include *ad hoc* meetings or simply telephone contact with other EU-specialists, or with MPs, the caucus chair, party leader, or members of the party’s national bodies. Finally, interviewees were asked about change over time in linkage. Those from the Greens and SPÖ stated there had been no significant change in recent years, but some reported an intention on the part of their national parties to make linkage more regularised and intense. In the case of the SPÖ, this reflects the fact that having lost office and the excellent EU connections this entailed, the party places greater value upon the information on current EU affairs its MEPs can provide. Given their small size, the Greens are even more reliant upon their MEPs (e.g. Interviews 16 & 21 respectively). On the other hand, numerous FPÖ and ÖVP respondents reported significant increase over recent years in the frequency and intensity of linkage between their MEPs and national parties (e.g. Interviews 7 and 27 respectively). However, one ÖVP interviewee was at pains to stress that this should not be interpreted as indicative of greater constraint upon MEP behaviour, since the proportion of *ex-post* MEP reporting had not declined (Interview 4). A similar pattern appears to pertain in the FPÖ and SPÖ (e.g. Interviews 3 and 21).³⁶

To summarise, MEPs’ generally high autonomy within the EP can be constrained on some issues and *ceteris paribus* is more likely to occur when their national party is in government. Though there is linkage between MEPs and national party bodies, this is mainly limited to the delegation leaders. Moreover, some of the most frequent and important linkage takes place elsewhere, namely either through informal contacts with party elites, or – when the party is in government – with the party in national executive office. As a proportion of overall linkage, institutionalised forms that involve the party *qua* party are thus relatively infrequent and often *post-hoc*.

Parties and their Europarties

The ÖVP, SPÖ and Greens all belong to Europarties.³⁷ The Greens’ international secretary played a significant role within the pan-European European Federation of Green Parties and its executive committee continues to delegate two MPs (currently its party manager and foreign policy spokeswoman) to the council of what in 2004 became the European Green Party (EGP). Although the intra-party significance of this Europarty activity has to date been virtually non-existent, two factors militate in favour this changing. First, the EGP is becoming more EU-oriented and less of

³⁵ This comment refers to the period from 2000 to the EP election of June 2004, at which the party was reduced from 5 to 1 seat, which was won by an individual completely opposed to the national leadership. When the BZÖ was formed (April 2005), the FPÖ effectively left government.

³⁶ One Green interviewee even suggested the Green delegation leader’s internally unassailable position means national executive meetings should be regarded less as occasions on which he might be held to account, than as opportunities for him to secure the national party’s endorsement for positions he proposes to adopt (Interview 25).

³⁷ Since 1995 there have been various attempts by FPÖ individuals and groups to forge transnational links. Interlocutors included Goldsmith’s Referendum Party, de Villiers’ group and the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang (most recently in autumn 2005). Not only have such attempts all come to naught, but they have been internally highly divisive, especially after the party entered national office.

an exclusively discussion forum for mid-level party functionaries, as witnessed by its recent introduction of leaders' meetings. Second, the Greens' leadership has started to consider the potential utility of the EU-level networking the EPG might offer, were the party to enter national government, a prospect regarded as much more likely since 2000. Indicative of this is that the party leader's first-ever EU-level activity was his attendance in late 2004 at an EGP party leaders' meeting (Interviews 16, 18 & 20).

The ÖVP and SPÖ have long been closely involved in their respective Europarties: the European People's Party (EPP) and the Party of European Socialists (PES). The EPP and PES differ in the organisation and labelling of their internal structures – which have also changed over time – but essentially function as transnational sites for party networking and co-ordination (Delwit et al. 2004). The following comments will be limited to their secretariats (PES: 'Co-ordination Team'; EPP: Political Bureau), to which the parties' international secretaries are delegated, and to their leaders' meetings.

Interviewees agreed that when acting in their Europarties, international secretaries have a very high degree of discretion and that this reflects the fact that the decisions they make relate almost exclusively to the co-ordination of the member parties' activities, rather than to matters of political substance (Interviews 14, 21 & 26). Yet the networking role of international secretaries is highly valued by their parties. The SPÖ had traditionally attached the greater significance to such networking, and had joined the PES even before accession. Moreover, its erstwhile *Nationalrat* president and deputy leader Heinz Fischer took a very active role in the PES, of which he was a vice-president from 1992 until elected President of Austria in 2004. The SPÖ's move into opposition in 2000 removed at a stroke many of the other channels of international networking to which it had become accustomed, making the party's Europarty links all the more highly prized. 2000 was also a key year for the ÖVP's Europarty links, though the catalysts here was the EU's 'sanctions': 'From one day to the next [the role of international secretary] became very important ... both within and outside the party. ... A major legacy was ... external contacts are no longer taken for granted' (Interview 14). Given the matters they deal with in their Europarties, international secretaries' linkage to their parties occur less through formal party bodies than via their respective EU-working groups. In part, they also report directly to other EU-specialists and to holders of key national office, such as the general secretary, caucus chair and party leader. The exigencies of incumbency mean that in the ÖVP feedback is on balance less extensive, governed more by considerations of the immediate political agenda and of course includes reports to the party's ministerial team (Interviews 14, 21 & 26).

Their composition and timing make leaders' meetings the most important type of Europarty activity in which the SPÖ and ÖVP are involved. Amongst the significant differences worthy of note are variations in individual continuity. Whilst the ÖVP has had the same leader since April 1995, the SPÖ has had three. The first (Franz Vranitzky)³⁸ attached enormous significance to PES leaders' meetings, which in his day were less closely linked to European Council meetings and provided considerably greater scope for brainstorming and strategic thinking. His successor (Viktor

³⁸ Federal chancellor from 1986 to 1997 and party leader from 1988 until 1997.

Klima) was allegedly much less international in his orientation, which allegedly contributed to him being less committed to and effective in leaders' meetings. The SPÖ's present leader, Alfred Gusenbauer, has a marked foreign policy background and again attaches great significance to leaders' meetings (Interviews 1, 21 & 30).

Incumbency also matters. The ÖVP has been in government since accession; until 2000 it held the vice-chancellorship and thereafter the chancellorship. By contrast, the SPÖ's leader held the chancellorship until 2000, but has since been in opposition. The ÖVP's current leader thus attends EPP leaders' meetings as a head of government who will shortly be engaging in substantive European Council negotiations. By contrast, though PES leaders' meetings are one of the most prestigious networking opportunities available to the current SPÖ leader, for non-incumbent leaders they have little immediate political significance, serving instead as a sort of 'consolation prize' (Interview 26). Finally and *prima facie* somewhat paradoxically, an interviewee from each party argued that when a party is in government, leaders' meetings (but to some extent Europarty meetings of international secretaries also) are of less party significance, since what is being discussed is above all the foreign policy of the state, rather than of the party (Interviews 1 & 14). The logical corollary of this argument is that the 'partyness' of Europarty activity is greater when a party is in opposition. An analogous logic is apparent in respect of the processes whereby party leaders' communicate with their parties about their activities in leaders' meetings. In both parties, leaders report back to their executive committees and on the most significant issues also to their national executives. However, at least as much weight is attached to the caucus. In the case of the ÖVP, the most important sites of both *ex-ante* and *ex-post* discussion are the Monday Circle and pre-cabinet meeting. Numerous interviewees suggested that *ex-ante* and *ex-post* party constraints are significantly lower in the case of leaders who are simultaneously prime minister.

Parties and their ministers

At least three aspects of Austria's institutional framework have the potential to enhance party elites' autonomy in EU-level executive decision-making. First, it might enable ministers to circumvent some of the constraints of cabinet decision-making. Constitutionally, ministers have full discretion in their national and European level actions, but convention dictates cabinet decisions require unanimity, which can place considerable political pressure upon ministers to act within overall government policy. At the EU-level, they can more easily ignore the wishes of their coalition partner. The best example to date is ÖVP ministers' 2002 approval of the Czech Republic's accession. Though they acted in accordance with the ÖVP's wishes, their effective avoidance of a potential cabinet veto by the FPÖ generated considerable intra-party difficulties for the latter's ministerial team. Ministers' EU-level autonomy can also be affected by the partial lack of 'fit' between their domestic portfolios and the briefs of the Councils of Ministers they attend. This has led to ministers making decisions in policy areas that are domestically the responsibility of other cabinet colleagues, or indeed of ministers from another party,³⁹ which in turn can undermine

³⁹ For example, during the 1995-1999 SPÖ-ÖVP government, the minister of transport attended councils whose briefs included road traffic, even though this was not within his domestic portfolio. This lack of 'fit' was mitigated in 2000, when some Austrian ministries were re-organised.

ministerial accountability to their parties. Finally, the discretion of party elites in general is enhanced by the *de facto* operation of the ‘fire brigade committee’, a virtual committee through which ministers liaise with representatives of the parliamentary parties regarding the current state of council negotiations and any changes they believe are necessary to their positions. The conduit for this liaison is the chair of Standing Sub-Committee on EU-Affairs. When eliciting the parties’ positions for onward transmission to the minister (or chancellor), he consults not only the committee’s formal members, but a range of elites from all parties and from their key auxiliary associations. In really important issues, he – or even the chancellor himself – will communicate directly with the leaders of the other parties. Accordingly, the fire brigade committee not only permits domestic EU-specialists to liaise with party elites acting in EU-level executive organs, but also promotes direct consultation on EU decision-making across a wide range of party elites, both within and outside of government (Interview 12). In sum, whilst the fire brigade committee was primarily designed to enable parliament to constrain ministers’ EU-level actions, an unintended consequence of its actual operation has arguably been a strengthening of the role in EU-issues of party elites in general.

To date, only the SPÖ, ÖVP and FPÖ have had ministers active in EU-level executive bodies. Notwithstanding institutional constraints and the political exigencies of coalition government, interviewees from all three agreed that when acting at the EU-level, ministers have considerably greater discretion vis-à-vis their own parties than they do in the domestic arena (e.g. Interviews 21, 27 and 23). Prominent amongst their explanations for this were the high intra-party status of ministers, the physical distance and relative lack of transparency of EU decision-making, the highly technical nature of issues ministers decide upon and the paucity of domestic interest in the majority of EU business (e.g. Interviews 21, 28 and 5). As with MEPs, ‘the more domestic political relevance an issue has, the greater is the degree of *de facto* constraint [upon ministers]’, though it is important to note that ‘not everything that is important in the Union has domestic political relevance and vice versa’ (Interview 27). The majority of ÖVP and FPÖ respondents maintained their ministers’ discretion has increased in recent years. Unsurprisingly, most ÖVP interviewees emphasised that their party leader’s discretion has increased most, a development which in their opinion had in turn further strengthened the chancellor’s intra-party power. They were also inclined to explain the general increase in ministerial autonomy by reference to arguments amounting to the proposition that the party’s growing experience of EU decision-making has resulted in a ‘permissive familiarity’.

The overall picture of ministers’ party linkage painted by the interviews is one of significant similarities between the parties, as the following statement highlights: ‘Ministers in effect receive three sets of instruction: from their party, from cabinet and from parliament. Of these, those they receive from their party are the least important’ (Interview 7). There was universal agreement that whilst ministers seek to maintain linkage to both the legislative and executive wings of their party in public office, the latter is more important and takes place above all in pre-ministerial party meetings. Moreover, it is above all here that ministers engage in not only *ex post*, but also significant *ex ante* discussion of their EU-level actions (e.g. Interviews 10 & 28). The second most

important arena of ministerial linkage to their parties is the caucus. When the SPÖ was in government, there would regularly be plenary meetings of the SPÖ caucus at which the chancellor and ministers reported on their EU-level activities. These were regarded by at least one minister as a useful form of political insurance for when things got tough (Interviews 22 & 31). ÖVP ministers have also regularly attended analogous meetings, the frequency of which has increased in recent years (Interview 12). Individual ÖVP ministers also report back to the league subdivisions of the party caucus. Given that the FPÖ repeatedly faced potential rebellion by its MPs, it is not surprising that the caucus was considered by the FPÖ's leadership as by far the most important site of ministerial linkage with the party (Interviews 5 & 7).

The linkage of ÖVP and FPÖ ministers to their respective party organisations has usually been much less regular and more rudimentary than to their parties in public office. When explaining this, these parties' respondents wished to stress that it is often more difficult for ministers to consult fully with their parties in respect of EU-level than national-level decisions. The arguments they cited included distance, the complex technical nature of many decisions and the infrequency with which formal party bodies meet (e.g. Interviews 12 and 3). Similar considerations applied when the SPÖ was in government, though some interviewees suggested party bodies were perhaps slightly less insignificant than (more recently) the case in the ÖVP and SPÖ (e.g. Interviews 22 & 31). In all parties, the most significant party bodies in which linkage occurs are executive committees and national executives, though even here, most discussions of ministers' EU-level activities are conducted on an *ex post* basis. As one ÖVP respondent put it: 'The national party is not kept constantly informed other than in respect of tactical, strategic or electoral matters' (Interview 10). Accordingly, EU-related decisions are only very rarely made in the ÖVP national executive (Interview 12). In the eurosceptic FPÖ, the rare discussions of EU-level activities were undertaken 'only at a relatively simplistic level' (Interview 5), something a senior FPÖ interviewee attributed to executive committee members' lack of EU expertise and preoccupation with domestic politics. Ministers of both large parties seek to maintain linkage to their key auxiliary associations. For example, whilst the SPÖ was in government, its chancellor made occasional appearances at the weekly meetings of the social democratic caucus of trade unionists. ÖVP ministers have much closer and regular links to the three functional leagues. Indeed, ÖVP ministers chair the relevant party policy committee (*Fachausschuss*), upon which they and their ministries exercise considerable influence (Interview 12). Finally, though ministers and at times even (vice-) chancellors report on their EU-level activities to their respective party congresses, the latter meet at best every year or two and, not least for that reason, rarely offer any opportunity for the party on the ground to influence their ministers' EU-level actions.

In sum, the interviews provided a considerable body of evidence in support of the hypothesis that European integration has further strengthened the intra-party influence of party elites. However, they also provided numerous comments that highlighted the in part very different patterns of linkage between parties and their ministers. Thus a leading member of the FPÖ, where EU policy has been highly contentious between the party in public office and the party on the ground, stated

the party's 'ministers of course have greater discretion, but have paid dearly for it' (Interview 5).⁴⁰ An SPÖ interviewee who had personal experience of voting against the national party's line at the EU-level was more sanguine about the intra-party consequences: 'One would then naturally have conflict at home, but one can deal with that. The matter has by then of course been decided.' (Interview 22). Meanwhile, many ÖVP interviewees were dismissive of the significance of linkage between a minister and the party *qua* party, insisting instead that EU-level decision-making by its party elites was governed above all by the decisions of the leader and small groups of elites that meet regularly in informal bodies such as the leader's kitchen cabinet and the meetings that take place about eight times a year and are attended by the party leader, caucus chair, general secretary, parliamentary president and provincial party leaders (e.g. Interviews 12, 27, 28 & 29). Especially in the case of the ÖVP, linkage to the party's key constituent elements (i.e. the provincial parties, but in particular the leagues) is in large measure a product of the fact that individual ministers are themselves frequently recruited through and remain embedded in the latter.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis of Austrian parties' organisational adaptation to European integration covers only a relatively short period, so it is impossible to be sure if the trends we have highlighted will endure. On the other hand, Austria's relatively new status within the Union means its parties' organizational adaptation is more recent and thus to some extent more visible. For one, it has necessarily been less incremental than in states with longer EU membership. Moreover, both intra-party documentation and interviewees' memories have perhaps been fuller than might otherwise have been the case.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the internal life of all four Austrian parties has changed in response to European integration, albeit not dramatically. There has been a considerable growth in EU-specialists, whom all four parties have guaranteed *ex officio* presence on national party bodies via formal statutory change. The resources allocated to EU-specialist activities have increased, though overwhelmingly from external bodies such as the EP, neo-corporatist interest groups and government ministries. EU-specialist involvement in manifesto formulation has grown, but remains limited above all to (the albeit growing range of) EU-specific topics. Within the two major parties, EU-specialists were particularly highly valued in the years immediately prior to accession and in the first few years thereafter. As EU-expertise becomes more widespread within these parties, however, so the intra-party status and career benefits of that specialisation declines. This may help explain why overall, we did not find consistent evidence in support of the hypothesis that EU-specialists would become increasingly significant players in internal power games.

On the other hand, party actors involved in decision-making at the supranational level enjoy in part considerably higher levels of autonomy from – and lower levels of accountability to – their national parties than is the case in analogous national arenas. Though this finding applies to MEPs, to those active in Europarties, as well as to those who attend Councils of Ministers or European Councils,

⁴⁰ All FPÖ respondents were interviewed before the BZÖ split in April 2005, which for reasons explained above further strengthened ministerial discretion.

few of these actors can convert their supranational level autonomy into an enhanced intra-party power. Europarty activity other than leaders' meetings has the least currency in national level intra-party power games and that of 'ordinary' MEPs as a rule not much more. By comparison, delegation leadership can have considerably greater value. However, our evidence very much supports this volume's hypothesis that involvement in decision-making within EU-level executive bodies does enhance the intra-party power of party elites and in particular of party leaders. There are a number of country-specific factors that may well help account for why Austrian parties' organisational adaptation to European integration has proceeded as indicated in this chapter. Certain features of Austria's institutional framework have been important, including its peculiar system of parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs and the single constituency national list system adopted for EP elections. The extensive interest group networks associated with Austria's system of social partnership and linked to its two major parties have been a further factor. The significant decline since accession in public support for membership has also played a role. Though 66.6% of them voted for membership in 1994, Austrians were by 2005 second only to the British in their negative evaluation of the impact of EU membership on their country, with only 37% believing Austria benefits from membership, whilst 23% consider the EU a bad thing.⁴¹

Furthermore, Austria's small size militates in favour of informal networks, not least since the number of the two categories of actors upon which we have focused (namely, EU-specialists and party elites active at the supranational level) is comparatively small. In turn, this militates against organisational complexity and enhances the potential significance of the personality of individual actors.

The parties' variable organisational responses to European integration can in part be explained by party size: in the two largest, functional differentiation and thus EU-specialisation are intrinsically easier. Closely related to this point is the parties' relative entrenchment within Austrian neo-corporatism, proximity to which facilitates access to considerable EU-specific policy expertise. This again distinguishes the SPÖ and ÖVP on the one hand from the FPÖ and Greens on the other. The individual parties' traditional model of organisation is also important. The ÖVP's complex dual structure and very significant functional leagues militates in favour of what one might, at the risk of exaggeration, characterise as a very pragmatic, or instrumental orientation to EU-related issues. By contrast, the Greens comprise a 'new politics' party, in which the principle of the individual mandate favours at times idiosyncratic behaviour on the part of holders of public office, but the principle of internal democracy as yet militates against the consolidation of a party elite. A further factor is the parties' fundamental orientation to European integration. If one had to rank them in terms of their current Europhile orientation, the ÖVP would probably come first, followed relatively closely by the SPÖ, with the Greens a distinct third, whilst the FPÖ would be classified as eurosceptic. European integration has had the most destructive effect on the organisation of the FPÖ, though it is possible that this has been due less to the party's overall euroscepticism than to the growing gap between the orientation of the party on the ground and the party in public (and above all in governmental) office. However, our study suggests the most significant determinant of

⁴¹ Eurobarometer 63, summer 2005

individual Austrian parties' organisational adaptation to European integration has been incumbency. Only incumbent parties participate in EU-level executive decision-making. Incumbent parties are also more likely to see the strengthening of party elites' intra-party power and the disaggregation of the party in public office that comes with the executive bias of EU decision-making.

In conclusion, it is worth stressing that parties' organisational adaptation to European integration is subject to change. For one, the future of European integration is itself uncertain. Moreover, as parties gain and lose incumbency status, the relative significance of the various categories of EU-specialists clearly alters, as does the opportunity for party elites to engage in the supranational activities we have demonstrated enhance their intra-party power. Furthermore, the development of the FPÖ since 2000 has shown that there is a limit to the extent to which EU-specialists and party elites can expect to operate in respect of EU-level issues in a manner that contradicts the sentiment of the party on the ground. Although that room for manoeuvre might be especially constrained in respect of eurosceptic parties, that does not detract from the general point that parties' structural and procedural responses to European integration can be reversed.

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