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Political Strategy and Ideological Adaptation in  
Regionalist Parties in Western Europe:  
A Comparative Study of the Northern League, Plaid  
Cymru, the South Tyrolean People's Party and the Scottish  
National Party

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DPhil in Politics and Contemporary European Studies

University of Sussex

October 2009

**Statement**

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to any other University for the award of any other degree

**Signature**.....

University of Sussex

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DPhil in Politics and Contemporary European Studies

Title

Political Strategy and Ideological Adaptation in Regionalist Parties in Western Europe:  
A Comparative Study of the Northern League, Plaid Cymru, the South Tyrol People's  
Party and the Scottish National Party.

### Summary of the thesis

The aim of the thesis is contribute to the growing comparative literature on regionalist parties in Western Europe, focusing on strategy and ideology. The research questions correspond to the three ideological dimensions/domains which are taken into consideration (centre-periphery, left-right and European integration), as well as to the links amongst such dimensions/domains:

- why are some regionalist parties more moderate (i.e. autonomists) while other are more radical (i.e. secessionists)?
- why do some regionalist parties position themselves to the left, while others position themselves to the right?
- why are some regionalist parties pro-integration, while others are against?
- are there relationships between regionalist parties' positions across the diverse ideological dimensions?

The analytical framework brings together sociological theories of political alignments with theories of party competition and theories of party change. The empirical section is made up of a comparison of four case studies (LN, PC, SVP and SNP), which are analysed in depth, plus a final chapter that includes the most important regionalist parties in Western Europe. Data are gathered through interviews with prominent party members, party documents (primarily manifestos), election studies and secondary sources.

In brief, in the conclusions it is argued that:

- regions that have been independent states in the past and regions with concentrated ethno-linguistic minorities tend to produce more radical parties on the centre-periphery dimension. Competition between regionalist parties acting in the same region also increases radicalism.
- 'working class' regions tend to produce leftist regionalist parties, while 'bourgeois' regions tend to produce rightist regionalist parties.
- positioning on European integration depends mainly on the compatibility of the self-government project with the process of European integration and on parties' satisfaction with the policy output of the state *vis a vis* that of the EU.
- only weak relationships can be discerned between centre-periphery and left-right positioning, and between centre-periphery and European integration. A stronger relationship is apparent between left-right and European integration positioning.

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## Introduction

Regionalist parties have become an important feature in the politics of Western European states and, to some extent, the politics of the EU. In contrast to their portrait as relics of the past (Hobsbawm, 1990), the last four decades have witnessed the emergence and establishment of regionalist parties as permanent and sometimes influential actors. From a quantitative point of view, Rokkan and Urwin (1983) identified about 29 ‘peripheral parties’ in the early 1980s, while Lane, McKay and Newton (1991) counted 44 ‘ethnic parties’ less than ten years later. An updated count would bring the number of regionalist and/or ethnic political organizations active at some level of electoral politics (local, regional, state and EU) in Western Europe to, at least, 93.<sup>1</sup>

What has made regionalist parties important actors, however, is not so much their increasing number but, rather, their capacity to become relevant actors at regional and/or national level. In the post WWII Federal Republic of Germany, the Christian Social Union has, barring the period 1954-57, governed Bavaria and has been in office at national level from 1946 to 1969, from 1982 to 1998 and from 2005 to the present. In addition, after reunification in 1990, the Party of Democratic Socialism (representing former Eastern Germany) has been in office at regional level in Mecklenburgh-Vorpommern and in Berlin. In Belgium, regionalist parties representing Flanders, the Walloon region and the Brussels region were government partners during the second half of the 1970s and in the late 1980s-early 1990s. In addition, since direct election of regional assemblies was introduced in 1995, regionalist parties representing Brussels and the Flanders have often been in office at regional level. In post-Franco Spain, regionalist parties have constituted precious support parties for single-party minority governments and have dominated regional governments in the Basque Country, Catalonia, Navarra, Cantabria and the Canary Islands. In Italy, the Northern League has been an important government partner from 1994 to 1995, from 2001 to 2006 and from 2008 to now. It has also been in office, as junior partner, in several northern Italian regions, primarily in Lombardy and Veneto. In addition, other regionalist parties have led the regional executives in Aosta Valley, South Tyrol and, more recently, in Sicily.

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth specifying that the present study distinguishes between regionalist and ethnic parties, dealing only with the former. The inclusion of ethnic parties in the count, however, facilitates comparison with figures provided by previous studies. The distribution of regionalist and/or ethnic parties across Western Europe is the following: 25 in Spain, 22 in France, 21 in Italy, 9 in the UK, 5 in Belgium, 5 in the Germany, 1 in Finland, 1 in Austria, 1 in Norway, 1 in Portugal and 1 in Greece.

In Switzerland, the Ticinesi League has established itself as a permanent party in office since 1995, strengthening its position after the last regional election in 2007. In the UK, the Northern Irish assembly and executive are dominated exclusively by regionalist parties, while, after the 2007 regional elections, regionalist parties attained office in Scotland and Wales too. Studying regionalist parties, therefore, no longer means – if it ever meant – focusing on marginal political actors. In fact, as noted by previous works (Grilli di Cortona, 2001), the impact of these parties on Western European states has gone beyond the electoral and the governmental, as they have managed to push through substantive and, in some cases (e.g. Belgium), dramatic constitutional reforms for the territorial re-distribution of powers with those states (Swenden, 2006).

This thesis places itself within an established and growing body of scholarship which aims to understand and explain the causes and consequences of regionalist mobilization in Western Europe. However, in contrast to most studies on regionalist parties, it focuses exclusively on party strategy and party ideology. The multi-dimensionality of regionalist party ideology has been addressed in academic literature only very recently. As regionalist actors politicize primarily the centre-periphery cleavage they have been treated as single-issue (or single-dimension) parties. Yet, even single-issue ('prolocutor') parties, if they establish themselves as permanent actors in the electoral and governmental arena, end up widening their ideological identity to all dimensions and issues that matter to voters (Lucardie, 2000, p. 176). While regionalist parties' ideological positioning on the periphery side of the centre-periphery divide is a given, the way they position themselves on that dimension and along other ideological dimensions – the left-right dimension and European integration will be analysed in this work – is a question which feeds into established theories of electoral alignments and party competition, as well as bearing very practical implications for coalition politics at regional and national level. One of the conclusions of this study, for instance, is that in most West European states, due to a general tendency of left-of-centre national parties to be more sensitive to regionalist claims than right-of-centre national parties, left-of-centre regionalist parties avoid supporting or entering coalitions with right-of-centre national parties, while right-of-centre regionalist parties do support and/or enter coalitions with left-of-centre national parties. The overall coalition politics of regionalist parties, therefore, tends to translate into a diversion of votes from the left to the right.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Whether this systematic bias is counterbalanced by voters' choices is a very interesting question which goes beyond the remit of this work.

This work is divided into two parts. The bulk of the research consists of in-depth analysis of and comparison between four regionalist parties: *Plaid Cymru* – The Party of Wales, the Scottish National Party, the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* and the *Lega Nord*. In the second part of the research the comparative analysis is extended to 43 regionalist parties acting in 26 ‘regions’ across 7 Western European states. This part of the research allows us to evaluate the generalizability of our findings. More precisely, the wider set of cases will be used to test hypotheses drawn both from the extant literature and, inductively, from the analysis of the four case-studies.

In Chapter One a terminological and conceptual discussion of regionalist parties is presented, followed by a brief summary of the state of the art and the introduction of the research questions. Then the research plan, methodology, case selection and data are discussed. Finally, the theoretical and analytical frameworks which guide the research are presented and discussed. In Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five the four parties are analysed in turn. Each chapter is structured in the same way. The first section is devoted to a general profile of the party. This includes the historical origins of the centre-periphery cleavage in the region, the birth, electoral emergence and main political achievements of the party, and its internal organizational structure. The following three sections are devoted to party ideological positioning respectively on the centre-periphery, left-right and European integration dimension. Chapter Six provides a comparison of the four cases, the presentation of hypotheses and the hypothesis testing on the wider set of parties. In the conclusion, the findings of the research are reported and discussed, and future avenues of research identified.

## Chapter 1

### Studying Regionalist Parties' Strategy and Ideology

#### 1.1 Regionalist parties in Western Europe: terminology and definition

The group of parties (or putative party family) that is analysed in this study has been labeled in many different ways: regionalist (De Winter and Türsan, 1998; Jolly, 2007; Deschouwer, 2009), regional (Newman, 1994; Brancati, 2005), ethno-regionalist (Tronconi, 2005; De Winter and Gomez-Reino, 2002; De Winter, 1998a; Müller-Rommel, 1998; Türsan, 1998); ethno-regional (Newman, 1997; Levi and Hechter, 1985; Miodownik and Cartrite, 2006), ethnoterritorial (Rudolph and Thompson, 1989), ethnonationalist (Connor, 1977), regional nationalist (Van Atta, 2003), peripheral (Rokkan and Urwin, 1983), peripheral nationalist (Gourevitch, 1979), nationalist (Coakley, 1992; Erk, 2009; Grilli di Cortona, 2001), minority nationalist (Lynch, 1996; Sorens, 2008; Elias, 2009), stateless nationalist (Keating, 1996; Guibernau 1999), sub-state nationalist (Erk, 2005), ethnic (Horowitz, 1985), autonomist (De Winter *et al.*, 2006b), secessionist (Sorens, 2005), non-state-wide (De Winter, 1994; Pallares *et al.*, 1997).

In spite of this terminological profusion, conceptual reflections on the core characteristics of these parties have provided some common understanding amongst scholars, especially as far as the literature on Western European cases is concerned. It is, therefore, worth discussing these reflections in order to provide a minimal definition. A good starting point is represented by De Winter's observation that the core characteristic of these parties is their demand for "political reorganization of the existing national power structure, for some kind of 'self-government'. In fact, the centrality of this demand distinguishes this type of party from other party 'families'" (De Winter, 1998a, p. 204-05). Gomez-Reino has built on De Winter's definition, stressing that the type of self-government sought by these parties is 'territorial' (Gomez-Reino, 2008). An emphasis on identification with some piece of territory is the *sine qua non* which had already been identified by previous studies (Urwin, 1982, p. 427, cited in Türsan, 1998, p. 5). The claims of these parties are, therefore, based on territorial identities/interests and their challenge to the existing power structure of the state revolves around territorial reorganization. Hence, independently of the timing of their emergence these actors politicize a very old cleavage which refers to the process of state formation, the *centre-periphery cleavage* (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). It is not by chance that, before the crisis

(or decline) of the modern nation-state became evident, these parties were sometimes considered as a sign of revolt against modernity (Lipset, 1985).

Given the centrality of ‘territory’ (compared to, say, ‘ethnicity’, ‘nationality’, ‘minority’, etc.) in defining the core characteristics of these political actors, I have chosen the term ‘regionalist’ to indicate this group of parties because it is the most genuinely geographical amongst those listed above, together with ‘regional’ and ‘non-state-wide’. The latter two (i.e. ‘regional’ and ‘non-state-wide’) can be considered as synonymous: they both mean that a party is not active in the whole territory of the state, but only in part of it (a region). This is, in fact, an important and empirically easy-to-spot characteristic of the parties considered in this study. However, it is neither a primary nor an exclusive feature of theirs. In other words, while ‘regionalist’ parties are usually ‘regional’, other parties can be ‘regional’ without necessarily being ‘regionalist’.

The definition of regionalist parties can, therefore, be formulated as follows: first, they are self-contained political organizations that contest elections; secondly, their explicit and primary objective is to defend the identities and interests of ‘their’ territory (region) by achieving/protecting/enhancing some kind of territorial self-government. A side-feature derived from their ‘core mission’ is that their organization is present only in a particular territory (region) of the state and their electoral activity is normally limited to that territory. This working definition allows us to sort out the ‘real’ regionalists from other regional parties, such as regional branches of state-wide parties. In the case of contemporary Belgium, for instance, it distinguishes regionalist parties fighting for more self-government from all the other regionalized (i.e. regional) parties.

The level of self-government sought – from mild autonomy to outright secession – constitutes a very important source of internal differentiation amongst regionalist parties and is one of the ideological dimensions which this research focuses on. However, it is not a defining characteristic (De Winter, 1998a, p. 205), nor does it matter whether parties consider their territory (and the people living in it) as a nation *per se* or part of a different nation-state. Similarly, self-assigned party labels, *per se*, have little value.

The above definition also facilitates charting the relationship between regionalist parties and two other categories of parties. The first one is the category of ethnic parties, i.e. those parties that receive support from an ethnic group (whether that group is defined in terms of language or religion, etc.) and aim to defend/enhance the identity and interests of people belonging to that ethnic group (Horowitz, 1985, p. 291).

Evidently, there is a large overlap between regionalist and ethnic parties, as most of the former refer - more or less compellingly and more or less consistently - to ethnic identities linked to territory. However, not all regionalist parties “have mobilized issues of culture or language” (Hepburn, 2009a). In addition, not all ethnic parties can be considered as regionalist, since some of them prefer to protect ethnic identities without seeking regional (i.e. territorial) self-government. This is clearly the case, for instance, of the *Svenska Folkpartiet* (SFP) in Finland (Raunio, 2006, p. 126).

The second category, which could be labeled as ‘regional unionist’, is represented by regional (and often ethnic) parties that originated as a reaction against regionalist mobilization in bordering regions or within the same region. Genetically these parties represent the demands of regionally concentrated ethnic groups who identify with the whole state and are keen to maintain the centralized constitutional settlement or, at least, a political union between the region and the state. The parties’ original ideology is therefore anti-regionalist and, often, centralist. They often stem from the regional branch of the most anti-regionalist state-wide party, before developing as independent and self-contained organizations. Sometimes, however, during this process, the aims of these parties change: from strenuous defence of state centralism to steering constitutional change in a direction which accommodates their concerns. Some of them can, therefore, become convinced supporters of regional self-government and, on that basis, have to be considered as regionalist parties. However, it is important to bear in mind that the reactive logic of their regionalism sets them apart from the other regionalist parties in important respects, not least the fact that they eschew secessionist positions because they feel safer within the state. Examples of reactive regional groups are: the Protestants (Unionists) in Northern Ireland, part of the Italian speaking community in South Tyrol, the (Blaverists) anti-catalanists in the Valencian community and most of the French speaking community in Brussels. Some of the parties created by these groups, such as the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in Northern Ireland and the *Unió Valenciana* (UnV) in the Valencian Community, fulfill all the characteristics of regionalist parties and have to be considered as such. Others, such as the *Front Démocratique du Francophone* (FDF) in Brussels and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) in Northern Ireland, can only be considered as regionalist parties in certain periods of their history.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, *Unitalia* in South Tyrol cannot be considered as a proper

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<sup>3</sup> The FDF can be considered as a regionalist party from 1970, when it abandoned centralism in support of federal reforms which would separate Brussels from the Flanders, to 1995 when its survival was

regionalist party. Although it ceased to be the regional branch of the state-wide party *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) in 1996, it has had affiliations with other right-wing state-wide parties. More importantly, as it will be discussed in Chapter Four, it has kept supporting state centralism rather than (an alternative form of) self-government for South Tyrol.

Three other parties, the former *Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus* (PDS) in Eastern Germany, the *Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern* (CSU) in Bavaria and the *Unión del Pueblo Navarro* (UPN) in Navarra,<sup>4</sup> deserve to be discussed, as they represent border-line cases. The PDS appears to be a case of a ‘new’ party with state-wide ambitions, which builds on its original territorial ‘heartland’ before expanding. This ambition is witnessed by the fact that it has always fielded candidates Germany-wide and finds an ultimate confirmation in the merger with *Arbeit und soziale Gerechtigkeit – Die Wahlalternative* (WASG) and the formation of a state-wide party, albeit one that still relies heavily on Eastern German votes, *Die Linke*. However, the PDS has *de facto* built its political project on the protection of Eastern Germany’s interests and political identity (Grix, 2002), while electoral activity in Western Germany can also be explained in instrumental terms, i.e. as an attempt to circumvent the constraints of the German voting system (Hough and Koss, 2009). On this basis, the PDS can be considered as a regionalist party until the advent of *Die Linke*. As far as the CSU and the UPN are concerned, they have certainly acted as *de facto* regional branches of state-wide parties (the German *Christlich Demokratische Union* and the Spanish *Partido Popular*). However, not only are they formally self-contained organizations but they have originated autonomously and then federated themselves with state-wide parties. Their history is, therefore, quite different from that of regional branches of state-wide parties that have become increasingly autonomous as a consequence of regionalist mobilization and devolution of power to the regions. Indeed,

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underpinned by a stable federation with the Flemish Liberals (Buelens and Van Dyck, 1998). The UUP remained affiliated with the Conservative British party until 1985. In 2008, this affiliation restarted (UUP, 2008). However, the party has been a convinced advocate of Northern Ireland’s self-government throughout its history, except in the period 1979-1995, when its leadership manifested a preference for Direct Rule from London (Murphy, 1990, p. 52-3).

<sup>4</sup> It is worth pointing out that the UPN also displays most of the characteristics of ‘regional unionist’ parties because of its strenuous opposition to Basque separatism, which sees Navarra as part of the Basque homeland and pursues the secession of the enlarged Basque Country (i.e. including Navarra) from Spain (Sorens, 2008, p. 338).



the CSU and UPN have always been, despite their close relationship with the CDU and the PP, rather assertive in demanding and protecting self-government for their regions.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2 Studying regionalist parties: State of the art and research questions

Having formulated the defining characteristics of regionalist parties, explored the boundaries that such definition draws and discussed the few cases which find themselves straddling those boundaries, I can now turn my attention to the fast-growing scholarship on regionalist parties and how my research aims to enhance our knowledge on this topic.

Naturally enough, the literature on regionalist parties has focused on the crucial question concerning the determinants of their electoral and political success. These determinants can be divided into two analytical classes: external and internal (De Winter 1998a; De Winter *et al.*, 2006). External factors refer to the political, institutional, economic and cultural environments in which regionalist parties act, while internal factors refer to party organization, its capacity to attract human and economic resources, party leadership, party strategy and ideology.

Amongst the studies which stress the importance of external factors, some look at long-term historical processes and the resulting structural environments. In this respect, the most influential work amongst the classics of political science (or political sociology) is Lipset and Rokkan's *cleavage theory* (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Together with the Reformation and the industrial revolution, nation-state formation is considered one of the crucial long-term processes which generated deep social and, consequently, political divisions in Western Europe. Such divisions (cleavages) entered into mass politics with the establishment of universal suffrage, thus ensuring the survival of the old alignments between social groups and their respective political actors. The main division regarding the process of nation-state building concerned the opposition by local and/or regional actors to the project/process of political, economic and cultural integration and centralization of power at the centre of the state: the so called *centre-periphery cleavage*. In this perspective, which was developed further by Rokkan and Urwin, the success of regionalist parties depends on the resources that the historical

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<sup>5</sup> In the run-up to German unification, fearing a dramatic shift to the left due to the integration of 'red' East Germany and a loss of economic resources which would be 'diverted' to the new *Länder*, CSU's prominent politicians even flirted with the idea of Bavaria's secession (Harvie, 1994, p. 67). For an extensive explanation of why the CSU should be included in comparative analyses of regionalist parties, see Hepburn (2008b).

process of nation-state building or, more precisely, competitive projects of different nation-states' building left to regionalist actors for mobilisation. These resources consist primarily of cultural distinctiveness (linguistic, religious, etc.), resulting from (partially) failed standardization across the whole territory of the state; and economic distinctiveness due to different paths of economic development, inequalities and/or lack of integration amongst different territorial regions of the state (Rokkan and Urwin, 1982, p. 3-9; 1983, p. 14-18). This structural-developmental approach emphasises, beside culture and economy, the historical process *per se*, with its timing, its institutional legacy and its (often re-elaborated) memories, which represent important elements for the success of regionalist mobilization. Therefore, territories with a historical legacy of sovereign statehood or extensive self-government in past times may represent potentially favourable environments for regionalist parties, even in the absence of cultural and economic distinctiveness.

As far as the economic factor is concerned, it is worth recalling that scholars have pointed out two different sources of regionalist grievances against the central state. On the one hand, in monocephalic states, where the centre is both politically and economically dominant, economically depressed regions may mobilize against state's 'internal colonialism' (Hechter, 1975). On the other hand, in policephalic states, where the political and economic centres do not coincide geographically, economically advanced regions may mobilize in order to turn their economic wealth into augmented political power (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Gourevitch, 1979).

Within the set of studies that focus on external determinants, some have taken into consideration the short-term effects of the institutional environment in which electoral competition takes place. In particular, some scholars argue that regionalist parties would do better at polls under proportional representation (PR) than under majoritarian systems (Hauss and Rayside, 1978). Yet, this hypothesis has remained rather controversial, given the territorial concentration of electoral support of regionalist parties. Recent empirical studies have, indeed, reached more nuanced conclusions which downplay the importance of the proportionality of electoral systems as a determinant of regionalist parties' success (Montabes-Pereira *et al.*, 2004). What these studies have pointed out, instead, is that the distinction between PR and majoritarian systems is important for the different dynamics of party competition they trigger (*ibid*, p. 77) - an important point which will be discussed below.

Recently, scholars have extended their attention to the political environments in which regionalist parties compete. Tronconi has shown how the electoral success of regionalist parties depends not only on culture and economy (which are still very important factors) but also on the level of ideological (left-right) polarization between state-wide parties (or electoral alliances), on the level of electoral volatility and on the type of democratic regime, be it majoritarian or consensual (Tronconi, 2005). More precisely, regionalist parties tend to do better in the presence of high volatility, consensual regimes and low polarization.

Academic research on individual cases has devoted more attention to internal factors of success. This has also been the case for edited collections, which have pointed to the importance of organization, leadership and ideology (De Winter and Türsan, 1998; De Winter *et al.*, 2006b), with the latter standing out as “one of the most important aspects to cover in future comparative work” (De Winter *et al.*, 2006b, p. 252).

The general aim of this research is to respond to this call. The concept of party ideology is here considered closely to the concept of party strategy in a competitive environment. The theoretical and analytical framework within which the research has developed, including the relationship between strategy and ideology, will be discussed in the next section. In the remaining part of this section I will simply spell out the research questions concerning regionalist parties’ ideology and will briefly outline the state of our knowledge on each question to date. In this way I will better explain to what extent ideology constitutes an underdeveloped theme in the literature and which aspects of the matter I aim to explore further.

First of all political ideologies refer to different spheres, domains, dimensions and aspects of social and political life. As far as regionalist parties are concerned, the core of their ideologies pertains to the centre-periphery dimension, i.e. their claim for some sort of territorial self-government for their region *vis à vis* the central state. The first question, therefore, concerns this ideological dimension:

Q1. What pushes regionalist parties to adopt moderate (autonomist) or radical (secessionist) stances and, possibly, to change position over time?

This question has not been completely overlooked in the extant literature. Scholars showed that regionalist parties adopt different positions on this dimension, also

providing classifications of the different possible stances (Rokkan and Urwin, 1983, p. 141; De Winter, 1998a, p. 206; van Houten, 2001, p. 7; Sorens, 2008, p. 326-29). Empirical quantitative studies have confirmed that regionalist assertiveness is positively correlated with the two structural factors singled out in the classic literature – cultural (mainly linguistic) distinctiveness and high economic status – (van Houten, 2001; Sorens, 2008). Regionalist parties in ethnically distinct and in relatively rich regions tend to put forward more demanding claims, all the way up to secession. The economic argument has lent itself very well to the formulation of rational choice theories – or economic theories of secession – (Boltom *et al.*, 1996). However, as even those who have formalized the economic rationality of secession have to admit: “[e]conomic grievances may well be among the factors that impel a region to seek full political autonomy, but they will rarely suffice to explain why independence is entertained at all as a possible option.” (Polese, 1985, p. 112). Indeed, the interplay between structural factors, such as economy, ethnicity and institutional history, is rather complex. In addition, the institutional/political environment also appears to play a major role. Newman argues that regionalist parties acting (as third parties) under majoritarian electoral systems within two-party systems face a strong incentive to develop radical centre-periphery stances, while regionalist parties acting under PR within multi-party systems can choose whether to adopt moderate or radical stances (Newman, 1997). Moreover, when it comes to explain changes of position over time, the political environment (i.e. the strategic interaction amongst parties competing in the party system) is often evoked as a crucial additional factor (Rokkan and Urwin, 1983; De Winter, 1998a; van Houten, 2001; De Winter *et al.*, 2006b; Sorens, 2008). Quantitative studies, however, are not particularly suitable to investigate strategic interactions within party systems. Indeed, according to one scholar: “it is necessary to turn again to case studies” (van Houten, 2001, p. 16). Qualitative case studies, however, have often lacked a comparative perspective and thrust towards generalization or, at least, hypothesis generation. In addition, scholars who have looked at party competition and strategies have often taken the analytical perspective of state-wide parties, devoting little or no attention to possible counter-strategies of regionalist parties (Levi and Hechter, 1985; Rudolph and Thompson, 1989). The present work aims, therefore, to address this question through in-depth qualitative analysis on four case studies, taking into consideration all factors identified in the extant literature and, as far as party competition is concerned, adopting the perspective of regionalist actors.

The second ideological dimension taken into consideration refers to the left-right schema (Fuchs and Klingemann, 1989). Although the success of this schema rests on its capacity to represent party systems in a single dimension, the left-right opposition is actually the synthesis of multiple dimensions. Political philosophers have identified the origin and the conceptual core of the distinction between left and right in opposite evaluations about 'equality', considered as 'natural and good' by left-wingers and 'artificial and bad' by right-wingers (Bobbio, 1994). Scholars of Western European (or more generally Western) politics have pointed to the salience of two left-right sub-dimensions: the socio-economic and the socio-cultural (Kitschelt, 1994, 2004; Hix, 1999; Hooghe *et al.*, 2002). Applying Bobbio's conceptual elaboration to these two sub-dimensions, it can be argued that the socio-economic left envisages redistribution of resources and the pursuit of (more) economic equality, while the socio-cultural left accords equal dignity and status to alternative ideas, values, identities and cultures. In contrast, the socio-economic right considers economic inequality as the natural result of the skill differential amongst individuals and envisages less redistributive intervention, while the socio-cultural right claims the right to cultural differences, reserving higher, if not exclusive, dignity to traditionalist and majoritarian ideas, values, identities and cultures. As empirical studies confirm, religion, as a traditionalist source of ideas, values, identities and culture - and especially the dominant religion, as a source of (at least supposedly) majoritarian ideas, values, identities and culture - is associated with the socio-cultural right (Knutsen, 2004; Norris and Inglehart, 2004). The second question, therefore, concerns the traditionally very salient and comprehensive left-right ideological dimension:

Q2. What pushes regionalist parties to adopt different positions along the left-right dimension and, possibly, to change their position over time?

This question has attracted some attention too, especially as far as the relationship between regionalism and social class is concerned: "[n]ationalism, whether of the right or of the left, is of course never really independent of the class structure" (Nairn, 1977, p. 44). Although comparative research has pointed out that left-right ideological positions span the whole spectrum and that changes of position are not rare amongst regionalist parties (De Winter 1998a, p. 209; De Winter *et al.*, 2006b), scholars have

struggled to find a general relationship between regionalism and left-right positioning. Jan Erk (2005; 2009), who has explored the question in the most explicit way, points to the importance of agency and historical critical junctures that sometimes occurred long before the emergence of regionalist parties themselves. John Coakley also stressed the peculiarity of each individual case: “In practice, nationalist ideologists tend to adopt a particularistic approach, promoting the interests of ‘their’ nation. It follows from this that the unique context of a particular national struggle shapes the class alliances that accompany it” (Coakley, 1992, p. 16).<sup>6</sup> Saul Newman (1996) has developed a fourfold typology of regionalist parties’ ideologies, suggesting that the factors shaping the ideological blend of each regionalist party are deeply contextual. In a later work, he points to the importance of the institutional/political environments in which regionalist parties compete, arguing that majoritarian voting systems and two-party systems push parties towards (left or right) mainstream positioning, while PR and multi-party systems allow regionalist parties to adopt both mainstream and radical positions (Newman, 1997). As this brief literature review shows, this question (i.e. Q2) has remained largely unanswered in comparative terms. The aim of this study is, therefore, to reach generalizable findings and to further our theoretical understanding about the relationship between regionalism and left-right positioning.

The last dimension taken into consideration concerns the process of European integration. Conceptually, this ideological dimension is the same as the centre-periphery one, but applied at a different level. Indeed, it refers to support or opposition towards a process of polity formation which involves a struggle for the distribution of powers between the European level (i.e. the centre), the member-states and the sub-state level (Bartolini, 2005). The third question concerns, therefore, ideological positioning towards European integration:

Q3. What pushes regionalist parties to support or oppose the process of European integration and, possibly, to change position over time?

This question has attracted some attention too, especially in the last fifteen years, including important comparative pieces of research (Lynch, 1996; De Winter, 1998a;

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<sup>6</sup> Coakley, Nairn and Erk use the term ‘nationalism’ (or ‘nationalist’) meaning ‘minority’, ‘sub-state’ or ‘stateless’ nationalism. The political parties they talk about, therefore, fall within the definition of ‘regionalist parties’ adopted in this work.

De Winter and Gomez-Reino, 2002; Jolly, 2007; Elias, 2009; 2008). In addition, other studies dealing with the impact of European integration on the regions and the interplay between European integration and regionalism result extremely helpful for answering the question, as they provide the picture for understanding the opportunity structure within which regionalist parties act (Hooghe, 1995; Keating, 1995; 1998; Jeffery 2000; 2004; Keating and Hooghe, 2001; McGarry and Keating, 2006; Hepburn, 2008a). Moreover, studies on political parties' positioning towards European integration have provided theories, hypotheses and analytical frameworks which may well apply to regionalist parties too (Hix and Lord, 1997; Taggart, 1998; Hix, 1999; Sitter, 2001, 2002; Hooghe *et al.*, 2002; Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2003; Hix, 2007; Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2008). Finally, within this literature, some studies have focused on the influence of the genetic cleavage on party positioning, thus providing hypotheses and empirical evidence on regionalist parties as a distinct family (Marks and Wilson, 2000; Marks *et al.*, 2002).

Summarizing the conceptual elaboration, the analytical frameworks proposed and the empirical evidence provided by these three strands of literature is not an easy task. In extreme synthesis, four explanatory models can be identified: 'geopolitical', 'domestic politics', 'left-right ideology', 'genetic'.<sup>7</sup> These models apply to all political parties and should, therefore, be expected apply to regionalist parties too (Elias, 2009, p. 34-38). The geopolitical model refers to substantive differences in support for European integration amongst the public opinions of different states, such as traditionally Europhile Italy vs. traditionally Eurosceptic UK, or supranational areas, such as Europhile Mediterranean Europe vs. Eurosceptic Scandinavia.<sup>8</sup> The model predicts that, notwithstanding internal differences, parties in Eurosceptic states or areas will tend to be Eurosceptic and *vice versa*. The domestic politics model refers to the use of European integration in the political debate at state level (or regional) level and focuses on party positions within the party system and on the party institutional roles. Put crudely, fringe/outsider parties tend to be more Eurosceptic than mainstream parties (Taggart, 1998), and opposition parties tend to voice their Euroscepticism more than parties in office (Sitter, 2001; 2002). The 'left-right ideology' model focuses on the

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<sup>7</sup> The four models presented here are inspired by Bartolini (2005, p. 321-326). However, only the first (geopolitical) and the fourth (genetic) model coincide fully with Bartolini's conceptualization. That is why different labels were used to identify the second and third models. In Bartolini (2005) these were called 'institutional' and 'partisan' respectively.

<sup>8</sup>See, for instance, Raunio (2007) on Euroscepticism in Scandinavia.

influence of party ideological positions along the two above-mentioned sub-dimensions, socio-economic and socio-cultural. Although scholars disagree on the existence of clear and stable relationships<sup>9</sup>, there seem to be a general consensus on the overall historical trajectories of the main party families' stances. Centre and mainstream-right parties, such as the Christian Democrats and the Liberals are the political forces that started the integration process and supported it throughout (Hix, 1999, p. 88; Marks and Wilson, 2000, p. 449-453). In contrast, the mainstream-left - the Socialists and Social-Democrats - were much less supportive in the 1950s and 1960s. However, in the following decades, they became strongly Europhile (Hix, 1999, p. 88; Marks and Wilson, 2000, p. 445). Other party families, such as the Greens and the radical-left parties, have also softened their stances on European integration during the 1990s, although they remain rather ambiguous if not openly Eurosceptic (Dunphy, 2004; Bomberg, 1998). Finally, radical-right parties, mainly due to their socio-cultural traditionalism and authoritarianism, have represented the most Eurosceptic party family in Europe over the last fifteen years (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002). At first sight, the 'left-right ideology' model would suggest that parties often confuse their support/opposition to EU policies with support/opposition to European integration itself. In fact, this type of positioning can be considered as rational, at least to some extent, as the link between the level of centralization of any given polity and its policy outcomes is profound and, often, systemic biases towards certain policies rather than others are difficult to reverse (Hix, 2007).

Given that regionalist parties have appeared in both Eurosceptic and Europhile states (or geo-political areas), that they have occupied different positions within their respective party systems and different institutional roles, and that the left-right ideological variance amongst them is substantive, these three models would predict substantive variance on their positions towards European integration too. Yet, recent (quantitative) empirical research has concluded that regionalist parties are consistently pro-integration across time, space and issue area (Jolly, 2007), confirming the overall conclusions of previous studies (Hix and Lord, 1997; Ray, 1999; Marks and Wilson, 2000; Marks *et al.*, 2002).<sup>10</sup> This contradiction can be, at least partially, explained by

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<sup>9</sup> In particular the Hooghe-Marks thesis sees a patterned relationship between left-right and European integration positions, while the Hix-Lord thesis sees the two dimensions as independent and orthogonal (Marks and Steenbergen, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Hix and Lord's analysis concerns only the parties affiliated to the European Free Alliance (EFA) group, thus leaving out important regionalist parties. It is worth pointing out that the converging conclusions by



considering the fourth model. Indeed, the ‘genetic’ model singles out the only characteristic that regionalist parties have in common, namely their origins in the centre-periphery cleavage. Such genesis, as discussed in the previous section, translates into the pursuit of “some kind of self-government” (De Winter, 1998a, p. 204). According to this model, then, European integration will be supported (or opposed) insofar as it favors (or hinders) the achievement or extension of regional self-government and other linked objectives, such as ethnic minority protection and minority language recognition.

As highlighted by Keating, there are “elements of consistency and mutual reinforcement” between European integration and regionalism (Keating, 1995, p. 1). Such elements have come to prominence during the 1980s and 1990s, due to substantive developments in EU institutions and policies which have fostered hopes for a ‘Europe of the Regions’ (Keating 1998, p. 176). Regionalist parties could take advantage of European integration in several respects. Economic integration enhanced the viability and therefore the credibility of secessionist projects (Meadwell and Martin, 2004). EU regional policies and the introduction of the principle of subsidiarity pushed member-states to create or enhance regional governments (McGarry *et al.*, 2006; p. 8). The establishment of the Committee of the Regions was a sign (probably overestimated by some) that a strengthened EU was going to recognize an active role for the regions in its policy-making process. European elections became an occasion, for some regionalist parties, to enhance their electoral visibility (Lynch, 1996).

Indeed, the genetic model hypothesized that regionalist parties would be strongly in favor of economic integration, as this enhances the viability of regional political autonomy, and moderately in favor of political integration because it weakens the state and creates a plural Europe in which all nations are minorities (Marks and Wilson, 2000, p. 439; Marks *et al.*, 2002, p. 587). The above-mentioned quantitative analyses have provided solid empirical evidence for this view that regionalism and European integration have been, to a great extent, mutually reinforcing processes during the 1980s and 1990s. However, more recent qualitative research points to a cooling down in the relationship between regionalism and European integration (Hepburn,

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Jolly, Ray, Marks and Wilson, and Marks *et al.* should not be surprising, as their analyses were based on the same datasets.

2008a), and even a general shift from pro towards more ambiguous or even Eurosceptic positions (Elias, 2008).

This research aims to provide a comprehensive investigation of the question (i.e. Q3) taking into consideration all the explanations put forward by the relevant literature and evaluating whether the empirical analysis substantiates them or not. However, the additional contribution will concern in particular three aspects. First, more attention will be devoted to the influence of party self-government goals. As discussed above, the common genesis in the centre-periphery cleavage has not prevented regionalist parties setting out different self-government objectives, from mild autonomy to full secession. Scholars have already noticed that differences in the self-government projects “are replicated at the European level, with parties’ attitudes towards self-determination influencing their position on European integration and the exact institutional shape of the European Union” (Lynch, 1996, p. 178). This insight has, however, remained largely overlooked in the literature, which has rather focused on how institutional developments in the EU have affected parties’ positions on self-government (Laible, 2008). Second, the powers accorded by states to the regions vary from member-state to member-state and, in the cases of asymmetric devolution, even within member-states – something which has implications for the evaluation of further integration by the different regionalist actors (Jeffery, 2000). Third, regionalist parties’ positioning on European integration in the current phase, characterized by the ‘constitutionalization of Europe’ (2000s), has attracted few pieces of research and limited to a very small number of cases (Elias, 2009; 2008). In this respect, the main innovative contribution of this study comes from the analysis of a much wider set of cases in the last chapter.

A fourth question concerns the relationships between the three different dimensions:

Q4. Are there patterned relationships between regionalist parties’ positioning across the three ideological dimensions?

This is not really an additional question but, rather, a way of adding a possible explanation to positioning on each ideological dimension. As mentioned above, positioning on European integration has also been seen as a result different left-right stances and one of the stated aims of this study is to investigate more closely the scarcely studied relationship between centre-periphery (i.e. regional self-government *vis*

*à vis* the state) and European integration. In addition to this, the relationship between regionalist parties positioning on centre-periphery and left-right will be explored. To my knowledge, the only reference to such a relationship is De Winter's observation that "parties situated to the left... also tend to be the most independentist. The right or centre-right parties are less independentist" (De Winter, 1998a, p. 211). However, no explanation has been advanced. The present research will investigate the links between different ideological dimensions and propose possible explanations.

### **1.3 Theoretical and analytical frameworks**

In this section I present the general theoretical and analytical frameworks which, together with the evidence accumulated by previous research specifically on regionalist parties, guide this research. The use of the various theories and approaches in different parts of the thesis can be better understood in the light of the next section, where the research design is explained. For this reason, this section will often refer to the next one and *vice versa*.

Given that the ultimate aim of this research is to provide answers to general questions, I will first introduce the two different but not mutually exclusive 'drivers' of generalization. These two drivers of generalization are simply two logics expected to orientate the behaviour of political parties (taken as unit of analysis) rather consistently across cases and across time.

The first driver refers to the logic of 'rational choice', a grand theory imported into political science from economics. While the use of 'rational choice' in studies of public policy has always been present, the full introduction of this approach into the study of party politics owes much to the seminal work of Anthony Downs (Downs, 1957). Building on Schumpeter's conceptualization of policy output as a function of the competitive struggle for power amongst groups of elites (Schumpeter, 1954 [1942]), Downs adopted the metaphor of the market to explain the dynamics of party competition in the electoral arena. According to this paradigm, policy is the commodity which political parties sell and voters buy on the electoral market. Both politicians and voters act in a self-interested way, the former seeking power and the latter seeking their preferred governmental policies (Downs, 1957, p. 38-40). Voters vote for the party which gives them the closest policy to their favorite one and, since in democratic systems the key to political power is represented by votes, parties develop their policies so as to accommodate voters' preferences and win as many votes as they can (*ibid.*, p.

35). However, because of information costs, voters look at party ideology, rather than the details of party policy, to make their choice (ibid., p. 98-100). The importance of the Downsian perspective rests, therefore, in its conceptualization of ideology as a dependent variable, influenced by the conditions of the (electoral) environment in which the parties act.

For reasons explained in the following section, this study will try and draw generalizations about ideological positioning, on the basis of the socio-economic and socio-cultural environments of the regions. This is not the same as applying Downs' model, which would require the knowledge of the electoral demand for each regional party system taken into consideration. As a short-cut, I will rely on the tradition of comparative historical sociology which has had the merit of highlighting the links between the social structure and party alignments: political preferences depend on cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Lipset and Rokkan's original theory, which, in spite of the widely recognized process of electoral de-alignment, has found confirmation in very recent empirical studies (Knutsen, 2004; 2006), has been revised and refined in order to take into account of more recent developments concerning the emergence of the so called 'new left' and 'new right' (Inglehart, 1977; Kitschelt, 1988; Ignazi, 1992; Kitschelt, 1994).

The second driver refers to the morphological nature of political ideologies. The structure of any ideology needs a minimum of internal consistency in order to stand as an agglomerate of interrelated concepts. As argued by Michael Freeden, "...logic must be evident in any *articulate* presentation of beliefs, and ideologies – because they are communicative as well as persuasive devices – will have recourse to some measure of logical consistency." (Freeden, 1996, p. 36). So, while the previous logic focuses on the relationship between certain environmental conditions and positioning on certain ideological dimensions (e.g. socio-economic status of the regions and party positioning on the left-right dimension), this second logic focuses on internal ideological consistency, looking at patterns of positioning across the three dimensions (centre-periphery, left-right, European integration).

While these two generalizing logics will be mainly used in the last chapter for identifying broad patterns amongst a wide set of cases, the central chapters concerning four case studies will make use primarily of other theories of party (ideological) change which have taken on board a greater deal of the complexity characterizing actual social and political processes.

There are several ways of departure from the assumptions of ‘formal models’ based on Downsian approach. The first to be discussed here is the role and definition of party strategy. In Downs’ work, strategy is defined in a very narrow way. Although the American scholar takes into consideration competition in multi-party systems, his approach is strongly influenced by his familiarity with the typical two-party system context, where policy influence depends almost entirely on the capacity to get into office and getting into office depends on the capacity to win a plurality of votes. In other words, in the two-party system context, the three substantive goals of political parties - votes, office and policy – tend to a great extent to overlap or to be consequential.<sup>11</sup> This substantial coincidence between policy, office and votes leads Downs to reduce party strategy to electoral marketing, i.e. to restrict the strategic focus to the pursuit of votes: “[t]hus all its [i.e. the party’s] actions are aimed at maximizing votes, and it treats policies merely as means towards this end” (Downs, 1957, p. 35). However, in multi-party systems important trade-offs can emerge between these three goals (Müller and Strøm, 1999). In addition, and crucially for regionalist parties, in multi-level systems such trade-offs may be significantly amplified (Deschouwer, 2003). Therefore, party strategy is here defined in a broader sense: not only as a plan designed to achieve a single objective but also as the dynamic management of the priority order between the three goals. The result of strategic decisions has, therefore, a multi-fold influence on ideological positioning: in the form of electoral marketing and/or in the form of coalition politics (and multi-party government agreements) and/or in the form of reacting to policy initiatives of competitors. In any case, whether strategies will be based on movements in the electoral demand or on movements in the electoral supply or on both, they have a direct impact on party ideological positioning (Mair *et al.*, 2004, p. 11-13).

The second way of departure from the Downsian model lies in the consideration that electoral demand is not only influenced by exogenous factors, such as the socio-economic and socio-cultural environments but is also endogenously influenced by its relationship with the electoral supply (Bartolini, 2000, p. 35-37).<sup>12</sup> Political parties,

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<sup>11</sup> As it has been pointed out, the three goals do not fully coincide in two-party systems. For instance, winning more votes than what it is necessary to get in office may come at the expense of policy preferences (Riker, 1962, p. 33).

<sup>12</sup> Bartolini goes much further, arguing that the existence of party competition itself, even in pluralist regimes, cannot be taken for granted (Bartolini, 2000). He pointed to four necessary conditions: a reasonably open regulation for entering the electoral market (contestability), a minimal share of fluctuant voters on the market, i.e. available for taking into consideration alternative choices (availability),

therefore, do not simply adapt to the electoral market but they also engage in attempts to drag voters towards their *a priori* defined ideology/policy positions. The in-depth analysis of case studies will allow investigating this complex relationship.

Thirdly, formal models of party competition consider political parties as single and monolithic actors, a very strong simplification *vis à vis* the actual working of parties (Panebianco, 1988). Scholars have, indeed, proposed more nuanced theories of party ideological change which, though recognising the explanatory power of ‘electoral Darwinism’ (Deschouwer, 1992), take into consideration the relationships between incentives and constraints coming from the external environment with the management of conflicting objectives - policy, office and votes<sup>13</sup> - and with the dynamics of internal party politics (Harmel and Janda, 1994). In this perspective, the role of party strategy as an intermediate between external environment and ideological change comes to fore.

Finally, the dynamics of party competition varies considerably depending on the voting systems and the formats of party systems. To be sure, this is not a big departure from Downs, as he too discussed the different incentives and constraints posed by multi-partyism as opposed to two-partyism. The relationship between voting systems and party systems’ formats - i.e. the number and size of parties gaining representation (Sartori, 1976) - is a highly controversial topic in political science, not only because the direction of causality is debatable (Taagepera and Shugart, 1989; Colomer, 2005), but also because the high number of variants within the former, the interaction of ‘mechanical’ and ‘psychological’ effects (Duverger, 1954), and the interfering of other factors – such as the underlying cleavage structure (Amorim Neto and Cox, 1997) - make the terms of the relationship rather uncertain. Yet, it is widely recognized that, where two-party systems exist, majoritarian voting systems tend to underpin and preserve them, while proportional representation are more permissive in translating the pluralist positions which are present in the electorate into multi-partyism (Sartori, 1994, p. 40-41). What is of interest here is that scholars have discussed the implications of these different dynamics for regionalist parties’ ideological positioning (Newman, 1997). In particular it has been argued that regionalist parties competing under majoritarian voting systems and in two party systems face an incentive to adopt

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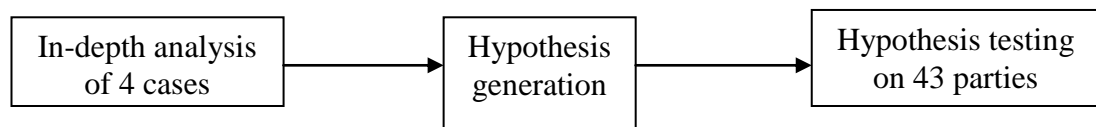
sufficient differentiation of the ideologies/policies on offer (decidability), and potential threat for incumbents to lose office at any election (vulnerability).

<sup>13</sup> Drawing on Strøm (1990) and Deschouwer (1992), Harmel and Janda include ‘intra-party democracy maximization’ as a fourth possible objective pursued by political parties (Harmel and Janda, 1994, p. 269). This is defined as the willingness to state loud and clear what party members stand for, even at the cost of electoral losses, of not getting into office and of a lack of influence on policy.

moderate positions on the left-right and radical positions on the centre-periphery dimensions. In contrast, under proportional representation and in multi-party systems, regionalist parties can choose whether to adopt radical or moderate positions on both dimensions.

#### 1.4 Research design, methodology, case-selection and data.

The research design combines in-depth analysis of and limited comparison amongst four individual regionalist parties - *Plaid Cymru* - The Party of Wales (PC), the Scottish National Party (SNP), the *Südtiroler Volkspartei* – South Tyrolean People’s Party (SVP), and the *Lega Nord* – Northern League (LN) - distributed in two Western European states, Italy and the UK, with a wider comparative analysis including the 43 most successful regionalist parties in Western Europe. In terms of time frame, the analysis of the four cases covers their entire life span, while the wider comparative analysis covers the post WWII period. The rationale of the design serves the purpose of theory building:



Charles Ragin classifies social and political research as qualitative, comparative or quantitative (Ragin, 1994). The first is characterized by in-depth research on one or few case-studies, the second compares a medium number of cases with considerable loss of information about each case, and the third is characterized by variable oriented, statistical analysis on very high number of cases. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for exploring difference and developing new theories (ibid, p. 51). The in-depth analysis of the four parties aims at understanding the cases in their complexity and to compare and contrast them in order to extract (also inductively) potentially generalizable patterns. First of all, it allows us to explore in detail the environment in which a given party acts, drawing a rather precise picture of the socio-structural, institutional, political and electoral context, as well as over-time changes in that context. At the same time, the in-depth approach permits us to escape a deterministic inference of ideological adaptation from the simple analysis of the environment. Indeed, it gives the opportunity to shed light on the interplay of different factors and on the role of

agency acting not only within, but also upon the environment. It makes it possible to appreciate the historical process, stressing the importance of the timing of events. It provides the opportunity to analyse parties as complex organizations, with their internal politics, generational change, leadership change, etc., thus paying attention to the above mentioned (non formal) theories concerning party ideological change (Panebianco, 1988; Deschouwer, 1992; Harmel and Janda, 1994). In this respect, the case study approach allows us to orientate the research also towards ‘understanding motivations’, rather than simply ‘explaining causal relations’ (Della Porta and Keating, 2008, p. 3). It gives the opportunity of investigating decision-makers’ perception of their environment and, therefore, their motives for taking certain strategic decisions rather than others: “[p]erception’ is the intermediate variable that has to be placed between objective facts and the reactions of parties” (Deschouwer, 1992, p. 17, quoted in Harmel and Janda, 1994, p. 264). Interviews conducted with politicians of the four parties, as well as their writings and internal party documents represent the best sources for grasping the perception of the decision makers and how such perception affected strategic decisions. Finally, in-depth analysis of the four parties and comparison between them give the chance to pick up certain aspects of the cases which might prove generalizable within the universe of regionalist parties but to which general theories of party change have so far devoted little attention. Indeed, an important aim of this part of the research is to generate hypotheses, either by the theoretically driven study of cases or, inductively, by the observation of patterns emerging from their comparative analysis. Some of these hypotheses can then be evaluated/tested on a much wider set of cases.

The logic behind the restricted comparison of the four cases and, therefore, behind their selection is to allow a wide exploration of the possible combinations between socio-structural and political/institutional environments, on the one hand, and party ideologies, on the other hand. The two states taken into consideration, Italy and the UK, differ in several respects. Historically, British identity was forged after the creation of the British state, while Italian identity, at least amongst elites, was the driving force for the creation of the Italian state. These different historical routes to ‘nation-statehood’ can still be observed in the predominance of the *ius sanguinis* in Italy for the attribution of citizenship, as opposed the predominance of the *ius soli* in the UK. In addition, Italy is a classic example of policephalic state, with the central and northern part of the country belonging to the medieval ‘city belt’ of Europe, while the UK is a classic example of monocephalic states, which emerged in the northern-western



periphery of (medieval) Europe. From a socio-cultural point of view, Italy has been a classic example of mono-religious Catholic (counter-Reformist) state, while the UK is an example of multi-confessional, predominantly protestant state. From a political/institutional point of view, (post WW2) Italy has been a classic example of a parliamentary regime with a rigid constitution, several veto points, proportional representation and multi-partyism. The changes to the voting system in 1993 and in 2005 have significantly affected the dynamics of party competition but have not led to the advent of single-party governments. In contrast, the UK is the classic example of a 'Westminster' parliamentary regime, with a flexible constitution, few or no veto points, majoritarian representation and a two-party system. Even in terms of policy, especially in the economic area, the two countries have diverged significantly in the last thirty years, with Italy being amongst the champions of the borrowing and spending approach while the UK led the 'neo-liberal revolution' in Western Europe. The two states have, until very recently, also been at odds on the question of European integration, in terms of both government and public opinion positions: Italy having been one of the most Europhile states and the UK often taking the lead in opposing further integration.

The four regions taken into consideration also present many differences amongst themselves. Demographically, South Tyrol represents about 1 percent of Italy's population, Wales and Scotland represent about 5 and 8 percent of UK's population respectively. In contrast, Padania (or Northern Italy) represents more than 50 percent of Italy's population. Even if only the two core regions, Lombardy and Veneto, are taken into consideration, they still represent nearly a quarter of the Italian population. In economic terms, South Tyrol produces about 1.2 percent of the national GDP and has a GDP per capita approaching 140 percent of the national average. Lombardy and Veneto produce nearly 30 percent of Italy's GDP and their GDP per capita exceeds 125 percent of the national average. In contrast, Wales has always been amongst the poorest regions in the UK reaching down to 70 percent of national average in terms of GDP per capita. Scotland has traditionally been below the national average too (though not as much as Wales), although in recent years it has reached a level of GDP per capita in line with the national average. In terms of ethno-linguistic distinctiveness, South Tyrol stands out for the presence of the German-speaking minority, which represents a strong majority within the region. South Tyrol also stands out as a contested territory between two states, Italy and Austria, thus representing a case of irredentism. Wales hosts a linguistic minority too: the Welsh-speakers. However, they only represent about a fifth of the

Welsh population. In contrast, ethno-linguistic distinctiveness is negligible in Scotland and Padania. Finally, the institutional history of the four territories is very different. Wales has never been a united and independent state. In addition it was incorporated within England in the sixteenth century and, as part of England, within the UK in the eighteenth century. In contrast, Scotland was a united and independent state until 1707, when it joined England to form the UK, and retained some institutional peculiarities within the union. South Tyrol was for centuries part of Austria, within which it maintained a degree of self-government, before it was annexed by Italy in 1919. Padania has never existed as a united and independent state. It has always been fragmented and some of its regions fell, in some periods, under foreign (i.e. non Italic) rule. The two core regions, Lombardy and Veneto, were united under Austrian rule from 1815 to 1859 and 1866 respectively, when they were annexed into the newly formed Italian state. In spite of all these differences amongst the two states and the four regions, the two couples of regions belonging to the same state present some similarities, especially in economic terms. The multiple possible comparisons – cross-regional, cross-national and cross-regional/intra-national – allow, therefore, the opportunity of extrapolating different insights from the analysis of the four cases.

Data concerning this part of the study have been gathered from different sources. Priority was given to primary sources: party documents, interviews, publications by top party members, opinion polls, election studies and newspapers' articles. However, previous academic publications have also been precious sources, especially for analysing less recent periods of parties' histories. Party ideology and ideological change was evaluated on the basis of party documents (primarily but not exclusively party manifestos), public speeches of leaders or prominent members, polls and electoral studies, extant literature and interviews. It is worth re-stating that the present study does not rely on formal models of party competition and it is not interested in quantitative measurement of ideological positioning. What is of interest here is discerning ideological repositioning within the party systems these actors are competing in. Ordinal positions *vis à vis* their competitors, therefore, are more important than cardinal ones, and qualitative thresholds – such as the distinction between secession and autonomy, between radical and mainstream left (or right), between pro and against further European integration – are sufficient to chart significant party ideological change. Secondary literature and opinion polls have been used to draw a picture of the environments in which these four parties act, both in socio-structural and

institutional/political terms. Interviews, publications by party leaders and top party members, internal party documents and newspaper articles were crucial to grasp the perception of the environment and the logic of the strategic responses adopted by party elites, as well as the dynamics of internal party politics which accompanied such strategic decisions.

The last chapter is devoted to comparative analysis with a higher number of cases for the identification of broad patterns (Ragin, 1994, p. 51). As mentioned before, the generation of hypotheses comes from the comparative analysis of the four cases, while the evaluation/testing is carried out by extending the comparison to 43 parties acting in 26 regions and 7 different Western European states, with the list of cases presented in the last chapter. Suffice here to say that they were selected on the basis of their electoral success. More precisely only regionalist parties – that is to say those parties which fall within the definition provided above (including the few border-line cases) – that have fulfilled the following criteria in the post WWII period have been selected: a) electing representatives to the regional assembly on, at least, three consecutive occasions; b) in the case of new parties that have not contested three regional elections yet, the criterion is either electing representatives on two occasions or getting into office (at regional level) at the first election; c) in the cases where an elected regional assembly does not exist (or did not exist in the past), the criterion is electing representatives to the central parliament. Electoral relevance, as far as the selection of the 43 cases is concerned, is not defined, therefore, in terms of Sartorian relevance in the party system.<sup>14</sup> What is of interest here is that the selected parties have been successful enough to be sensitive to the electoral driver of party competition. Indeed, as discussed in the previous section, one of the two logics that are used in order to reach general conclusions is represented by Downs' approach, which sees ideology as adapting strategically to the conditions of the electoral environment. This approach obviously entails a strong loss of complexity, which is almost inevitable if generalization has to be achieved.

One problem is represented by the difficulty of gathering quantitative data on the socio-economic and socio-cultural attitudes of the 26 regional electorates. These data do exist but just for some of the regions. In addition, they are dispersed and available in different languages. Therefore, while the collection of this kind of data

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<sup>14</sup> Sartori's definition of relevance rests on the 'coalitional' or 'blackmail' potential of parties in the party system, i.e. it strictly related to conditions for government formation (Sartori, 1976, p. 121-24).

should be carried out in the future, possibly as a collective enterprise of country (or region) experts, a different approach has been adopted here. The regions have been classified in terms of their ethnic distinctiveness, institutional history and economic status using secondary sources as well as OECD regional statistics. As specified in the previous section, the link between the macro-characteristics of the regions and the preferences of their electorates lies in the tradition of comparative historical sociology (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Case studies on the specific parties, edited collections and comparative studies constitute the main source for discerning the ideological positioning of the 43 parties.

The technique used for hypothesis testing is rather rudimentary, as it consists of a series of cross tabulations accompanied by a discussion of emerging (or non emerging) patterns, as well as a discussion of specific cases either because they fit some patterns particularly well, therefore become 'paradigmatic', or because of their deviance from such patterns. However, in spite of the rudimentary technique adopted for the comparative analysis, this study reaches interesting conclusions which: a) confirm some of the findings of previous research, b) qualify and refine other previous findings, c) provide a systematization of the state of the art, d) point out new insights and move our theoretical and comparative knowledge of regionalist parties' ideological positioning forward.

## **Chapter 2.**

### ***Plaid Cymru – The Party of Wales***

Plaid Cymru is an old party, born in the inter-war period. Although from the very beginning it aimed to represent the whole of Wales, thus characterizing itself as a regionalist party, until the early 1960s it was first and foremost an ethnic party, primarily concerned with the protection of the Welsh language and electorally confined to the Welsh speaking areas of Wales. To be sure, the strong link between PC and the use of the Welsh language has never disappeared, as the electoral geography of the party clearly demonstrates. Yet, the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) in 1999 has definitely contributed to make PC a truly Wales-wide party.

The early 1960s also marked the start of a permanent and primary focus on electoral politics. It is from that period, therefore, that the party's ideological development started to respond to electoral strategies and, hence, to the social and electoral environment of Wales, whereas in the previous period it had mainly depended on the personal convictions of its prominent figures, almost independently of electoral considerations. Since then, especially as far as the left-right dimension is concerned, the party appears to have adopted a 'fitter' ideological position *vis a vis* the Welsh environment.

With Wales making up less than 5 percent of the UK population, the core of the party's activities is definitely the regional and then, some way behind, the local level. This is also confirmed by the 'dual voting' which rewards PC in Welsh elections and penalizes it in general elections. The establishment of the NAW has also introduced the possibility of multi-party or minority governments with consequent governmental agreements amongst parties, thus adding another driver of ideology/policy adaptation. After the 2007 Welsh elections the party entered office for the first time as a junior partner with Welsh Labour.

### **2.1. Party Profile: Origins and Political Achievements**

#### **2.1.1 The historical origins of the centre/periphery cleavage in Wales**

The ancient roots of the centre-periphery cleavage in Wales date back to the Anglo-Saxon invasion and occupation of (most parts of) Britain. The Britons, under the pressure of the Germanic invaders moved westward, remaining confined in three

enclaves relatively isolated from each other: Cornwall in the south-west, Cumbria and Strathclyde in the north-west, and the west peninsula of Wales. The Britons, who spoke Brythonic, a Celt language, were called ‘the strangers’ by the Saxon (W(e)alas or Welsh), whereas they called themselves ‘Y Cymry’, that is ‘the compatriots’ in Brythonic (Davies, 1982, p. 112).<sup>15</sup> Probably due to its geographical characteristics, Wales remained the most resistant enclave to Anglo-Saxon political and cultural penetration. Offa’s Dyke, built in the late eighth century, represented for centuries the territorial divide between the Welsh kingdoms, on one side, and the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, on the other side (Dodd, 1977, p. 1). The fact that the current ‘border’ between Wales and England coincide to a very large extent with it, testifies to the importance of the pre-Norman period in understanding the genesis of the centre-periphery cleavage. However, to speak of a national Welsh identity in the middle ages, intended as a sense of belonging to the people living in Wales, would be misleading. At that time, the Welsh freemen were divided between a local identity, a sense of belonging to the *gwlad* (‘local community’, at those times coinciding with a local kingdom or part of it), and a pan-Briton identity. The latter, not only included the other Brythonic enclaves of their time, but referred to the pre-Saxon, and even to pre-Roman, historical periods when the ancient Britons were the masters of Britain (Williams, 1979, p. 5). This *ante litteram* ‘British identity’ of the Welsh, which was maintained by the historical/mythological literature portraying them as the lawful landlords of Britain, became soon evident to the new Norman invaders. According to the author of a fourteenth-century biography of Edward II:

The Welsh, formerly called the Britons, were once noble crowned over the whole realm of England; but they were expelled by the Saxons and lost both the name and the kingdom. The fertile plains went to the Saxons; but the sterile and mountainous districts to the Welsh. But from the saying of the prophet Merlin they still hope to recover England. Hence it is that the Welsh frequently rebel, hoping to give effect to the prophecy. (cited in Williams, 1979, p. 11).

In fact, it was the fight against Norman invasion (starting in the late thirteenth century), the consequent capitulation to alien rule and the great revolt led by Owain Glyn Dwr (between the fourteenth and fifteenth century) which contributed to create a Welsh national identity. Historian Gwyn A. Williams argues that if “there is doubt about Welsh

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<sup>15</sup> The name ‘Cymry’ started to be widely used at the time of the Anglo-Saxon invasion but became the most commonly used only from the thirteenth century onwards, replacing the term ‘Brythoniaid’ (Britons). Both names, at least initially, referred to all Britons, not only those living the Wales’ peninsula (Davies, 1993).

consciousness, even Welsh nationalism, before the revolt, there can be none after it... Modern Wales, in short, really begins in 1410" (cited in Williams, 1979, p. 13).

However, the failure of Owain's great revolt and the annexation of Wales within the English kingdom in the following century (1535-42), with the consequent replacement of the Welsh law by the English one, ended any residual autonomy. The relative ease with which the Welsh accepted absorption into England and the lack of subsequent serious attempts to break away can be put down to three factors. First, the Welsh had proven unable to sustain military confrontation with England. Second, the coming to power of a new dynasty – the Tudors – which could be claimed (at least partially) as Welsh, made it easier to accept the London based monarchy, which was perceived no more as English but as British (Williams, 1979, p. 17). In addition to this, the Tudors' accommodating strategy, in contrast with the ruthless abuses pursued by the previous monarchs, allowed the Welsh to keep using Welsh customary laws and conceded local administration to the Welsh gentry. Thirdly, in contrast to the Irish, the Welsh came to accept religious Reformation and the break away from Roman Catholicism. In fact, through the wide diffusion of non-conformist denominations at the expense of Anglicanism between the eighteenth and the early twentieth century,<sup>16</sup> Wales regained a certain religious distinctiveness *vis a vis* its bigger neighbour. However, the abandonment of the Catholic faith meant that the national Welsh/English divide was never underpinned by the Catholic/Anglican clash that poisoned Irish/English relations (ibid, p. 18-9).

In the following three centuries, the union of England (including Wales) and Scotland, the common protestant faith, the colonial and continental (European) wars, the industrial revolution and growing demographic movements across the three countries of Britain, contributed to forge a British national identity which also encompassed the Welsh one (Colley, 1992). In addition, the political, administrative, economic and, to a lesser extent, religious and cultural assimilation of Wales into England became so marked that it led to considering the former as a mere region of the latter.<sup>17</sup>

As this brief historical outline shows, the complete integration of Wales into England was facilitated, if not determined, by the fact that Wales had never been a state. Therefore, there was no institutional legacy on which Welsh nationalism could build.

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<sup>16</sup> By the middle years of the nineteenth century, three quarters of the Welsh population had abandoned the established Church of England in favour of dissenting denominations (McAllister, 2001, p. 45).

<sup>17</sup> The nineteenth century *Encyclopaedia Britannica*'s dismissing note "For Wales see England" is particularly telling (Elis Thomas, 1991, p. 57).

Only two elements kept the centre-periphery cleavage alive, though largely dormant for a long period of time. The first element was actually something external to Wales. That is the persisting saliency of the centre-periphery question within UK politics, mainly due to the drive of Irish (and in more recent times Scottish) nationalism. The Liberal party's turn to 'Home Rule all around' in the 1880s originated primarily from pressures coming from Ireland, but it had a very important effect on Wales. It was the first time that a British party took up some of the peripheral nationalist grievances and, in Wales, this meant the first significant (re)politicization of the centre-periphery cleavage. However, by the 1920s, the decline of the Liberal party and the *de facto* dropping of the 'Home Rule' policy by the rising Labour party left the Welsh nationalist question politically unrepresented. The second element was the Welsh language, the very distinctive feature of Wales *vis a vis* England and the whole UK. Despite English penetration, the Welsh language remained widely spoken until the late nineteenth century (Jenkins, 1997). However, in the first decades of the twentieth century, growing industrialization, urbanization and military campaigns determined a sharp decline. In fact, it was the combined effect of British parties' lack of interest in the Welsh question, the recent political developments in Ireland, and the threat posed to the survival of the Welsh language that, in the mid 1920s, led a small group of nationalist to take action.

In 1924, two nationalist organizations were formed (Davies, 1983, p. 35-40). The first, a secret organisation led by Saunders Lewis and Ambrose Bebb, was created in Penarth, South Wales. This was a group of academics and intellectuals, with little or no experience of political engagement, primarily concerned with the fate of the Welsh language. The organisation was called *Mudiad Cymreig* (Welsh Movement). The second one was formed in Caernarfon, North Wales, on the initiative of travelling salesman H. R. Jones and others, such as Rev. Lewis Valentine. Although the North Wales group was also made up of people with little or no political experience, their organization was set up with the intention of creating a new political party. Indeed, it was initially called *Byddin Ymreolwyr Cymru* (Welsh Home Rule Army) but was renamed few months later *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru* (The Welsh Nationalist Party).

### **2.1.2 Party birth, electoral expansion and political achievements**

After contacts and negotiations between H. R. Jones and Saunders Lewis, a meeting was held in August 1925, at Pwllheli in North-west Wales, where the members



of *Mudiad Cymreig* joined *Plaid Genedlaethol Cymru*,<sup>18</sup> thus giving birth to a unified Welsh nationalist party (Davies, 1983, p. 61). It was decided that the leaders of the South Wales group would join the executive committee of the new party, while the leaders of the North Wales group would retain their previous party posts, with Rev. Lewis Valentine as party president, and the party headquarters remained at Caernarfon.

The first five years were decisive for the creation of a party image which proved difficult to change in the following decades. The *Mudiad Cymreig* group, whose intellectual superiority was beyond doubt, assumed the political leadership for what concerned the definition of the party ideals and, to a much lesser extent, strategies and objectives. Saunders Lewis, the party leader from 1926 to 1939 (see Table 2.1), and most of the early leadership were primarily concerned with the rescue and revitalization of the Welsh language.

Lewis was very sceptical about electoral politics, especially concerning UK general elections, as a means of pursuing the party primary objective.<sup>19</sup> His approach to political engagement, as well his ideological orientations, was rather elitist, which did not make him an ideal leader at the time of the emergence of mass electoral politics. He seemed more preoccupied with winning the intellectual argument, thus making the party act as a think-tank or a pressure group, rather than with getting support from the voters (McAllister, 2001, p. 24-5). This elitist distaste for the electoral market also meant that party ideology and policy was shaped entirely by the ideas of the party leaders, in complete disregard of voters' preferences and concerns. The primary (and for some years also exclusive) objective of making Wales a monolingual Welsh speaking region, for instance, made the party very unappealing to the non-Welsh speaking majority of Wales' population, thus creating the worst conditions for electoral expansion. In fact, from an electoral perspective, Lewis represented a crucial obstacle for the development of *Plaid Cymru*, which remained for long time *de facto* a cultural/political organization confined to the Welsh speaking areas of North-west and West Wales, rather than a real 'Wales-wide' political party. On the other hand, this approach provided the party with a social constituency, the Welsh speakers, whose votes could be targeted.

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<sup>18</sup> The party shortened its name to *Plaid Cymru* in 1945, getting rid of the heavy loaded adjective 'Genedlaethol' (nationalist), and added the English version 'The Party of Wales' only in 1998 (Van Morgan, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> He was determined to limit the party's electoral commitment to local elections in Wales. When the executive committee decided to try and contest Westminster seats too, he urged the candidates not to take up their post as MPs in case they were elected. This policy was, however, reversed in the early 1930s (Davies, 1983, p. 72).

**Table 2.1**  
**Party leaders 1925-2009**

Lewis Valentine	1925-26	President
Saunders Lewis	1926-39	President
J. E. Daniel	1939-43	President
Abi Williams	1943-45	President
Gwynfor Evans	1945-81	President
Dafydd Wigley	1981-84	President
D. Elis-Thomas	1984-91	President
Dafydd Wigley	1991-00	President and NAW group leader
Ieuan Wyn Jones	2000-03	President and NAW group leader
Dafydd Iwan	2003-06	President
Ieuan Wyn Jones	2006-	NAW group leader

Source: McAllister (2001, p. 63) up to 2000.

From the 1950s, under Evans' leadership, the party started to devote more energies and attention to contesting elections but it was only in 1962, when a separate Welsh Language Society (*Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg*) was created,<sup>20</sup> that Plaid Cymru became a 'proper' political party, fully committed to electoral politics. However, as shown in Table 2.2, general election outcomes have generally been rather frustrating, both in terms of votes and, even more, in terms of seats. Indeed, the launch of the Welsh Office by the Labour government in 1964, which constituted the first significant institutional recognition of Wales as a separate entity, can hardly be attributed to electoral pressure coming from Plaid.

In 1966, Evans managed to win a by-election in the Carmarthen constituency becoming the first Plaid's MP and the first representative of a (non Irish) minority-nationalist party to seat in Westminster. It is arguable that such unexpected election (combined with a successful by-election for the SNP in Scotland in 1967) influenced the decision of the Government in 1968 to set up the Royal Commission on the Constitution (mostly known as Kilbrandon Commission) with the aim of discussing a possible devolution reform. In any case, Evans's election gave a strong boost to party confidence in its electoral chances and led it, in the 1970 election, to contest all Westminster seats in Wales for the first time in its history. It is also arguable that, although the disproportional effects of the FPTP voting system nullified the very good performance of the 1970

<sup>20</sup> The decision to create the Welsh Language Society was urged by a dramatic appeal to save the Welsh language launched by Saunders Lewis in a radio lecture (Christiansen, 1998, p. 127).

election, when the party obtained its best pre-devolution result (11.5 of the popular vote in Wales), such electoral growth added some pressure on the still working Kilbrandon Commission.

**Table 2.2**  
**UK General Election Results in Wales, 1945-2005**

Year	Conservative		Labour		Lib Dem		Plaid Cymru	
	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
1945	22.6	4	58.5	25	14.9	6	1.1	0
1950	27.4	4	58.4	27	12.6	5	1.2	0
1951	30.8	6	60.5	27	7.6	3	0.8	0
1955	29.9	6	57.6	27	7.3	3	3.2	0
1959	32.6	7	56.5	27	5.3	2	5.2	0
1964	29.4	6	57.8	28	7.3	2	4.8	0
1966	27.8	3	60.7	32	6.3	1	4.3	0
1970	27.7	7	51.6	27	6.8	1	11.5	0
1974 (Feb)	25.9	8	46.8	24	16.0	2	10.7	2
1974 (Oct)	23.9	8	49.5	23	15.5	2	10.8	3
1979	32.2	11	47.0	21	10.6	1	8.1	2
1983	31.0	14	37.5	20	23.2	2	7.8	2
1987	29.5	8	45.1	24	17.9	3	7.3	3
1992	28.6	6	49.5	27	12.4	1	8.8	4
1997	19.6	0	54.7	34	12.4	2	9.9	4
2001	21.0	0	48.6	34	13.8	2	14.3	4
2005	21.4	3	42.7	29	18.4	4	12.6	3

Source: Van Morgan (2006); Massetti (2009b).

In the 1974 elections, despite a slight decrease of votes, Plaid elected three (in February) and then two MPs (in October). In conjunction with the startling results of the SNP in Scotland, the performance of PC pushed the Labour government to try and implement the suggestions of the Kilbrandon Commission, which had recommended limited devolution of powers to Wales. However, as shown in Table 2.3, Plaid Cymru and the ‘Yes camp’ were defeated in the 1979 referendum for the final approval of the Wales Act, suggesting a very limited capacity to pull the Welsh electorate towards endorsing its core political objectives.

Failure in the 1979 devolution referendum also negatively affected the party’s score in the general election of the same year, leading to the set up of an internal Commission of Inquiry devoted to a deep and extensive reflection on Plaid’s strategy, ideology and policy. After two decades of increasing commitment to electoral politics,

Plaid had taken full awareness that party strategy, ideology and policy could not be developed independently of the electoral market.

In the 1980s the party managed to hold onto its heartland constituencies in spite of overall electoral decline. In 1987 Plaid Cymru entered into an alliance with the Scottish National Party, with the hope that in a hung Parliament a group of 'Celtic' nationalist could play an influential role in government formation. A hung parliament has never materialized since but the co-operation of the Welsh and Scottish nationalist MPs has remained to the present day. Instead, the main political success of the 1980s came from extra-electoral activities. In 1981, after Evans had threatened to starve himself to death, the Conservative government agreed to establish a Welsh-language TV channel (Christiansen, 1998, p. 128).

The 1990s witnessed a slight increase in electoral support and more importantly the major political achievement of the party, the establishment of a National Assembly for Wales (NAW) with secondary legislative powers in specified policy areas.<sup>21</sup> Once again, it would be hard to argue that the Labour government's initiative to establish an elected regional government in Wales was dictated by electoral pressure from Plaid. The very narrow victory (see Table 2.3) in the 1997 referendum on the government bill testifies to the fact that the Welsh electorate was not solidly won over to the argument of Wales' self-government, Plaid's core mission.

However, the establishment of the NAW with a slightly more proportional voting system<sup>22</sup> (compared to the traditional FPTP), has changed completely the opportunity structure in which the party operates, creating for the first time a 'Wales-wide' and 'Wales alone' arena for party politics, and thus leading to the emergence of a real Welsh party system (Masseti, 2009b). In NAW elections Plaid Cymru has had the chance to present itself as the only party that 'has no bosses in London' and, therefore, the best uncompromising defender of Welsh interests. This favourable condition has helped it achieve a much higher score in NAW elections (see Table 2.4) than in Westminster ones.

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<sup>21</sup> These are Agriculture, Monuments, Culture, Economic development, Education, Environment, food, Health Services, Transport, Local Government, Public Administration, Social Welfare, Sport, Tourism, Urban and rural planning, and the Welsh Language.

<sup>22</sup> The Assembly is made of sixty members (AMs). Forty are elected in FPTP constituency, which correspond to the forty Westminster constituencies. Twenty are elected from party lists in regional districts (5), so to compensate for the disproportional allocation of the FPTP vote. The voting system is therefore a case of Mixed Member Proportional (MMP), also called Additional Member System (AMS).

**Table 2.3**  
**Devolution referendum results in Wales (1979 and 1997)**

	<i>% of those who voted</i>		<i>% of the whole electorate</i>		<i>Turn out</i>
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
<b>1979</b>	20.3	<u>79.7</u>	12	47	59
<b>1997</b>	<u>50.3</u>	49.7	25.2	24.9	50.1

**Table 2.4**  
**Welsh Assembly Election Results**

	<i>Constituencies</i>		<i>Regional lists</i>		<i>Total</i>
	Vote (%)	Seats	Vote (%)	Seats	Seats
<b>1999</b>					
Conservative	15.8	1	16.5	8	9
Labour	37.6	27	35.5	1	28
Liberal Democrats	13.5	3	12.5	3	6
Plaid Cymru	28.4	9	30.6	8	17
Others	4.8	0	5.0	0	0
<b>2003</b>					
Conservative	19.9	1	19.2	10	11
Labour	40.0	30	36.6	0	30
Liberal Democrats	14.1	3	12.7	3	6
Plaid Cymru	21.2	5	19.7	7	12
Others	4.8	1	11.8	0	1
<b>2007</b>					
Conservative	22.4	5	21.4	7	12
Labour	32.2	24	29.6	2	26
Liberal Democrats	14.8	3	11.7	3	6
Plaid Cymru	22.4	7	21.0	8	15
Others	8.2	1	16.3	0	1

Source: Massetti (2009b).

After the first NAW election in 1999, Plaid emerged as the formal opposition party, well ahead of the Conservatives and Liberal-Democrats. For the first time its electoral support also spread to South Wales, where it won constituency seats, such as Rhondda and Llanelli, that Labour had held for about eight decades (Scully *et al.*, 2003). In 2003, however, Plaid lost votes and seats, largely retreating again to its geographical stronghold (Wyn Jones and Scully, 2003).

**Table 2.5**  
**Local Election Results, 1973-2008**

	Con		Lab		Lib Dem		Plaid		Indep/Other	
Year	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
County 1973	12.5	12.0	37.3	48.1	5.3	3.5	9.7	3.1	35.2	33.3
District 1973	11.0	9.1	33.9	42.0	4.5	2.6	9.1	3.2	41.4	43.1
District 1976	15.0	14.6	29.1	29.0	4.9	2.6	14.8	8.2	36.1	45.6
County 1977	22.0	24.4	32.3	34.0	3.8	1.9	16.1	6.8	25.9	32.9
District 1979	18.6	12.8	37.0	38.5	4.2	2.6	11.2	4.6	29.0	41.5
District 1983	16.3	13.0	34.8	41.6	12.9	4.1	9.9	4.7	26.1	36.6
County 1985	15.2	9.1	45.2	53.3	12.9	6.5	8.6	3.6	18.1	27.5
District 1987	14.1	10.1	37.0	40.2	15.0	6.1	8.7	6.4	25.1	37.2
County 1989	16.5	7.3	46.0	55.4	7.3	4.4	8.8	5.1	21.4	27.7
District 1991	13.3	7.6	38.1	41.7	9.4	5.5	11.2	8.3	28.0	36.8
County 1993	12.5	6.4	47.1	54.2	10.9	6.8	13.3	8.2	16.2	24.5
Unitary 1995	8.1	3.3	43.6	57.1	10.2	6.2	12.5	8.9	25.5	24.5
Unitary 1999	10.1	5.9	34.4	44.3	13.4	7.7	18.2	16.1	23.8	25.9
Unitary 2004	9	8.6	38	37.9	12	11.7	14	13.6	28	28.1
Unitary 2008	n.d	13.9	n.d	27.2	n.d	12.9	n.d	16.3	n.d	29.6

Source: Van Morgan (2006) for the data between 1973 and 1999. For the 2004 and 2008 election results, House of Commons, "Local Election 2004", Library Research paper 04/49, and "Local election 2008", Library Research paper 08/48 available respectively at:

[www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2004/rp04-049.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2004/rp04-049.pdf)

[www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2008/rp08-048.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2008/rp08-048.pdf)

**Table 2.6**  
**European Election Results in Wales**

	Conservative		Labour		Lib Dem		Plaid Cymru	
Year	Votes	Seat	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats
1979	36.6	1	41.5	3	9.6	0	11.7	0
1984	25.4	1	44.5	3	17.4	0	12.2	0
1989	23.4	0	48.9	4	3.6	0	12.9	0
1994	14.6	0	55.9	5	8.7	0	17.1	0
1999	22.8	1	31.9	2	8.2	0	29.6	2
2004	19.4	1	32.5	2	10.5	0	17.4	1
2009	21.2	1	20.3	1	10.7	0	18.5	1

Source: Van Morgan (2006) and [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/vote2004/euro\\_uk/html/20.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/vote2004/euro_uk/html/20.stm)

The NAW voting system has also opened the way to coalition and/or minority governments, meaning that Labour is not the only party able get into office and/or to shape legislation. The opportunity for Plaid to enter a government coalition materialised

after the third NAW election in 2007, when the party recovered both votes and seats, including the South Wales constituency seat of Llanelli. Initially, the party negotiated an agreement with the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats to form a rainbow-coalition government, ousting Labour for the first time. However, such a plan did not work out and Plaid decided to accept Labour's proposal to form a sort of 'grand coalition'. As a result, the party finds itself in office for the first time, with the leader Ieuan Wyn Jones acting as Deputy First Minister and Minister of the Economy and Transport, plus two other ministers in the Welsh executive (Alun Ffred Jones and Elin Jones, respectively at Heritage and Rural Affairs).

The establishment of the NAW in 1999 appears to have boosted Plaid's electoral performances in the other electoral arenas. In 2001 the party scored its best result ever in UK general elections, with 14.3% of votes in Wales and four elected MPs (see table 2.2). In the 1999 local elections, as shown in Table 2.5, Plaid obtained 18.2% of votes and 16.1% of all councillors in Wales. Although the party has always attributed great importance to local elections and had always done slightly better in those than in general elections, that was the best result ever. In addition, 1999 was a great year for European elections too. For the first time the election of members of the European Parliament in the UK was to be made by proportional representation. As Table 2.6 shows, Plaid's result was astonishingly good, capturing 29.6% of votes and two MEPs. While in the most recent elections the party did considerably worse than in 1999 at all level of government (with the exception of local elections 2008), its electoral support remains well above of the pre-devolution period.

Beyond the opportunity to enhance its electoral fortunes and get into office, the establishment of the NAW provided an institutional driver for Welsh nationalism and identity. In addition, the presence of an Assembly allows for an incremental strategy in the pursuit of further objectives. Indeed, the Labour-Plaid government agreement included the call of a referendum to enhance the legislative powers of the Assembly, so to make it *de facto* a regional Parliament. The process would not require a vote in Westminster because the UK government passed a New Wales Act in 2006, which set out the procedure for incremental devolution of powers to the Assembly. However, while Plaid appears to be in a very positive trend in terms of policy success, its electoral success will depend on its ability to challenge Labour. In this respect, having gone into a government coalition with its main competitor may prove counterproductive in purely electoral terms.

### 2.1.3 Party organization

In the early years, Saunders Lewis made a great contribution in establishing a political organisation which was completely autonomous of the established British political parties and, at least from a cultural perspective, in competition with them. From the beginning, Plaid Cymru's members could not join other parties and were not supposed to vote for other parties' candidates, even in elections where the party was not standing (McAllister, 2001, p. 25).

Lewis' 'Wales alone' and 'Welsh Wales' approach contributed to give the new party a characterising outlook which distinguished it clearly from the 'British' parties. However, it also created a sort of 'red line' which made expansion beyond Welsh speaking areas of Wales difficult. As Table 2.7 shows, party membership remained extremely low in the first five years. However, the launch of a new party journal in English (*The Welsh Nationalist*) in 1932 (*ibid*), together with increased visibility due to direct action,<sup>23</sup> helped the party increase its membership and expand its organization territorially.

For a party whose most important source of revenue has always been membership income, increasing the number of fee-paying members was crucial for stabilizing its financial situation. Yet, there has often been considerable laxity in collecting fees from members. This issue was addressed several times during the party's history. In 1964, under the leadership of Gynfor Evans, there was a reform of the system which produced a significant improvement (Christiansen, 1998, p. 139). Other reforms were attempted in order to make the collection system more effective, particularly after the suggestions outlined in Report of the Plaid Cymru Commission of Inquiry (1981), but the overall results were limited and temporary. In 2004, the party finally decided to tackle the problem by moving to a system of direct debit payment, with considerable beneficial effects for the party financial stability. Plaid Cymru still relies almost exclusively on membership fees and small donations, with virtually no funds coming from businesses or unions (interview with then Chief Executive Dafydd Trystan Davies, Cardiff, 01/12/06). Under Saunders Lewis' leadership, the party worked very much as a top-down organization, where the leaders/intellectuals held lectures in party summer schools to 'educate' the followers on the case for Welsh nationalism.

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<sup>23</sup> The most famous action was the attack in 1936 to the RAF Penyberth air base, which had just been built in the heart of Welsh speaking Wales.



**Table 2.7**  
**Number of party branches and membership**

<i>Year</i>	<i>N. of branches</i>	<i>Membership</i>
1925		120
1930		500
1933	58	
1939	119	3,750
1945	150	6,050
1964	241	2,199*
1970	300	40,000
1985	100	
1992	180	7,000
1995		10,000
1999	220	16,000
2006	210	8,000*

*Source:* Davies (1983, p. 270), McAllister, (1981, p. 248), McAllister (2001, p. 97), and interview with D. Trystan Davies (Cardiff, 01/12/06).

\*Only fee-paying members counted.

However, the organizational structure which emerged from the 1930s<sup>24</sup> onwards was very decentralised, offering party members plenty of autonomy in the local branches' administration and, at least potentially, a significant say in the policy making process. This grassroots ethos has remained a characteristic of the party to the present day, carrying important consequences for the way the party has reacted to changing external conditions and how it has been affected by waves of incoming new members in particular periods.

The formal organizational structure of the party, despite several reforms carried out during its long history, has remained largely the same. The Branches constitute the primary level of the organization. Their territorial dimension has changed several times, mainly after the drawing and re-drawing of local election districts. At present, they should be coterminous with the boundaries of Unitary Authority electoral wards but, in fact, there are many exceptions to this general rule (interview with D. Trystan Davies, Cardiff, 01/12/06). The Branches, which at present time are formed by a minimum of ten members, are responsible for the party activities within their area. They are grouped within the boundaries of the electoral constituency and report to the Constituency

<sup>24</sup> The Annual Conference became the supreme venue for policy making in 1933. Until then, it was the Executive Committee that drafted party policy (Davies, 1983, p. 85).

Committees. The latter, currently based on the forty Westminster/Assembly single member districts, coordinate the activities of Branches, run the electoral campaign in their area and are involved in the candidate selection process. Beyond the Constituencies and the national bodies there also are Local Government Area Committees and the Regional Electoral Area Committees. The latter coordinate electoral activities in the five regional districts for the additional members elected in the Assembly by party list.

The three main collective bodies at national level are the Executive Committee, the National Council and the Annual Conference. The latter is normally held once a year and it is where all party constituencies are represented. Its most important functions are the approval of party policies and the election/confirmation of national party officers. The National Council implements the decisions that the Conference has taken. It is responsible for determining the party strategy and tactics, and for deciding on the membership of the National Policy Forum. In addition it also gives the final approval for party manifestos. The Executive Committee is the operative organ of the party. It manages party organization and finances, coordinates all party officers elected by the Conference, and organizes and directs the electoral campaigns for UK and Wales elections. It is worth noting that the professionalization of electoral campaigns has been a very recent process for Plaid Cymru, which has always used its internal staff. In the Welsh Assembly election of 2007 the party, for the first time, relied significantly on external agencies (interview to D. Trystan Davies, cit.).

The most important national officers of the party are the party leader, the Treasurer, the Director of Policy, the Director of Elections, the Director of Organization and the Director of Communication. As shown in Table 2.1, the leader has traditionally been the person elected to the post of president of the party. However, in 2006 the constitution was changed in order to designate the group leader in the National Assembly for Wales as the overall party leader and to reduce the role of the president (interview to D. Trystan Davies, cit.).

The policy process within Plaid Cymru is rather open and inclusive. All organs of the party, including individual branches and constituencies, can submit motions to the conference, and the designated committee is prone to admit most proposed motions in the conference agenda. However, since Plaid became the official opposition party in the Welsh Assembly in 1999 and then a government partner in 2007, the leadership has tended to exercise more control over policy making. In particular, the shadow or actual NAW ministers play a significant role in shaping policies in their respective areas. A

National Policy Forum has been set up, which works closely with the director of policy and with the party (shadow or actual) ministers, and often policy proposals are also discussed in the National Council. Nonetheless, involvement of the party rank and file remains comparatively high, including in the way the manifesto is created. Party members in the branches and constituencies are likely to see two or three drafts of the manifesto and to feed back on them before the central bodies come up with the final version (interview with D. Trystan Davies, cit.).

## **2.2. Party Ideology and Policy: The Centre-Periphery Dimension**

### **2.2.1 The Legacy of the Inter-War Period**

The centre-periphery cleavage has been Plaid's *raison d'être* since its birth throughout its history. From the very beginning Plaid has worked at professing, justifying, encouraging and enhancing Wales' distinctiveness and separateness *vis a vis* England (and the whole UK). As a consequence the core of the party ideology lies in the territorial dimension. In particular, as the original name (Welsh Nationalist Party) underscores, Plaid was born a (minority-)nationalist party and, despite the fact that in particular periods it shied away from using the word 'nationalist' (or 'nationalism'), it has remained a nationalist party throughout its history (McAllister, 2001, p. 21). However, Plaid's nationalism needs to be qualified. The party has always professed that the Welsh people and Wales, as a defined territory, constitute a distinct 'nation'. Yet, while identifying one people and its 'natural' territory as a 'nation' represents one of the necessary pillars of the nationalist ideology, this, at least in its classic nineteenth century version, is completed by a second pillar, which is the idea that each nation shall be provided with an independent state. This second pillar, which can be labelled the 'constitutional element' of nationalism, has largely remained in the shadow in the case of Plaid Cymru, either overlooked or ambiguously phrased.

Once again, the origins of such ambiguity can be traced back to the early years and to the legacy of Saunders Lewis. Being first of all a poet and a writer, Lewis' ideas of nationalism were strongly influenced by early nineteenth century German and Italian 'romanticism', where the language, the music, the history, the 'civilization' and the natural landscape of the nation were celebrated as its most important constituents, leaving aside the much less poetic constitutional element. Such a 'romantic' version of nationalism, strongly focused on the issue of the Welsh language, meant that institutional

self-government for Wales was not a priority for the party. Actually, during the first five years there was no mention about any sort of self-government on party membership forms (Davies, 1983, p. 82). The party aimed to achieve “just as much freedom as may be necessary to establish and safeguard civilization in Wales” (Plaid Cymru, quoted in McAllister, 2001, p. 128). Such lack of policy definition can be partially explained as a consequence of a general strategy aimed at avoiding both internal divisions and a sort of sectarianism from the beginning. Lewis felt, even before the creation of Plaid Cymru, that a new political movement should be a ‘broad church’, capable of attracting people with different views: “Adopting a definite policy would tie us down before we start work” (Lewis, 1923, quoted in McAllister, 2001, p. 24). However, he was also convinced that the socio-cultural element of nationalism was far more important than the constitutional one. As he himself put it, if it were possible to safeguard the language and culture of Wales “without any radical change in the relation of England and Wales, then I for my part will be content” (ibid.). In a way, Plaid’s variety of nationalism reflected the history of the nation. Wales had never existed as a state. It had been for many centuries the ‘residue’ of kingdoms that were formed in Britain by new invaders, until it was conquered and embodied in the Kingdom of England. It is not surprising, therefore, that Welsh nationalism manifested a certain anti-state, sometimes even anarchic, twist: “Nationalism is the defence of the individual soul against the oppression of the centralist, imperialist state” (Lewis, 1935, quoted in Davies, 1983, p. 59). In fact, from a constitutional perspective, the early years of Plaid Cymru represented a step back, even compared to the ‘Home Rule’ policy of the Liberal party of the late nineteenth century (and of the Labour party in the first decades of the twentieth century).

It was the drive of electoral politics, although in the very limited form of contesting only one Westminster seat in the 1929 general election, that stimulated the party to formulate a policy on its constitutional objective. Rev. Valentine, the party candidate, fought the election on a platform very short of detail, to say the least. During the campaign it tried to widen his blueprint by adding the vague expressions ‘Free Wales’ and ‘Home Rule’ to the party’s primary slogan ‘Welsh Wales’ (Davies, 1983, p. 83). However, the disastrous election results (only 609 votes obtained) triggered debate on the adoption of a clearer policy stance. Internal discussions mainly concerned whether the party should ask for devolution, a choice that would implicitly recognise Westminster as the only source of legitimate power, or ‘Dominion status’, which would set the party on a moderately sovereigntist course. The option of outright ‘independence’ also had

some supporters within Plaid but since the time of first summer school it had been banned by Lewis from the party's vocabulary for being an anti-Christian, materialist and ultimately dangerous concept (Davies, 1983, p. 82). Lewis nationalist ideas drew inspiration from the medieval past, characterized by inter-dependence rather 'independence', by 'unity in diversity' rather than separation amongst homogeneous parts. However, they were also very contemporary, in that they took very seriously the attempt to create an international umbrella by the establishment of the League of Nations, and even forward-looking if one thinks about global international co-operation and European integration in the post-World War Two period.

The new party policy was adopted in the run up to the 1931 general election. Plaid asked for Wales to be given 'Dominion status', following the examples of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the Irish Free State. This should have been achieved by the establishment of a Welsh Parliament with full legislative, administrative and financial powers. Wales would remain loyal to the monarchy and to the Commonwealth, recognising the right of the crown to control matters relating to imperial defence. 'Dominion status for Wales' headed the new list of party aims, with the protection of Welsh language following suit. The third point was an important corollary of the self-government policy, as it stated that Wales should have become a member of the League of Nations (Davies, 1983, p. 84). The crisis of the League of Nations in the late 1930s, in fact, triggered some internal criticism directed at the party policy position on self-government, and calling for a more radical stance. However, the policy remained unchanged (Davies, 1983, p. 85).

### **2.2.2 From Dominion status to the Welsh Senate (1940s-1980s)**

In taking over the party leadership in 1945, Gynfor Evans inherited the 'dominion status' policy which had been designed in the early 1930s. From an ideological perspective the party had not elaborated beyond the core concept of nationalism. At best, the 1930s had brought about some reflections and rudimentary policy formulations on the economic and constitutional elements of nationalism, thus completing the cultural and linguistic focus of the 1920s. Yet, Plaid's outlook had remained, and would remain until well into 1960s, that of a party caring almost exclusively about the Welsh language (McAllister, 2001, p. 159).

Evans also inherited a party whose reputation had been discredited by Bebb and Lewis' positions on the Fascist regimes in Europe and on UK's foreign policy in the run

up to and during World War Two.<sup>25</sup> Even perhaps more importantly, the association of Hitler's *lebensraum* creed with nationalism, made the latter word very unpopular for several decades after World War Two. It was not by chance that the party decided to get rid of the adjective 'Glenedaethol' (nationalist) in its formal name in 1945. The cosmetic change, however, did not help much, at least in the short term, and advocating the cause of Welsh nationalism proved extremely difficult in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Still in 1969, a party pamphlet devoted the opening pages to drawing a distinction between oppressive nationalism, such as Nazi Germany's, and freedom-seeking nationalism, carefully explaining the differences between the two kinds and emphasising that the Welsh variety belonged entirely to the latter (Plaid Cymru, *This is Plaid Cymru*, 1969, p. 3). Actually, the issue of whether it was appropriate and/or convenient to refer to the party as 'nationalist' went on well into the 1980s, when the then party leader Dafydd Elis Thomas (1984-1991) made a declaration which probably sounded as scandalous to the 'traditionalist' members of the party: "I will never let anyone get away with calling me a 'nationalist' and I will never call myself that, if I ever did" (Elis Thomas, quoted in McAllister, 2001, p. 78).

While Evans' long leadership (1945-1981) produced decisive change in terms of improving the party organization and focusing on electoral politics, the party elaboration of the centre-periphery dimension both in ideological and policy terms showed substantive continuity with the inter-war period. Like Lewis, Evans saw the nation as a living organic creature which evolves through history and needs to be kept alive by ensuring cultural continuity. Even though in the 1960s the 'Welsh Wales' policy was formally dropped in favour of a 'bilingual Wales', the centrality of the Welsh language in Evans' nationalist ideology implicitly entailed that it was only the Welsh speaking Welsh (not the English speaking Welsh) who contributed to keep the nation alive. That might explain why his reform of the party machine and his focus on winning elections led Plaid Cymru to considerably strengthen its electoral support in the Welsh speaking areas but it proved unable to make significant gains in South and East Wales. Even from the constitutional perspective, the party continued with the same policy developed in 1931 until well into the 1970s, with the only stylistic difference that it was now phrased 'self-

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<sup>25</sup> Bebb had manifested some sympathies for conservative-authoritarian regimes, such as Italian Fascism and Spanish Falangism, though not for the 'pagan' German Nazism. Lewis viewed the conflict not as one between democracy (UK and France) vs. authoritarianism (Germany) but as one between competing empires. Therefore, he professed that Welsh nationalists should not feel morally compelled to take sides and that neutrality was the best option (Davies, 1983).

government for Wales within the Commonwealth' (Plaid Cymru: *20 Questions&Answers*, no date, between 1970 and 1972). Actually, as far as membership forms were concerned, the adopted formula was even more elusive, stating that the party's first aim was simply "Self-government for Wales" (Plaid Cymru, *Membership Form*, between 1970 and 1980, no date).

However Evans' focus on electoral politics did produce some change in the sense that Plaid's nationalism and its policy proposals for constitutional change were now included in a wider party programme which outlined in much greater detail the proposals in all areas of government. In particular, more attention was devoted to socio-economic issues, not only to defend the cause of Welsh self-government from an economic perspective but also to propose solutions to immediate problems, independently of constitutional change. In addition, electoral strategy, more than party beliefs, seemed to dictate the priorities, at least in terms of communicating the party programme to the electorate. For instance, in the 39-page long manifesto for the 1970 general election, the national language<sup>26</sup> issue came only at page 31 and the constitutional policy followed at page 33, whereas the first 30 pages were entirely devoted to socio-economic matters (Plaid Cymru, *Action for Wales*, 1970).

The debate on the constitutional policy was revitalized both within and outside the party by the report of the Kilbrandon Commission, which had been set up in 1968. The majority report, presented in October 1973, recommended a directly elected Welsh Assembly with limited powers, so as to preserve "the political and economic unity of the United Kingdom" (quoted in McAllister, p. 131). For the first time, therefore, Plaid found itself in a position where discussions about constitutional change were not only based on wishful thinking or on the ideal preferences of party members but on a plan which had some realistic chance of being carried through. When the Wales Act was passed in 1978 with the provision that a referendum was needed to make it come into effect, the discussion with Plaid Cymru had to narrow down to whether the party intended to support a 'yes' or a 'no' vote. The need to operate such a 'either or' choice proved extremely difficult for a party that had maintained internal unity through ambiguous formulations of its aims. Eventually the leadership decided to join the Labour-led 'Yes' campaign but such a choice created an unprecedented level of dissent within the party (ibid., p. 132).

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<sup>26</sup> It is telling that still in 1970, in spite of the formal 'bilingual Wales' policy, the party still referred to Welsh as the 'national language', implicitly meaning that English was not.

The results of the referendum represented a heavy blow for the party's aspirations of self-government. As Table 2.8 shows, support for the Assembly was just above 20% in the whole of Wales and remained below 35% even in the Welsh speaking areas, such as Gwynedd and Dyfed.

**Table 2.8**  
**1979 Referendum results by council areas**

<i>Council Area</i>	<i>Yes %</i>	<i>No %</i>
Clwyd	12.1	87.9
Dyfed	28.1	71.9
Gwynedd	34.4	65.6
Gwent	12.1	87.9
Glamorgan (Mid)	20.2	79.8
Glamorgan (North)	13.1	86.9
Glamorgan (West)	18.7	81.3
Powys	18.7	81.3
Wales	20.3	79.7

In the wake of such a debacle, Plaid set up an internal Commission of Inquiry which, in two years, produced a majority and a minority report on the ideological, strategic and organizational challenges that the party had to address if it was to recover its credibility. As far as the constitutional policy was concerned, the minority report, drafted by Phil Williams, urged the party to decide whether it wanted “to work to win a better deal for the Welsh people within the existing framework” or if it was “totally determined to end English rule” (quoted in McAllister, p. 136). In this respect, the majority report appeared to lean towards the second option, as it warned the party against the risk of jeopardising the achievement of radical constitutional changes by accepting compromises: “If, by...forcing concessions at parliamentary level, we get the present system to work more in harmony with the needs of Wales..., we are in effect strengthening the system of government that we seek to replace.” (ibid, p. 135). However, the report did not say how a party which had been unable to convince more than 12% of the Welsh voters to accept limited devolution would be able to push through a radical replacement of the UK's constitutional structure. In fact, the leaders of the 1980s, Dafydd Wigley (1981-1984) and Dafydd Elis Thomas (1984-1991), did not take the above considerations too seriously. The former, who ironically enough was a member of the Commission himself and signed



the majority report, argued that Plaid Cymru “had to fight not only for self-government for Wales but also for the best possible deal for the people of Wales” (Wigley, 1981, quoted in McAllister, 1983 p. 135). Yet, Plaid’s 1983 general election manifesto was the most radical one of its pre-devolution history as, for the first time, the party asked explicitly for Wales to have her “own Welsh state” (Plaid Cymru, *The Only Alternative*, Manifesto 1983, p. 1).

It was with the election of Elis Thomas as President that the party really refocused its position on the constitutional dimension, both in terms of ideology, strategy and policy. In his vision, Plaid Cymru had to start from the socio-economic problems that the Welsh people were facing in the mid 1980s and had to propose credible solutions for them. This implied a different ideological profile, which left the nationalist dimension in the background. As stated above, he never referred to himself or to Plaid using the word ‘nationalist’ and, according to the then vice-chair Phil Williams, Thomas’ aim was to turn Plaid into an ‘anti-nationalist’ party (Christiansen, 1998, p. 131). As a consequence, in Thomas’ approach, the party’s constitutional policy should have emerged from practical considerations regarding the powers Wales would need to in order to tackle the most immediate problems affecting the Welsh people, rather than from nationalist ideological stances. This approach led the party to adopt a *de facto* autonomist position in the 1987 election, when it asked for a Welsh “Senate firmly elected by the people of Wales and able to tackle the basic economic and social problems that we face” (Plaid Cymru, *Winning for Wales*, Manifesto 1987, p. 2). The electoral alliance with the Scottish nationalists also provided a concrete strategy to achieve the policy objective. The presence of third forces, such as Liberal Democrats, made hung parliaments a more realistic scenario during the 1980s. The manifesto went on to state that “In the event of this [SNP-PC] alliance holding the balance of power our primary aim will be to secure constitutional advance for our two countries” (ibid., p. 4).

### **2.2.3 From the National Assembly for Wales to independence (1990s and 2000s)**

Thomas’ strategic repositioning did not work out immediately, either in terms of electoral progress or in terms of policy achievements. However, the second presidency of Dafydd Wigley (1991-2000) culminated with the greatest policy success of Plaid’s history, the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales.

By 1992, attitudes within the Labour party towards devolving powers to the ‘Celtic peripheries’ had changed considerably. Despite returning an overwhelming

majority of Labour MPs to Westminster, Wales (and Scotland) had been governed by the Conservatives in London and by a Conservative Secretary of State since 1979. As a consequence, some sort of self-government for Wales (and Scotland) was not seen anymore, from Labour's perspective, as a mere concession to nationalist claims. Rather, it was included in a larger plan of constitutional modernization of the UK and was perceived as a remedy for the 'democratic deficit' suffered by the Celtic peripheries in the last thirteen years. The perpetuation of such 'democratic deficit' for another five years after the 1992 election<sup>27</sup> and the electoral growth of Plaid Cymru (and even more of the SNP in Scotland), represented a further decisive thrust for the Labour party to commit itself to devolution and to include such commitment into the 1997 election manifesto.

On Plaid's side, the wording used to address the party constitutional policy remained ambiguous and/or contradictory. Different formulas, such as self-government, a democratic Welsh state, decentralised socialism and full national status were used in the party statute, membership cards, manifestos and speeches. Wigley managed to re-unite the party under his leadership by conceding more voice to the hard-core nationalists, as the latter had been somewhat alienated during the Thomas years. However, the overall strategy remained very similar to Thomas': linking self-government to socio-economic and 'new politics' issues, so as to foster an image of 'progressive' nationalism, and setting out objectives pragmatically, on the basis of the evolving context (Christiansen, 1998, p. 131).

In 1997, the new Labour government pressed immediately for the implementation of its devolution program. The plan foresaw again a referendum to legitimise constitutional reform. Before the election, Plaid Cymru had campaigned to obtain a multi-option referendum, in which the voters would be able to express their preferences between the *status quo*, a devolved Assembly and full self-government (McAllister, p. 138). On the one hand, the inclusion of the latter option would have allowed the party to distinguish itself not only from the Conservatives, who supported the *status quo*, but also from Labour and the Liberal-Democrats, who supported devolution. It would have also appeased the hard-core nationalist fringe, which ideologically rejected the devolutionist approach, on the grounds that it implicitly recognised the 'imperial' Parliament in London as the legitimate source of power. On the other hand, splitting the pro-reform camp would have increased the chances of victory for the *status quo* side. In fact, the

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<sup>27</sup> The Conservatives unexpectedly won the 1992 UK general election because of their strong majority in England. However, they obtained less than a sixth of the Welsh and Scottish seats.

inclusion of a third, more radical option was never a real issue, as Labour was determined to give the electorate only the first two options. However, it exemplifies how the dogmatic independentist drive of a significant minority of the party could have jeopardised the most important achievement in their history. Wisely, Plaid Cymru decided to join the pro-Assembly front and to co-operate with Labour and the Liberal-Democrats in the referendum campaign.

**Table 2.9**  
**1997 Referendum results by unitary authorities**

<i>Local Authority</i>	<i>Yes %</i>	<i>No %</i>	<i>Turn out</i>
Blaenau Gwent	56.1	43.9	49.3
Bridgend	54.4	45.6	50.6
Caerphilly	54.7	45.3	49.3
Cardiff	44.4	55.6	46.9
Carmarthenshire	65.3	34.7	56.4
Ceredigion	59.2	40.8	56.8
Conwy	40.9	59.1	51.5
Denbighshire	40.8	59.2	49.7
Flintshire	38.2	61.8	41
Gwynedd	64.1	35.9	59.8
Merthyr Tydfil	58.2	41.8	49.5
Monmouthshire	32.1	67.9	50.5
Neath and Port Talbot	66.5	33.5	51.9
Newport	37.4	62.6	45.9
Pembrokeshire	42.8	57.2	52.6
Powys	42.7	57.3	56.2
Rhondda Cynon Taffs	58.5	41.5	49.9
Swansea	52	48	47.1
Torfael	49.8	50.2	45.5
Vale of Glamorgan	36.7	63.3	54.3
Wrexham	45.3	54.7	42.4
Ynys Môn	50.9	49.1	56.9
Total Wales	50.3	49.7	50.1

Source: Jowell, R., Heath, A. and J. K. Curtice (1997) *Scottish and Welsh Referendum Studies, 1997*, UKDA Study Number: 3952

[http://www.dataarchive.ac.uk/doc/3952/mrdoc/UKDA/UKDA\\_Study\\_3952\\_Information.htm](http://www.dataarchive.ac.uk/doc/3952/mrdoc/UKDA/UKDA_Study_3952_Information.htm)

The ballot boxes were opened on the 18th September, a week after the Scots had voted by an overwhelming majority in favour of the establishment of a Scottish Parliament. The drive of the Scottish vote was probably decisive as support for the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) was won by just 0.6% of votes (50.3 vs. 49.7). The results, as shown in Table 2.9, presented a highly divided nation, with Cardiff and East

Wales voting overwhelmingly against the Assembly, while Swansea and West Wales voted in favour. The closeness of the result was remarkable if one considers that, the parties supporting the 'Yes vote' represented 77% of the Welsh votes and 100% of the Welsh MPs after the May 1997 general election, the Conservatives having failed to win a single seat. It testified to the reluctance of a vast section of the Welsh electorate to accept the idea of Wales being separated from England, even in the form of limited autonomy and even after the support of Labour's elite, the traditionally dominant party and now a very popular government.

However, the narrow victory gave Wales its own elected Assembly and, with it, a separate political arena. This constituted a crucial turning point for Plaid Cymru in terms of political opportunity structure. First, in the medium/long term the presence of the Assembly could represent an institutional drive for Welsh nationalism, helping to consolidate a Welsh identity and to win support for the idea of Welsh self-government. Secondly, a Wales-wide and Wales-only political/electoral venue represented the ideal arena in which Plaid could compete. It gave the party the opportunity presenting itself as the only one fully committed to protect Welsh interests and as the only truly Welsh one, without bosses in London from whom to take orders. This strategy proved particularly effective in the first NAW election in 1999 when Welsh Labour, the main opponent, was torn apart by internal divisions due to excessive interference from New Labour's leadership in London (Masseti, 2004). Plaid's manifesto insisted on the fact that "New Labour has rejected its Labour Party past, which Wales as a nation helped create" and, by adopting Tory policies, "it has chosen to become the party of 'Middle England'" (Plaid Cymru, 1999, *Working for Wales*, p. 2). Therefore, "Only the Party of Wales offers a real challenge to more Tory-type policies in Wales" (ibid, p. 3).

Beyond attacking the Blairite Labour, Plaid paid greater attention to avoiding scaring off non Welsh-speaking voters. The 'whole-Wales' character of the election compelled the party to emphasize its commitment to bilingualism and to dissipate its past image of a 'Welsh Wales' party. For the first time it presented itself to the voters adding the English translation ('The Party of Wales') to its Welsh name. In addition, having just secured some degree of self-government by the tiniest majority, the party avoided any reference to any ambitious constitutional objective and focused on how to make the Assembly work best by putting forward socio-economic policy proposals.

The astonishingly positive election results, mainly obtained at the expense of Labour, were considered a 'quiet earthquake' in Welsh politics (Scully *et al.*, 2003). For

the first time, electoral support did not come only for the party's traditional 'heartland' but also from the southern valleys where Plaid managed to win in single member constituencies that Labour had continuously held, for Westminster elections, for about eight decades (*ibid.*). As a result, Plaid became the formal opposition party to a Labour minority executive (1999-2000) and then to the Lab-Lib coalition executive (2000-2003).

However, with the election of Rhodri Morgan as new Welsh Labour leader and First Minister in NAW in 2000, the wind started to change. Morgan represented both an opportunity and a challenge to Plaid. On the one hand, his ability to speak Welsh and his commitment to the protection of the language, his blatantly anti-Blairite approach in socio-economic matters and his moderate support for further self-government for Wales, enhanced Plaid's chances of seeing some of its favourite policies being implemented. On the other hand, Morgan's 'Welshness' neutralized almost completely the strategy adopted in 1999.

In 2000, Plaid elected a new leader, Ieuan Wyn Jones, who was formally both President and leader of the NAW group. His leadership was characterized by overall continuity both in terms of ideology and strategy. The hard-core nationalists were kept under control and the party maintained an incrementalist approach on constitutional change, asking for the establishment of a Parliament with similar powers to the Scottish one and linking such requests to practical shortcomings of the current arrangement (Manifesto 2003, p. 28). However, controversies emerging from the growing influx of English, buying properties and settling in rural, poor and Welsh-speaking areas of Wales, allowed the Labour sympathising press to depict Plaid as an extremist and racist 'anti-English' party (Wyn Jones and Scully, 2003, p. 129-30). Arguably, these attacks damaged the party, especially in the English speaking southern valleys. More importantly, Labour had completed its re-branding as 'Welsh Labour', also adopting a Welsh version of the name, and was now united under Morgan's leadership and ready to restore its grip on the Welsh electorate.

If Plaid's results at the 2003 NAW election were evaluated against any pre-devolution election (or indeed against the 2001 general election), they would have been considered at least a very good performance. However, compared with the extraordinary results of the 1999 NAW election, they were perceived as a disastrous setback. All the four constituency seats in the south Wales were lost to Labour and the party's score in the regional vote decreased by more than a third, thus losing further seat. Labour was now able to form a single party majority government and Plaid retained its 'opposition

party' status by only one seat lead on the Conservatives. The first consequence of the election was the resignation of Wyn Jones for the post of President (Wyn Jones and Scully, p. 128). The second consequence was a revival of nationalist pride within the party which led to the election of folk-music singer and local councillor Dafydd Iwan as new President and leader. In his speech at the opening of the Annual Conference held in September 2003 in Cardiff, Iwan said that "Plaid Cymru wants to see Wales emerge from England's shadow" and went on to ask the delegates to change the long term goal of the party from the vague expression 'full national status' to the unequivocally secessionist 'independence' (BBC Wales, 19/09/03, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/3121196.stm>). Delegates approved the change of the party constitution unanimously two days later, arguably ending many decades of ambiguity on the party' long-term constitutional policy (BBC Wales, 21/09/03, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/3124418.stm>).

To date, the new long-term aim of the party has never been brought openly into question, signalling that it enjoys an overall support within PC. Yet, as Table 10 shows, preference for independence within the Welsh electorate is still very much a minority view. In contrast, since devolution there seems to have been a gradually growing support for the establishment of a Scottish-like Parliament. This shift of preferences from the Assembly to a law-making Parliament in the Welsh electorate appears to correspond to (or indeed to follow) a similar shift in attitudes amongst most of the Welsh (NAW based) political elites. In particular, the appointment in 2002 of an independent Commission on the Powers and Electoral Arrangements for the NAW (so called Richard Commission) decided by the Lab-Lib executive showed, at the very least, an open-minded attitude towards discussing the best constitutional arrangement for Wales, if not a decided opinion in favour of more powers being devolved. The Commission's report, delivered in 2004, represented *de facto* a strong and authoritative legitimation for more powers for the NAW. The report highlighted the awkwardness of the current arrangement and its actual functioning, pointing in particular to problems related to accountability and the capability to deliver on time (Report of the Commission, 2004, p. 85-125). It, therefore, concluded "we do not think that status quo is a sustainable basis for future development" and went on to recommend the establishment of "a legislative Assembly for Wales with primary law-making powers" (ibid. p. 255).

**Table 2.10**  
**Public attitudes towards constitutional change in Wales (%)**

Voting intentions in referendum 2007-09				Constitutional preferences (1997-2008)			
Year	More devolution (yes)	More devolution (no)	Don't know	No devolution	Assembly	Law- making Parliament	Independence
1997				36.9	25.1	18.3	13.2
1999				24.3	32.9	28.3	9.6
2001				23.1	24.5	36.8	11.8
2003				20.3	25.3	35.9	13.4
2006				20.4	23.9	40.2	11.0
2007	47	44	9	15.7	26.1	41.5	11.5
2008	49	46	5	15.0	30.7	38.8	10.0
2009	52	39	9	19.0	21.0	44.0	13.0

Source: National Assembly for Wales: Public Attitudes 2008, available at:  
[http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/abt-commission/about\\_us-public\\_attitudes\\_2008/about\\_us-public\\_attitudes\\_2008\\_attitudes\\_towards\\_the\\_assembly.htm](http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/abt-commission/about_us-public_attitudes_2008/about_us-public_attitudes_2008_attitudes_towards_the_assembly.htm)), ICM polls/BBC Wales, June 2007  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/6235466.stm>), ICM polls/BBC Wales, September 2008  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/wales\\_politics/7625621.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/wales_politics/7625621.stm)), ICM polls /BBC Wales, February 2009,  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/7269460.stm>)

So, in spite of Plaid's electoral setback in 2003, the long wave effect of its extraordinary success in 1999 and the (at least partially consequent) assertiveness of NAW based Welsh Labour seem to have created a much more favourable environment for powers being devolved to Wales.

In this respect, the 2003 openly secessionist turn has left some influential members of the party rather sceptical about the convenience of such move:

I don't think it is really helpful to aim too high. I would like the party to drop final aims and be more pragmatic...we should just focus on winning the next election and running things in the best interest of Wales. Our only constitutional objective should be the one we can get in the next few years and that is the same status as Scotland (Dafydd Elis Thomas, interview with the author, Cardiff, 12/12/06)

Elis Thomas' position is not isolated within the party.<sup>28</sup> Other prominent party members have confirmed that a firm belief in independence both as a strategic move and as a possible outcome is far from unanimous:

<sup>28</sup> He has never been loved by the traditionalist (nationalist) wing of the party and lost the support of many left-wing members in 1992, when he accepted the title of Baron and a seat in the House of Lords.

There is still some debate because we have now got this Assembly and there is a strong feeling that we have to work through this now...it makes much more sense. Anyway I don't see independence happening tomorrow or even in ten years. Unlike Ireland... and Scotland... we have a wide open border and a long one compared to the depth of the country. Therefore it is much more difficult for us to be separate from England, to become independent from England. And it's very easy for people who oppose independence, like the Labour party, to point to the problems that separation entails for Wales. That's why we don't talk about independence so much up-front. I think a large part of the party, not all of it, would prefer to progress gradually and overcome all the practical problems on the way (Janet Davies, interview with the author, Cardiff, 04/12/06).

Persistent disagreement on the constitutional issue is not confined to the party elites. As table 2.11 shows, the party membership is also divided and, perhaps surprisingly, half of the members would prefer a law-making Parliament to all other options, with less than a third opting for independence as their first choice. In fact, the gradualist approach has never been fully abandoned and, with the return of Wyn Jones as party leader in 2006, it has regained prominence over the long-term independence objective. In addition, a new Government of Wales Act passed in 2006 has slightly increased the powers of the Assembly and has introduced a formal separation between the roles of the Welsh executive and the Assembly itself. Even more importantly, in terms of prospects for future development, the new Act gives the Assembly the opportunity to initiate, by a two-thirds vote, a referendum for the acquisition of law-making powers in the devolved areas.<sup>29</sup> The realistic perspective to achieve more self-government working through the existing institutions has, therefore, deflected attention from debates over the ultimate goal of the party. In the 2007 NAW election the party campaigned primarily on environmental and socio-economic issues. As far as constitutional policy was concerned, it was left to the bottom of the manifesto and the ultimate aim of independence was preceded by the claim for the establishment of a law-making parliament on the model set out in the Government of Wales Act 2006 (Plaid Cymru, *Make a Difference*, Manifesto 2007, p. 36).

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Since the inception of the NAW he has acted as the Proceeding Officer and, arguably, this *super partes* role has contributed further to his isolation from the day to day running of the party. Nonetheless, he remains a very highly respected figure within the party.

<sup>29</sup> The Assembly can only initiate the order for a referendum. However, then it is up to the Secretary of State to decide whether it is appropriate to bring the order before the Parliament in London. For the referendum to be called, it needs to get the approval of both the Commons and the Lords (Government of Wales Act, 2006, Part 4, 103, available at: [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/ukpga\\_20060032\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/ukpga_20060032_en_1)).



**Table 2.11**  
**Constitutional preference and party identification, 2008 (%)**

<i>CONSTITUTIONAL PREFERENCE</i>	LABOUR	CONS.	LIBDEM	PLAID	NO PARTY ID
Independence	6	3	7	27	12
Parliament	44	30	50	50	38
Assembly	37	34	32	18	28
No Devolution	11	30	10	2	14
Don't Know/Refused	3	3	1	3	9

Source: National Assembly for Wales: Public Attitudes 2008, available at: [http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/abt-commission/about\\_us-public\\_attitudes\\_2008/about\\_us-public\\_attitudes\\_2008\\_attitudes\\_towards\\_the\\_assembly.htm](http://www.assemblywales.org/abthome/abt-commission/about_us-public_attitudes_2008/about_us-public_attitudes_2008_attitudes_towards_the_assembly.htm))

In the aftermath of the 2007 NAW election, after alternative options were unsuccessfully explored,<sup>30</sup> Plaid decided eventually to enter a coalition government with Welsh Labour. The party managed, in spite of some resistance from Labour, to include in the coalition agreement the holding of a referendum on further devolution of legislative powers to be called within the next Assembly term (*One Wales*, Agreement between Labour and Plaid Cymru, 2007, p. 6). The two parties have already started to work on the organization, by establishing an all-Wales Convention for extensive consultation with civil society. As table 10 above shows, latest opinion polls on voting intentions in a referendum are encouraging and the two parties have agreed to fully commit in campaigning for a 'Yes' vote.

However, working closely with Labour and having a realistic prospect of obtaining a Welsh parliament in the next two years, has not entailed leaving the 2003 independentist turn completely in the background. The fact that the independence policy has not been reversed points to the achievement of a new strategic equilibrium, where a relatively undisputed independentist long-term project is coupled with an equally

<sup>30</sup> In particular a Plaid-Conservative-Liberal Democrats coalition was thoroughly discussed but eventually the LibDems withdrew (Masseti, 2009b).

undisputed strategy of working gradually, even engaging in cross-party ventures, and pick up the opportunities that are offered along the way. The pro-independence stance might cost the party some voters but, in perspective, it may help maintaining a certain distinctiveness and, in case a law-making Parliament was established as in Scotland in the next two years, to retain a further objective that still justifies the existence of the party.

As we shall see in the section on European integration, the new policy also offers to link the ultimate objective of the party with the institutional structure of the EU in a more consistent way. In this respect, one could see an influence of EU's persisting intergovernmentalism on the party's turn on independence: "Europe is one of the reasons why we recently ended up calling for independence... being an independent member-state is the only status that European Union recognizes. You cannot be a member of the EU unless you are an independent nation-state." (Alun Fred Jones, interview with the author, Cardiff, 05/12/06). In addition, some within the party feel that "we have to put the argument out there in order to change public opinion towards more support for independence" (interview with Leonne Wood, Cardiff, 12/12/06). Indeed, in 2009 the party launched a new initiative to preach the benefits of independence, by setting up a website [www.walescan.com](http://www.walescan.com) where people can find articles by Welsh politicians and commentators and can have their say on the matter. However, PC has a long way to go to convince a majority of Welsh voters to support independence. A recent poll has found that only 13% of respondents would favour independence within or without the EU (ICM Poll for BBC Cymru Wales, 20-24 February 2009, available at:

<http://www.icmresearch.co.uk/media-centre-archive.php?month=February&year=2009>)

## **2.3 Party Ideology and Policy: The Left-Right Dimension**

### **2.3.1 The legacy of the inter-war period**

The interwar period was one of extreme polarization, in which ideological debate on contrasting political/economic doctrines intertwined with significant political change both in the international scene and in Britain and Wales. At home, the rise of the Labour party and the decline of the Liberals entailed an increase in political and ideological polarization. The economic crises of the 1930s, which hit South Wales badly, sanctioned the end of the hegemony of the liberal, free-market ideology. The sympathies of some Labour's left-wingers for communist ideas and the activism of Mosley's fascist party in the 1930s added to the left-right radicalization of domestic politics. In Europe, the rise of

Lenin's Communism and Mussolini's Fascism in the late 1910s and early 1920s set the tone for the ideological debate in the following two decades. The seizure of power by Hitler's Nazi party in the early 1930s polarized the international picture further. The Spanish civil war represented dramatically the political and ideological struggle between Fascism and Communism.

In this context, the attempt by Plaid's elite to ignore the left-right ideological and social conflict and to push on the salience of the centre-periphery cleavage was a desperate move. Some members, such as John Roose Williams, had pointed out from 1925 that, from a socio-economic and ideological perspective Wales was a left-leaning nation and, therefore, no success would have been possible if the party had not characterized itself as a socialist party, so as to win the support of the working class (Davies, 1983, p. 96). Yet, until the early 1930s, the party did not elaborate much beyond the issue of 'Welsh Wales'. This was mainly due to the need to focus on establishing an independent new organization, which was formed by people of different ideological orientations. Ignoring left-right politics allowed the party to persist in the critical first years, thus avoiding immediate disintegration.

Although Plaid did not develop formal ideological and/or policy stances directly linked to left-right politics, it ended up being associated with the personal ideas of its most authoritative and outspoken members, primarily Sanders Lewis and Ambrose Bebb. The former expressed on many occasions his Catholic, traditionalist and conservative views. His point of reference was Wales (and Europe) in the middle Ages, which he considered a morally superior civilization than 'Anglicised' Wales. He also opposed the mainstream philosophical strands, such as Enlightenment, positivism and materialism, professing the superiority of spiritual over material values. Consistently, he rejected mainstream or rising political ideologies, such liberalism and socialism, criticising the individualism of the former and the materialist secularism of the latter (Davies, 1983, p. 102). Moreover, he looked very negatively on major long-term socio economic processes (capitalist industrialization and urbanization) which had transformed Wales. In addition to the right-leaning orientations of Lewis, Bebb had spoken enthusiastically about Fascism in several occasion (Davies, 1983, p. 97), contributing to a public image of Plaid Cymru as a right-wing party.

In spite of Lewis's insistence on moral and cultural issues, after the disastrous electoral performance in 1929, the party started to reflect on the need to develop a socio-economic policy as well. In addition, the dramatic effects of the economic crisis of the

early 1930s, the political debate on the limits of free-market capitalism and the rising tide of socialism convinced even Lewis himself of the need to devote more attention to economic matters. The main contribution, however, came from D.J. and Noëlle Davies, two former members of the Labour party who had deep knowledge of Scandinavian, and in particular Danish, social-democracy. In 1931, D.J. Davies published *The Economics of Welsh Self-Government*, the first party pamphlet that addressed economic issues in detail and that tried to justify Welsh self-government in economic terms.<sup>31</sup> Davies envisaged a Welsh economy and society based on the principles of co-operative socialism.

In 1934, Lewis summarised the new socio-economic plan of the party in his *Ten Points of Policy*, a document that remained very influential in the following decades. He embodied the co-operative ethos of D. J. Davies in his wider nationalist conservative ideology, forging the doctrine of ‘co-operative nationalism’ (Lewis, *Ten Points of Policy*, 1934). His position on the economy was deeply influenced by the Christian (Catholic) social doctrine, although it was expressed in more radical and visionary terms. He envisaged a return to the primacy of agriculture: “Agriculture should be the chief industry of Wales and the basis of its civilization...South Wales must be de-industrialised” (ibid.). The main driving concepts of Lewis’ socio-economic plan were co-operation, decentralization and diffusion of ownership. His anti-state ethos led him to oppose the nationalization of industries, thus rejecting socialist policies (Davies, 1983, p. 102). Overall, Lewis remained always concerned with the party being identified with a specific ideology or socio-economic doctrine, in particular with socialism.

While Lewis’s plan made some sense for the mainly agricultural North and West Wales, it offered no immediate solutions for the growing unemployment and extremely poor conditions of Southern Wales’ working class. For these reasons, the party’s leadership came under attack in the late 1930s. Dafydd Jenkins accused the leaders of being “far too ready to attack ‘socialism’, usually meaning by that either the English Labour Party, or the philosophy of Karl Marx” and warned that “Wales cannot be won for Home Rule unless the socialists of Wales are won over” (quoted in Davies, 1983, p. 105). The main challenge came at the 1938 Conference in Swansea where some delegates, linked to a group of young members of the University College in Bangor, strongly criticised the party’s economic policy and proposed the nationalization of coal, steel and tinplate industries on the grounds that they were unsuitable for schemes of

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<sup>31</sup> *The Economics of Welsh Self-Government* was also the first party pamphlet to be published in English (Davies, 1983, p. 88).

cooperative control (Davies, 1983, p. 94). In general some members were deeply dissatisfied with the party being identified as right-wing because of its leaders' personal views. However, the overwhelming majority of the delegates backed Lewis' leadership and economic policy. In addition, during WWII the right-wing image of the party was even reinforced by Lewis's neutrality stance.

From a strategic/electoral point of view, the ideological development of Plaid Cymru in the inter-war period appears as a missed opportunity, if not a disastrous mistake. Although the party aimed to represent a left-leaning nation, both in ideological, socio-economic and political terms, it developed an overall right-leaning ideology and policy platform. The electoral de-alignment away from Liberal domination of the 1920s was a tremendous opportunity which Plaid did not exploit for both organizational and ideological reasons. By the end of the 1930s, the Welsh electorate had re-aligned behind the socialist ideology of Labour, whereas Plaid had projected a conservative, if not a reactionary/Fascist image which will accompany the party for some decades. However, some strands of Lewis' ideological legacy, such as anti-militarism, anti-industrialism, environmental sustainability and decentralism, would represent an important source of inspiration in the post-industrial period, with the emergence of the so called 'New Politics'.

### **2.3.2 From co-operative nationalism to decentralised socialism (1940s-1980s)**

The first decade after WWII saw the gradual de-polarization of British politics. The great reforms of late 1940s - primarily the establishment of the National Health Service by Welshman Labour minister Aneurin Bevan – met initial resistance by the Conservatives. However, from the mid-1950s a new settlement on welfare policies and Keynesian economics emerged, which arguably persisted for the following two decades. In this broad political context, Plaid Cymru managed to remain a 'broad church', capable of attracting and retaining nationalists of all ideological persuasions. The party leadership, under Gynfor Evans, gradually developed a wider and more detailed socio-economic platform but always remaining within the borders of co-operative nationalism and opposing any attempt to add labels which would qualify the left-right party's stance.

Yet, this course looked inappropriate to many who wanted to place the party more to the left, so as to capture a greater share of the Welsh electorate. At the 1949 summer school, a group of republicans openly criticised Evans' leadership and put forward a motion calling for a republican basis to Plaid's ideology (McAllister, p. 161). The

rejection of the motion led many of them to leave the party and form an independent organization called the Welsh Republican Movement. More importantly, pressure from some of the branches to adopt a more trenchant socialist ideology and policy mounted during the 1960s. However, the image of a traditionalist leadership opposed the socialist grassroots would be misleading. Most party members remained faithful to the ideological legacy of the inter-war period, with the leadership trying to maintain the balance between them and those who urged for the adoption of a clear-cut leftist stance. In 1960 a motion from the Newport branch called for the party to remain a 'broad church' and to avoid stressing its left-right ideological positions (McAllister, p. 164).

Internal debate continued, with leftist members asking to include references to socialism while at the same time suggesting qualification of what type of socialism the party wanted to adopt. In particular, it was widely acknowledged by most socialist members that, if the party was to be labelled as socialist, it needed to be distinguished from both the centralist ethos of the Labour party and from the oppressive bureaucratic drive of orthodox Marxism. At the 1963 conference, a motion from the Bridgend branch entitled 'Socialism' urged the party to emphasise "the democratic socialist nature of our policy in our pamphlets and addresses and relocate the people as far as the real meaning of socialism is concerned" (quoted in McAllister, p. 164). The leadership intervened to amend the motion, which was passed only after the word 'socialism' was substituted with 'democracy'.

The first electoral success at the 1966 by-election engendered some euphoria within the party, shifting the attention from the bad old news –the inability to win votes in South Wales – to the good new news – its ability to win votes and seats in the party heartland. However, the issue of expanding its social and electoral support amongst the Southern working class could not be ignored for long and, with it, the need to present the party with a more appealing ideological outlook and policy platform. In 1970 the *Economic Plan for Wales* was launched, containing interventionist policy proposals but devoid of explicit reference to socialism. That was not sufficient for many left-wingers in the party. As a convinced socialist member put it:

There is no hope for Blaid [i.e. Plaid Cymru] to win self-government as long as it sticks to its current economic and social policies. Only a nationalist party with valid socialist policies can hope to win the support of the majority of the people of Wales (Gareth Miles, translated by Hywel Davies, 1973, p. 15)

What emerged from a study on the composition of Plaid's electorate in Cardiganshire in the early 1970s, as reported in Table 2.12, was that the party still attracted predominantly middle class voters. It also gained disproportionate support from the lower working class but was still largely underrepresented by the skilled working class.

**Table 2.12**  
**Social Class and Plaid's Electorate in Cardiganshire in the 1970s**

<i>Social Class</i>	<i>All Cardiganshire Electorate (%)</i>	<i>Plaid Cymru (%)</i>
<i>Top Middle Class</i>	10	15
<i>Lower Middle Class</i>	24	33
<i>Farming Class</i>	20	8
<i>Top Working Class</i>	29	15
<i>Lower Working Class</i>	15	26

Source: original data in P. Magdwick (1973, p. 160), reported in T. D. Combes (1977, p. 309)

However, it is difficult to say if the party's inability to win working class voters, mainly concentrated in South Wales, was due to its ideological position on the left-right or, rather, to its persisting characterization as a 'Welsh Wales' party. As shown in Tables 2.13 and 2.14, in the late 1960s and early 1970s Plaid's electoral support was still overwhelmingly from Welsh speaking voters. In the 1970s election the party obtained its best result ever (in terms of votes) but this came from gains in the Welsh speaking areas rather than from the more populous English speaking ones. In other words, many within Plaid, and certainly the leadership, felt that the party's ideology and policy position on the left-right dimension was already in tune with the preferences of the Welsh electorate – i.e. it was already leftist enough and did not need to be explicitly labelled as socialist - while the 'language blockage' represented the most important impediment for expanding support in south Wales, and in particular amongst the English speaking working class. In the February 1974 election, 16 out of the 36 of Plaid's candidates were non Welsh-speaking compared with just 9 in 1970. This was the result of a strategic choice to reduce the 'language blockage' and increase electoral support in south Wales. In the 1974 general elections, the party still won the overwhelming majority of its votes in north-west and west Wales but, in the 1976 local election, this strategy seemed to bear some fruit,

with Plaid electing several councillors in the southern valleys of West and Mid Glamorgan (Combes, 1977, p. 314).

**Table 2.13**  
**Voting intentions and ability to speak Welsh**

<i>Which party do you intend to vote?</i>	<i>Welsh-Speaking (%)</i>	<i>Non Welsh-Speaking (%)</i>
<i>Labour</i>	33	37
<i>Conservative</i>	17	35
<i>Liberal</i>	12	9
<i>Plaid Cymru</i>	24	9
<i>Don't know</i>	14	10

Source: original data in *Western Mail*, 25/09/1968 (O.R.C. Survey), reported in T. D. Combes, 1977, p. 310.

**Table 2.14**  
**Welsh Speakers and Votes for Plaid in the 1970 general election**

Plaid Cymru Performance			
Able to speak Welsh in the area (%)	Seats Contested	Mean % of Vote	Change on 1966 election
Over 70%	6	24.4	+11.4
25-60%	8	13.6	+ 7.3
10-25%	12	10.9	+ 5.0
Under 10%	10	6.0	- 0.1

Source: original data in M. Steed (1971, p. 402), reported in T. D. Combes (1977, p. 311).

Although these electoral gains proved temporary, they confirmed that in the Southern Valleys there was a considerable share of voters who could be potentially won over from Labour (Balsom *et al.*, 1983, p. 313).

In the late 1970s, Plaid attention shifted to the Labour government's work on the bills that would lead to the first referendum on devolution in 1979. In that context,



debates on left-right positioning lost some of their salience. However, after the disastrous results of the referendum and the bad results of the 1979 election, in which Plaid's support retrenched again in the Welsh speaking areas, the debates on party ideology and policy reignited even more strongly, with the balance of power between traditionalists and left-wingers shifting in favour of the latter. Two major interrelated factors can be singled out to explain ideological change in the 1980s. First, the dramatic increase in social and political polarization in Welsh and British politics, determined by the rightward turn of Thatcher's conservatives and the leftward turn of Foot's Labour. The apex of social radicalization was reached during the dramatic miners' strike between 1984 and 1985 but high polarization persisted throughout the 1980s. Secondly, new young members with 'New Left' and radical left ideas had been joining the party during the 1970s and continued to do so in early 1980s, altering the ideological leaning of the party.

In 1980 Dafydd Elis Thomas and other members of the party set up a ginger group called the National Left, which was open also to non party members, with the explicit aim of bringing people of left-wing views into Plaid and the implicit aim of pushing Plaid more firmly to the left (McAllister, 2001, p. 174-5). From 1983, the ideas of the National Left were also propagated through a new quarterly magazine called *Radical Wales*, whose objective was to spark intellectual debate on the political context and on Plaid's role within it. The Commission of Inquiry, which was set up after the 1979 referendum and reported in 1981, strengthened the argument for a leftward ideological re-positioning. Under the heading 'Political Philosophy' the Report argued that Plaid's ideology and policy "is socialist in nature" (Plaid Cymru, Report of the Commission of Inquiry, 1981, p. 14). However, Plaid's socialism needed to be qualified: "It is important for us not to allow our political stance to be misinterpreted" (ibid.). It went then on to explain the two-dimensional dualisms, left-right and decentralism-centralism, with Labour occupying the left-centralist quadrant, the Tories the right-centralist one and the Liberals the right-decentralist one. The Report concluded that Plaid was a left-decentralist party and its political philosophy "could be best described as Decentralist Socialism" (ibid.).

The new ideological stance was formally adopted in the party's statute and membership forms with a vote won at the 1981 Conference by a two thirds majority (McAllister, 2001, p. 167). Although the content of Plaid's 'decentralist socialism' did not differ a great deal from D. J. Davies' 'co-operative socialism' of the 1930s, for the first time the party officially recognised the it had to take a clear stance on the left-right

dimension and introduced an unequivocal, though qualified, reference to socialism. A further attempt to win the support of the working class was represented by the establishment in 1982 of a trade union affiliated to the party. Some party members tried to set up an organizational structure but, by March 1984, it had become clear that the project had failed (Plaid Cymru, *NOPTU – Lost Momentum: A Critical Analysis*, by Stuart Austin, 1984).

The adoption of a leftist ideological position ended the ‘broad church’ strategy which the party had been following until then and opened a phase of strong internal debate, with many traditionalist members now feeling uncomfortable within Plaid. At the 1981 Conference, the leadership contest between Dafydd Wigley and Dafydd Elis Thomas was largely perceived both within and without the party as a left-right one, with the former representing a more traditionalist position and the latter representing the left-wingers (McAllister, 2001, p. 72). The election of the former did not impede the formation of a ginger group called Hydro, whose primary aim was to “to re-establish self-government for Wales, unqualified by any dogma, as the main aim of Plaid Cymru” (*Hydro Report on Plaid’s Electoral Performance*, October 1983). However, Wigley’s pragmatism contributed to soften the tone of the debate and to maintain party unity.<sup>32</sup> He was a strong supporter of social-democratic policies but he preferred not to call himself a socialist, nor was he entirely comfortable with Plaid being called so. Under his leadership, rumours circulated that the party was conducting secret talks with the centrist Social Democratic Party to enhance cross-party co-operation (McAllister, 2001, p. 168).

However, with the election of Elis Thomas in 1984 as party President and leader, the fragile internal truce was broken. Some traditionalist members left the party at the same conference in 1984, after a motion calling for the abandonment of the commitment to socialism was defeated (McAllister, 2001, p. 173). The confrontation between the National Left and Hydro became sour and, at times, nasty.

The evolution of the socio-political context in Wales reinforced the National Left even more. In particular, the 1984-85 miners’ strike and Labour’ ambivalent position on it, gave Plaid the opportunity to try and mobilize support in the southern Valleys (Lynch, 1995, p. 202). The party became involved with the National Union of Mineworkers and played an important role within the Congress in Support of Mining Communities, which organized the collection of money and food, even from abroad, to support the

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<sup>32</sup> In fact, few hard left-wingers, such as marxist Garreth Miles, left the party during Wigley’s first leadership (*Radical Wales*, first issue, Winter 1983).

communities during the strike (Janet Davies, interview with the author, Cardiff, 04/12/06). The term socialist became more widely used in public speeches and pamphlets, such as Tim Richards' *The case for a Socialist Wales* (n.d.), and Plaid became a more familiar political actor in south Wales. After another attempt to reverse the commitment to socialism failed miserably at the 1986 Conference,<sup>33</sup> the Hydro group was disbanded in order to preserve party unity in the run up to the 1987 general election (*Western Mail*, 15/07/1986).

Elis Thomas' constant concern was to broaden the base of Plaid, in order to turn what was a 'nationalist' party, confined into Welsh speaking Wales, into a 'nation-wide' party (McAllister, 2001, p. 77). Beside placing Plaid more firmly on the left in socio-economic terms, his strategy included a stronger emphasis and commitment on 'New Politics' issues, such as gender equality, environmentalism and anti-militarism. In order to establish the party as a recognised supporter of these instances, Elis Thomas sought co-operation with civil society's organizations and pressure groups, such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Women's Movement and the Greens.

Evaluated against immediate electoral performances, Plaid's strategy did not produce any appreciable result. Electoral gains in the 1987 local and 1989 European elections were extremely limited, whereas at the 1987 general election the party lost votes, particularly in south Wales. While some voters from the Valleys may have developed a certain sympathy for Plaid's stance, their only hope of getting rid of the Tory government was that Labour would win a majority of UK seats. Therefore, the recovery of Labour and the still high competition from the Alliance of the Liberals and Social Democratic Party nullified all the efforts to break out of the party's traditional heartland. On the other hand, adopting clear leftist and socially progressive rhetoric did not harm in rural Wales, where Plaid increased the number of elected MPs from 2 to 3. That represented a proof that this strategy could be pursued further, without incurring in electoral losses in the party's heartland. A senior party figure and former member of the National Left explained the fruits of the 1980s strategy as follows:

In the place where I come from [South Wales], our image has completely changed. In the late 1970s we were still seen as some peculiar people who wanted to have a Welsh speaking Wales, where people who could not speak Welsh would be considered as second class citizens. We were also perceived as being on the side of the IRA, in spite of our anti-violence tradition. Whereas by the end of the 1980s people were saying

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<sup>33</sup> Only 15 out of 215 delegates voted against a motion retaining socialism as a party's aim (*Western Mail*, 15/07/1986).

‘we agree with you, we think you are great, the only problem you’ve got is that you are too small...but we like you, you are pulling the Labour party towards the way we want it to go’. That’s what our left-wing stance did, it made us acceptable and respectable in the south, which is where most people live. (Janet Davies, interview with the author, 04/12/06).

### **2.3.3 Still a Socialist Party? Following and Challenging Labour (1990s-2000s)**

In the early 1990s Plaid continued with the same strategy, consolidating its new image as a leftist and socially progressive party. The alliance with the Wales Green Party at the 1992 election represented a further move in that direction. The 1989 European election had shown that the two parties, in spite of their similar policy proposals, attracted voters from different socio-cultural and geographical constituencies. Plaid, as usual, had scored much better amongst the indigenous and Welsh-speaking voters, whereas the Greens had taken many votes from English-speaking voters who had recently moved to Wales because of its well preserved natural environment (Plaid Cymru, by Cynog Davies, 2005, p. 12). For Elis Thomas, the pursuit of the electoral alliance with the Greens represented a choice consistent with both the party’s ideological orientations and the political strategy aimed at broadening its base (Lynch, 1995, p. 204-5). Dafydd Wigley, who was re-elected as party leader in 1991, supervised the final stages of the electoral alliance, though most of the activity, including the organization of the campaign, was carried out at the local level amongst the two parties’ activists. The results were positive for Plaid which increased its Wales-wide vote share and, thanks to the electoral pact with the Greens, won one more seat in Ceredigion and North Pembrokeshire. However, the disastrous results of the Green candidates jeopardised the stability of the alliance in the medium term. Few joint candidates were presented at the 1995 local elections but, given the rebellion of many Green local activists, that represented the end point.

Dafydd Wigley’s strategy during its second mandate as party President and leader was to target explicitly Labour voters across all Wales (McAllister, 2001, p. 83). The party he inherited from Elis Thomas was much fitter for the purpose, in terms of its ideological position. The leftist, inclusive and socially progressive outlook built during the 1980s had helped soften, to some extent, Plaid’s public image as a cultural nationalist and exclusivist party. This was particularly important in respect of what was going on in former Yugoslavia, where nationalism was causing a brutal inter-ethnic war, and allowed the party to deflect possible accusations of professing a divisive and destructive ideology.

However, focusing more closely on winning working class voters implied a further, though slight, ideological repositioning. While the socio-economic leftist orientations were maintained, including the ‘socialist’ word in the party constitution, ‘New Politics’ issues were not supported indiscriminately anymore. Some ideas, which were part of the ideological legacy of the early years, such as opposition to war, militarism and armament, were kept highly visible in the party blueprint. Environmentalism, which was also seen as a legacy of the early years, was maintained within the party programme and was still talked up front but it was slightly diluted in the face of more pro-economic development proposals. Other issues, such as feminism, ethnic (immigrant) minority rights, not to mention gay rights, which were more extraneous to the party’s ideological tradition, were left in the background. While this ideological shift also responded to the preferences of party members and activists (Van Morgan, 2006, p. 272), it arguably made the party more in tune with the preferences of the Valleys’ working class, traditionally more sensitive to socio-economic than to ‘new politics’ issues.

In the 1995 local elections, Plaid built on the success of the 1991 election, improving its score in South Wales, though most of the gains came again from the area of Gwynedd. By the mid-1990s, however, social and political polarization in the UK and in Wales had substantively diminished. New Labour had gradually repositioned itself towards the centre-ground, thus denying oxygen to centrist Liberal Democrats and re-establishing itself as a UK-wide credible alternative to the Conservative party. In this context, debate within Plaid on left-right ideological positioning lost most of its salience. In addition, Labour’s victory in the 1997 election and its pushing ahead with devolution shifted the attention again from left-right politics to self-government. This allowed the party to regain unity and to devote more attention to organisational and campaigning efficiency. Overall, it followed the right-wards ideological shift which characterised Britain and, arguably, the whole Western world and beyond:

I think it is inevitable that we became less left-wing than we were in the 1980s. A lot of us were really idealists then, it was ‘left or nothing, no compromise’. However, as we became more involved with running local councils from the early 1990s, we had to do the things that worked. (Janet Davies, interview with the author, Cardiff, 04/12/06)

However, Plaid remained clearly to the left of New Labour and, when the time of the first election to the newly established National Assembly for Wales came, the party was ready to fully exploit the opportunity which was presented to it.

The strategy that Plaid followed more or less consistently from the early 1980s entailed a left-ward ideological repositioning that, by the late 1990s, had made it much more appealing to south Wales' working class voters. However, the overwhelming majority of them, including those who liked Plaid, kept voting for Labour for two main reasons. First, Plaid Cymru did not represent a credible player in UK general elections. Second, Labour in south Wales was seen as the true party of Wales, conveying a type of national identity which drew mostly on the socio-economic characteristics of the region (Roberts, 1995). In the 1999 NAW election these two obstacles to Plaid's electoral success either disappeared (in the case of the former) or lost strength (in the case of the latter). Tony Blair's interference in the leadership contest of Welsh Labour made the party look less Welsh and less left-wing, thus upsetting many voters who decided either to abstain or to vote for Plaid (Scully *et al.*, 2003). That gave the party the electoral breakthrough it had sought for many years, which was also replicated at the local and European level.

Data from the Welsh Election Study, carried out in 2001, show how Plaid has become a credible political actor amongst the Welsh working class, even overcoming Labour (see Table 2.15).

**Table 2.15**  
**Working Class Interests and Party Image (%) 2001**

Looks after Working Class interests	Welsh Labour	Plaid Cymru
Very closely	9.7	13.1
Fairly closely	53.5	52.2
Not very closely	24.9	18.8
Not at all closely	3.0	3.3
Don't know/not answered	8.8	12.7

Source: Wyn Jones, Trystan and Heath, *Welsh Election Study* (2001), reported in Van Morgan (2006).

However, turning working class voters' sympathy into actual votes remains a hard challenge for Plaid. Especially after Blairite leader Alun Michael was replaced in 2000 by Rhodri Morgan at the head of Welsh Labour. The latter has not missed any occasion to stress the 'clear red water' that separates Welsh Labour from English New Labour (Wyn Jones and Scully, 2004). As Table 2.16 shows, Plaid's electorate in the early 2000s was still very much cross-class, with most votes coming from the 'petit bourgeoisie'.

**Table 2.16**  
**Social Class and Party Support in Wales (%), 2001**

Social group	Cons	Lab	Plaid	Lib Dem	Others
Salariat	23.2	36.0	14.0	22.0	4.8
Routine non-manual	17.3	51.8	12.9	12.2	5.8
Petty Bourgeoisie	21.2	32.7	21.2	19.2	5.7
Manual, foreman, technicians	14.5	61.8	14.5	7.3	1.9
Working class	10.9	66.7	11.5	7.8	3.1

Source: Wyn Jones, Trystan and Heath, *Welsh Election Study* (2001), reported in Van Morgan (2006).

Ieuan Wyn Jones, elected as Plaid new President and leader in 2000, had to face the difficult challenge to maintain the 1999 level of electoral support in the face of a reinvigorated Welsh Labour party. His strategy was to follow the path traced by Wigley in the previous decade, although the new leader conveyed a less leftist image. Compared with the previous general elections the party's score in 2001 was a success, but still it lost 50% of the vote share compared with the FPTP results of the 1999 NAW election. The confirmation that Plaid was losing ground came at the 2003 NAW election, when the party lost a quarter of the vote share in the FPTP constituencies and more than a third of the its vote share in the regional constituencies. That meant a total loss of five members of the Assembly, keeping just a one-member lead on the Conservatives. Some AMs explained such a strong setback by pointing to the party's stance against the Iraq war, which had seemingly just been concluded with a victory for Britain and the other allies (interview with Dai Lloyd, Cardiff, 29/11/06). However, controversial statements against English immigration in Wales by some Plaid's members also helped Welsh Labour reaffirm his grips on its traditional English-speaking constituencies (Wyn Jones and Scully, 2003).

The electoral defeat in 2003 triggered a leadership change in Plaid Cymru, with the election of Dafydd Iwan as party President and leader. Iwan, a local councillor in Gwynedd and Welsh folk-music singer, projected the classic image of the hard core nationalist, strongly concerned with the Welsh language. The independence turn at the 2003 Conference, added to the picture. Although he did not force any left-right ideological repositioning which would signalled a discontinuity with the previous leaderships, he was definitely not the best front man to sell Plaid Cymru to southern and

eastern English-speaking voters. Following the negative trend of 2003, in the 2004 local elections the party lost 4% of its vote share, 28 councillors and the control of two councils in the south, Caerphilly and Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Arguably, the return of Wyn Jones as party leader in 2006 increased the chances for the party doing better in the 2007 NAW election, especially in the south. However, the traditionalist soul of the party seems to have regained strength and primacy. It was Elis Thomas once again who shook the party with his famous interview:

When I sit in my chair in our new debating chamber, I am ashamed when I look out and see before me a sea of white faces....Not having representatives from the BME (black, minority, ethnic) communities is just as bad as it would if there were no women AMs or no AMs who could speak Welsh (*Western Mail*, 29/03/06)

Addressing the issue of ethnic minority representation in the Assembly was also a way to prompt debate on the party ideological positioning, a debate which was still going on in the run up to the 2007 NAW election (Elis Thomas, interview with the author, Cardiff, 12/12/06). Ideological divisions within the party re-merged mainly as a consequence of coalition politics. Even before the election, some members of the 'socialist' wing of the party were uncomfortable about talks going on with the Conservatives for possible post-election coalitions (Leonne Wood, interview with the author, Cardiff, 12/12/06). After the election, as the Liberal Democrats ruled out entering a coalition with Labour, Plaid Cymru was left as the pivotal actor. The choice between forming a coalition with Labour, as junior partner, or with the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, as the leading partner, sparked debate amongst party members. The left of the party wanted a deal with Labour, even if this meant renouncing the claim to a Plaid' First Minister, whereas Wyn Jones and the traditionalists preferred to lead a government with the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. Eventually, it was the Liberal Democrats who decided to turn down the so called 'rainbow coalition'. Therefore Plaid was left to decide whether accept the Labour offer or renounce involvement in office. The Labour-Plaid government agreement was negotiated by the leadership and then approved by the National Council in July 2007 without any outspoken opposition to the deal. (BBC/Wales, 07/06/07, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/wales/6278848.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/6278848.stm)).

Since the party took office, ideological divisions have been left in the background, re-surfacing occasionally on specific policies. In particular, the Labour proposal on



increasing university fees has prompted some internal debate. However, discussions on the left-right ideological positioning are likely to go on, as the party has returned to being, if it ever ceased to be, a ‘broad church’.

## **2.4 Party Ideology and Policy: The European Integration Dimension**

### **2.4.1 The Eurosceptic turn: ‘Europe Yes – EEC No’ (1950s-1979)**

During the 1950s, when the process of European integration got started, Plaid Cymru’s general vision of Europe was still deeply influenced by the ideological legacy of Sanders Lewis. He had not fully anticipated the multi-level system of governance that European integration would create in the 1990s but his admiration for Medieval Europe, united in the Christian faith and yet harmoniously respectful of local and national centers of power, as well as local and national cultural identities, oriented him towards a position strongly in favour of European co-operation. This was reflected in the supportive attitudes of the party towards the nascent integration process, irrespectively of well informed considerations on the institutional configuration and on the policies that the new entity was likely to adopt. Just few months before the signing of the Treaty of Rome, the party’s journal reported that “the imminent reality of economic integration in Western Europe... must be welcomed by Plaid Cymru, which had always called for greater co-operation with Europe in general” (*Welsh Nation*, January, 1957, p. 4). The indifference of the UK for European integration was highly criticized, especially for the exclusion of Wales from European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), as both industrial sectors were vital for the Welsh economy (Lynch, 1996, p. 59).

On the other hand, already in 1957, the party expressed some concerns about the prospect of joining the ECSC at a later stage and without appropriate representation of Wales’ interests at the negotiation table, a concern that would re-surface many times in Plaid’s discourses about European integration and that contributed to change Plaid’s position during the 1960s. A further source of dissonance between the party and European integration came from the strong grassroots ethos of the former and the technocratic, elitist, top-down nature of the latter. There was some overlapping between the two arguments, as the technocratic character of the process entailed scarce involvement of political parties and, as far as Plaid was concerned, a scarce possibility for the party to voice Wales’ interests.

By the late 1960s, Plaid's position had substantively changed. In 1969, the party adopted a clear position against UK's accession into the European Economic Community (Lynch, 1996, p. 61). During the 1970 election, the party tried to push the issue of European integration at the centre of the public debate. This allowed it to distinguish itself from the British parties: "Plaid Cymru is the only party that has consistently opposed British application to join the European Common Market... The three British parties are deliberately trying to keep the question of the Common Market out of this election. And yet it is the most crucial issue which faces us at present (Plaid Cymru, Election Manifesto 1970, p. 23). Plaid's strategy was to exploit the issue electorally and, at the same time, to link it to Welsh self-government, strengthening the argument for the latter objective: "The prospect of E.E.C. entry makes the need for a Welsh Parliament even more urgent." (ibid.).

Beyond the generic preoccupation for Wales' non-representation in the negotiations, a more detailed analysis of the possible impact of ECC membership on the Welsh economy was undertaken. One of the major issues highlighted in the study *Wales and the European Common Market*, reported in 1971 by party member Gwynn Matthews, was the impact of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) on Welsh hill farmers. There were concerns about the possibility that the CAP pricing system for cereals would penalize Welsh agriculture. There was also a concern that CAP's incentives on the creation of larger and fewer landholdings would threaten the survival of farming communities in the Welsh hills (Plaid Cymru, by G. Matthews, 1971, p. 12-13). The substantial overlap between agricultural and Welsh-speaking Wales made this issue very salient for Plaid, which obviously viewed the problem not only in economic but also in cultural, linguistic terms. A second concern, which was rather widespread in south Wales in the run up to UK accession (Rhys David, *Western Mail*, 23/06/1971), was about the impact of the Common Market on the Welsh steel industry. In particular the analysis pointed to the possibility that peripheral production plants, such as the Welsh ones, would be closed down and "new plants would probably be sited in those regions of Britain convenient for Europe" (Plaid Cymru, by G. Matthews, 1971, p. 15). There also were other, more general, economic concerns about the possible impact of membership on unemployment and the cost of living, which made the overall scenario of Wales in Europe appear rather gloomy.

Beside the negative expectations about the economic impact of Wales joining Europe through the UK, other arguments were put forward against membership. First of

all the party commitment to Welsh self-government, which at that was still leaning, though not without ambiguities, towards a sovereigntist position ('Commonwealth status'), could be seen as being at odds with the membership of a supranational polity whose vocation was 'ever closer union': "We took a negative position because there was the feeling that if we wanted to be in our own, then it was not very sensible to join another union" (Janet Davies, interview with author, Cardiff, 04/12/06). The EEC's structure, seen as overtly centralized and scarcely democratic, was perceived as a potential source of oppression and exploitation: "You can blame London for our position in the 1970s, because we have always been oppressed by London so we had the feelings that also the other Europeans would oppress us" (Dai Llyod, interview with author, Cardiff, 29/11/06).

In order to avoid projecting a fully isolationist image, the party used an old proposal, which envisaged the creation of a Common Market of the British Islands, within which Wales would be a self-governing nation retaining close economic ties with England (Plaid Cymru, *20 Questions And Answers*, between 1968 and 1972, n.d.). In addition, it proposed to strengthen co-operation within the European Free Trade Area, on the grounds that Wales had much more in common with EFTA countries than with EEC ones (Plaid Cymru, Election Manifesto 1970, p 23; *20 Questions And Answers*, n.d., p. 12).

Some criticism of the EEC can also be linked to the left leaning ideology of Plaid Cymru. One of the reasons why Plaid felt that Wales had more in common with EFTA countries than with the EEC was that the former favoured social-democratic policies, whereas the latter was perceived as liberal, free-market organization favouring the interests of big business over those of workers and local communities. Moreover, EFTA countries had a much more neutral position within the context of the cold war, whereas the EEC ones were all NATO members and perceived to be aligned with US foreign policy. This was problem for the anti-war tradition of the party, especially in the context of the Vietnam War. Finally the party criticized EEC protectionism against third world countries (Plaid Cymru, by G. Matthews, 1971, p. 24).

Given all these arguments, when the Labour government elected in October 1974 held a referendum for the following year on continued UK membership of the EEC, Plaid sided with the 'No' campaign. However, that was not a fully unitary decision and the slogan adopted for the campaign 'Europe Yes – EEC No' reflected mixed views of party members. Indeed, likewise the other British parties, Plaid hosted very different positions

within its ranks. The majority of the party favoured a ‘no’ position. This was an alliance of hard-core nationalists that did not want another ‘foreign’ power, which would impose its technocratic decisions on Wales, and a more influential group of left-wingers, led by Dafydd Elis Thomas, which criticized the EEC for its (internal) free-market, anti-third world and pro-US positions. However, a minority of party members, led by Dafydd Wigley, saw no contradiction between joining the EEC and advancing Wales’ self-government. Quite the opposite, they insisted that the EEC umbrella could actually strengthen the argument of a self-governing Wales and that Europe centralized structure could be reformed in a decentralist direction. A senior party member recalls the divisions on the EEC referendum largely overlapping with the left-right divisions within the party:

we took a position against EEC accession mainly because of the influence of Dafydd Elis-Thomas one of our two MPs at the time... there was a debate between the left and right within Plaid Cymru and at that time. Dafydd Wigley was seen as the one representing the right and David Ellis-Thomas was seen as the good guy representing the left. The trade unions at that time were against UK entry as the EEC was seen as a capitalist club... so it was the left led Plaid Cymru to campaign for a no vote in the referendum. (Alun Fred Jones, interview with the author, Cardiff, 05/12/06).

However, the decision to campaign for a ‘No’ vote was not based only on the ideological discrepancies between the left of the party and the EEC. Arguably, the reason why the left managed to impose its stance on the party was that, adopting a ‘No’ position, Plaid Cymru could distinguish itself from all the other parties and, at the same time, exploit their much more evident divisions. Elis Thomas confirms that:

in 1975 we chose to campaign for a no vote because we wanted to be part of the left alliance, we wanted to work together with the trade unions against UK entry. The Labour party was divided and we had an opportunity to win support from the workers. We were also the only party in Wales who developed an original position, ‘Europe yes – EEC no’, which did not work very well for the referendum. (Elis Thomas, interview with the author, Cardiff, 12/12/06).

Indeed, as Table 2.17 shows, the results were disappointing for Plaid. Wales voted clearly in favour of continued membership, especially in the rural counties, such as the party’s heartland Gwynedd. Arguably, the Welsh farmers had had enough time to learn about and appreciate the benefits of the CAP (Keating and Jones, 1995, p. 95).

In the aftermath of the referendum the party had to come to terms with the preferences of the Welsh electorate and its traditional constituencies. The party discourse on Europe softened considerably, although the policy remained unaltered (Lynch, 1996,

p. 71). The prospect of having an elected European Parliament in few years time also neutralized, albeit partially, some of the previous criticism about the non-democratic character of the EEC. However, at that time, Plaid's attention shifted to the debate on the devolution, as the Labour's proposal was making its way through Westminster. A thorough re-examination of the party position on Europe was, therefore, postponed.

**Table 2.17**  
**The EEC Referendum in Wales, 1975**

<i>County</i>	<i>Turnout</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Clwyd	65.8	69.1	30.9
Dyfed	67.5	67.6	32.4
Gwent	68.0	62.1	37.9
Gwynedd	64.3	70.6	29.4
Mid Glamorgan	66.6	56.9	43.1
Powys	67.9	74.3	25.7
South Glamorgan	66.7	69.9	30.7
West Glamorgan	67.4	61.6	38.4
Wales	66.7	64.8	35.2
United Kingdom	62.7	67.2	32.8

Source: Original data in Danis Balsom, 1991, reported in Peter Lynch, 1996, p. 70.

#### **2.4.2 The Europhile (federalist) turn: 'Europe of the Regions' or 'Full National Status in Europe'? (1980-2003)**

During the 1980s Plaid Cymru gradually reversed its stance on European integration. In this period the pro-EEC wing within the party grew stronger, as developments in domestic politics as well as at the EEC level reduced both the ideological distance between Plaid and Europe and the exploitability of a Eurosceptic position in terms of electoral party competition.

The Report of the Plaid Cymru Commission of Inquiry (1981) was quite dismissive about the issue of European integration. It anticipated that, in its present form, the EEC would not survive the 1980s and that the party had therefore to decide whether to try and reform the EEC's structure or to promote its collapse (*ibid.*, p. 9). As highlighted above, after the publication of the report, internal debate was almost completely absorbed by discussion on 'socialism' and left-right positioning, leaving little

room for other issues, such as European integration to be taken into account. Reconsideration of Plaid's stance on Europe began in the period before the 1983 general election. However, it did not lead to a real change of policy, nor to a clear qualification of the party's stance: "Plaid Cymru views with concern the effects of UK membership of the European Economic Community on Wales, and the lack of an effective Welsh voice within the Common Market" (Plaid Cymru, 1983 Election Manifesto, p. 11). The message the party wanted to convey was that both countries which had decided to remain out of the EEC, such as Norway, Sweden and Finland, and countries that joined as self-governing nations, such as Ireland, were doing better than Wales economically. Therefore, membership of the EEC was to be considered a secondary issue, which could properly be addressed only after the achievement of self-government.

However, the development of domestic politics which featured the strengthening right-wing and Eurosceptic connotations of Mrs. Thatcher's government led the left of Plaid to re-think its position on Europe. An article appeared on the first issue of the periodical *Radical Left* stated:

[Plaid's] analysis has rarely penetrated beyond these simple formulae: Common Market equals free enterprise equals bad: or Common Market equals Brussels equal bureaucracy equals bad. The time has now come to rethink the issue much more carefully... anti-European sentiments are being increasingly voiced within the Thatcher government... In this political context... those who urge withdrawal from Europe... can all too easily contribute to conservative, centralist, statist goals... it is no use disentangling ourselves from Brussels and European multinationals if, in so doing, we end up tightening the stranglehold of South-East England (*Radical Wales*, "Withdrawal to what? Britain and the European Community, 1983, p. 17)

The involvement of the party in the building up of a European party family for the regionalist and minority nationalist parties – the European Free Alliance (EFA) -led some of its members to realize that Plaid's positions were much closer to those of many European politicians and parties than to those of the British government. As a senior party member recalls:

We had the feeling that the EU was actually defending us against the worst excesses of the Conservative government of that time. So, many people within the party changed their position towards Europe. You know during the miners' strike in 1984-85 some of the sister parties in Europe, such as the *Volksumie*, sent us lots and lots of food for the miners in South Wales and they raised the whole issue in the European Parliament when nobody else had raised it. (Janet Davies, interview with the author, Cardiff, 04/12/06).

It should not come as surprise, therefore, that the party's left-wingers, which had pushed for a 'No' position in 1975, gradually became the most strenuous supporter of a policy change: "We started realizing that there was more political benefit in being pro-European... we started cooperating within the European Parliament elections with the other autonomist groups and parties" (Elis Thomas, interview with the author, Cardiff, 12/12/06). The ideological proximity between Plaid and the EEC was also enhanced by EEC policies, such as the regional and structural funds, and by its emerging role in the international arena, which could be clearly distinguished by the US's for its stress of peace, human rights and environment as inspiring values.

During the 1984 European election, the party continued to use the issue of European integration mainly to strengthen the case for Wales' self-government: "The key issue is self-government and nowhere is this more obvious than in the European Economic Community" (Plaid Cymru, 1984 Election Manifesto, p. 2). However, it became evident that the party's stance on UK's membership of the EEC had changed: "there is no answer in totally rejecting Europe and retreating to 'fortress Britain'" (ibid., p. 4).

Under Elis Thomas leadership, the party consolidated a Europhile stance. However, the linkage between Plaid's self-government objective and its policy on Europe became more ambiguous. Closer co-operation with the other parties of EFA, most of which were seeking some form of autonomy rather than full independence, together with the emphasis posed by the new leadership on short-term self-government objectives, such as devolution, led Plaid to develop a proposal which fell in between a sovereigntist and non-sovereigntist position. This ambiguity emerged in the 1987 election manifesto, where the party was calling for the establishment of a Welsh Senate: "The Senate will establish a Brussels office to represent Wales within the European community, as a first step towards ensuring Welsh ministerial representation in the Council of Ministers and a voice for Wales in all Community institutions (Plaid Cymru, 1987 Election Manifesto, p. 26).

*De facto*, during the 1980s, the party adopted the policy of the 'Europe of the Regions', calling for a more decentralized structure of the EEC rather than one underpinned by intergovernmental politics (Lynch, 1996, p. 74). This new policy, however, was not fully reconcilable with previous self-government aims that, though avoiding the word independence (let alone secession), entailed a more 'sovereigntist position, nor with party's claims shaped by those previous aims, such as Wales' veto power in the Council or same representation in the Parliament as existing small states.

In 1989, when PC completed its policy reversal on European integration, the party policy was still oscillating between two different proposals: ‘full national status in the EEC’ and the ‘Europe of the regions’ (Plaid Cymru, Manifesto 1989). The former proposal was meant as a short-term objective, whereas the latter would follow from the regionalization of the EEC (Lynch, 1996, p. 76-77). While the 1989 European election marked the maturation of a fully Europhile, federalist position, the two-step policy was rather visionary, as both the first and the second step were not likely to materialized in the medium (and arguably long) term, and ambiguous.

During the 1990s, Plaid remained a strong supporter of European integration: “We shall seek both the widening and the deepening of Europe” (Plaid Cymru, European Election Manifesto 1994, p. 9). However, its linkage between the self-government objective and the preferred structure of Europe remained ambiguous. The establishment, with the Treaty of Maastricht, of the Committee of the Regions and the principle of subsidiarity led the party to envisage the creation of a federal ‘Europe of the peoples’, with powers shifting from the Council and the Commission to a bicameral Parliament where the regions would be represented (ibid. p. 11-12). The establishment of the Welsh Assembly, giving the party the possibility to have a more influential role within the European multi-level governance structure, reinforced the perspective of a regionalized Europe. In the 1999 European election, which coincided with the first NAW election, the party obtained its highest score ever, getting representation in the European Parliament for the first time. This represented an occasion for Plaid to take an even more active role within the EFA which, after the election, formed a new European parliamentary group with the Greens. Arguably, greater involvement in EU institutions helped consolidate the pro-European stance, though the party kept calling for reforms in a more democratic and more decentralist direction. The 2003 Welsh election manifesto states: “We firmly believe in the creation of a more democratic European Union with a written constitution and a Charter of Fundamental Rights in the Treaty.” (Plaid Cymru, 2003 Manifesto, p. 27). However, actual prospects on constitutional reform of the EU’s structure, as outlined in both the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe and the Reform Treaty, did not go in the direction the party hoped for.

#### **2.4.4 The current phase: disillusioned Europhilia? (2004-2009)**

After the party’s adoption of the policy of independence in Europe in September 2003 and the final draft of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe agreed in



June 2004, Plaid's position on European integration turned much milder. The European Constitution, reaffirming the primacy of the member-states as the building blocs of the Union, appears to have dashed the expectations of the party. Some party members called for Plaid to commit to independence outside Europe but many of them left the party after they lost the argument (Janet Davies, interview with the author, Cardiff, 04/12/06). The perplexity over the lack of attention to regionalist concerns is outlined very clearly by the then party's chief executive:

The constitution from our perspective had to guarantee the right of the regions being represented within the Council of Ministers.... The Constitution could specify that regions with regional governments must be included with regional delegations when something potentially relevant to them is being discussed. (Dafydd Trystan, interview with the author, Cardiff, 01/12/06).

In the 2005 general election manifesto, the party advocated further integration in “foreign policy, conflict prevention and the use of military force for peace keeping purposes” because “the EU is potentially a very important counterweight in the world to the power of the US” (Plaid Cymru, Manifesto 2005). However, when it comes to the EU Constitution, the manifesto statements reflect the critical position outlined above. PC welcomes, “in principle”, both the proposed constitution and the promised referendum, without spelling out whether it would support a ‘yes’ vote. In addition, the party maintains that, without UK government consulting the Welsh Assembly on new proposals coming from the Commission and allowing representation for Wales in the UK delegations in the Council, “the new constitution will not work at its best” (ibid). Such position is re-proposed in very similar terms in the 2007 Assembly election manifesto (Plaid Cymru, Manifesto 2007, p. 33-34). However, no party documents speak openly about opposition to the Constitution or Reform treaties and the party does not appear to have a clear position on them. As one AM put it:

We did not like it [i.e. the EU Constitution] because it seems to work against the regions within Europe. The constitution does not take the regions seriously...it does not consider them proper players within Europe...but I am not sure we would reject the whole constitution on those grounds. (interview with Alun Fred Jones, 05/12/06)

In fact, Plaid Cymru is keeping a very low profile on Europe. The party appears divided and probably confused. On the one hand, the Welsh nationalists still appreciates

important EU policies, such as the structural funds, environmental policies and the EU role in the international scene. As one member of the Assembly put it:

We like very much the EU legislation...we have very few sensible laws made in England, the most sensible laws recently have been European ones. For instance, in terms of environmental legislation we would not have it if the UK wasn't in Europe. So we don't have problems with Europe making laws, provided that we have our full say in Wales (Dai Lloyd, interview with the author, Cardiff, 29/11/06).

On the other hand, the constitutional process has disappointed some of Party's expectations. While in the 1980s and 1990s the process of European integration was perceived as an ally in the party's struggle for self-government, the current trajectory of the EU's constitutional reform seem to offer very little to regional authorities. Therefore, the party has now lost hope that empowerment of Wales within the EU multi-level governance may come from the EU level. In other words, as far as enhancement of Wales' self-government is concerned, the EU is now perceived as a neutral actor, which leaves decisions on the empowerment of the regions to the member-states. In this respect, it is the 'non-sovereigntist' (autonomist) soul of the party which has been let down by the current trajectory of the EU constitutional structure: "I think the constitution could not satisfy our autonomous ambitions. I think it should go much further in recognizing the role of the regions" (Dafydd Elis Thomas, interview with author, Cardiff, 12/12/06). The independence turn, arguably, represents an attempt to come to terms with the reality of the situation. However, with independence being out of reach in the medium term, the party frustration with its lack of representation in the EU policy making, as well as debate within the party, is likely to continue:

Plaid Cymru supports an honest and open debate on the future of Europe, which is why we supported a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty... As an interim measure, we will propose that the [Welsh] First Minister has the right to attend Council of Ministers meetings as an Observer with speaking rights... Things must change: the EU must stand up for you, for your community and for the future of Wales. (Plaid Cymru, Manifesto, 2009, p. 11-12).

## **Conclusion**

During its long history PC has changed ideological/policy positions several times on all three dimensions. As far as self-government (i.e. the centre-periphery dimension) is concerned, the ideological position of the party was affected for a very long time by

the anti-independentist stance of its leader and founder. The strong resilience of this ideological legacy, which translated into a certain ambiguity in setting the party's final goal, also owed much to the need to reconcile the largely pro-independence attitude of party membership with the overwhelmingly anti-independence stance of the Welsh electorate. Since the 1970s, the party's position has changed several times in response to the emerging possibility of achieving limited autonomy. Finally, in 2003, PC abandoned any ambiguity, stating that independence for Wales represents its final objective. However, the opportunities opened up by multi-party government formation in the NAW, which resulted in PC becoming a junior coalition partner to Welsh Labour in 2007, have determined the adoption of a pragmatic, gradualist strategy aimed at achieving a Scottish-style Parliament in the short to medium term.

The ideological legacy of the inter-war period had a long-lasting effect on the left-right dimension too. A certain conservatism and even sympathy for Fascism gave the party a right-wing public image which proved difficult to get rid of. In the wake of WWII the party tried to establish a centrist (no right, no left) image, which would allow members of all ideological orientations to feel comfortable. While this strategy made some sense in agricultural North and West Wales, it was completely 'unfit' for Wales-wide electoral expansion. Ideological repositioning towards the left started in the 1970s and accelerated in the early 1980s, under the thrust of increased polarization. In addition, in the second half of the 1980s and 1990s the party also developed a New Left ideology, emphasising its anti-militarist, environmentalist and pro gender equality stances. In the age of New Labour, PC could moderate its leftist stance and ease internal tensions on left-right ideological positioning. That said, it seems to have established itself as the most leftist party in the Welsh party system, in spite of Welsh Labour's attempts to distance themselves from the centrist strategy of London's New Labour.

As far as European integration is concerned, the main change of position, from anti- to pro-integration, occurred during the 1980s. In spite of the pro-European legacy of the inter-war period, PC had developed a Eurosceptic position during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1975 it campaign for a 'No vote' in the referendum confirming the UK's membership of the EEC, acquiring political visibility given the pro-membership positions of all the other parties. The slow change of position during the 1980s owed much to the contemporary leftward movement of both the party and the EEC's policies. In addition it was reinforced during the 1990s by the regionalist emphasis of the EU. Indeed, in that period the party subscribed to a Eurofederalist position. During the latest, constitutional,

phase of the EU (2002-2009), the party has maintained a rather ambiguous position. Many prominent members did not like Lisbon's re-emphasis on the centrality of member-states. PC asked for a referendum on the Treaty, omitting to spell out, however, its precise stance should such a referendum be held.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **The Scottish National Party**

The Scottish National Party was born in the inter-war period but it made an impact in the electoral arena only in the late 1960s. From the very beginning it has been the party of self-government for Scotland, drawing on the region's history as an independent state and on the institutional legacy of that independence within the UK. Ethnic distinctiveness *vis a vis* England has never had a high profile in party's discourse and has declined over time; given the affinities between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland and the use of the same language north and south of the border, the resources for ethnic mobilization were scarce if not absent.

With Scotland making up less than ten percent of the UK's population, the SNP has rarely been a relevant party in Westminster. As with many other regionalist parties, its core level of action is the regional one. That is why the establishment of a regional parliament in 1999 completely changed the party's opportunity structure and eventually saw it take office in 2007. Like PC, the SNP consistently does better at regional than at general elections. However, in contrast with many other regionalist parties, the SNP has scored rather poorly at local elections until very recently.

#### **3.1. Party Profile: Origins and Political Achievements**

##### **3.1.1 The historical origins of the centre/periphery cleavage in Scotland**

The origins of the centre/periphery cleavage in Scotland lie in the simple fact that Scotland and England were two independent and separate states for several centuries before the formation of the (United) Kingdom of Great Britain in 1707. From the late twelfth century, a unified kingdom, whose borders coincided to a large extent with contemporary Scotland, had emerged in northern Britain. Leaving aside a serious attempt by the English monarchy to embrace Scotland within the Kingdom of England between the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries, the Scottish Kingdom has enjoyed institutional continuity for about five centuries. Even after the Act of Union of 1707, Scotland maintained its own civil law, its civil service, its separate Church and its education system. These institutional elements contributed to maintain a sense of

Scottish identity in the face of cultural, and in particular linguistic, assimilation which was completed with the spread of mass education in the twentieth century.

From a cultural perspective, medieval Scotland was not a particularly homogeneous polity, nor was it clearly separated from Anglo-Norman England. The Highlands and the north were predominantly Celtic in culture (in spite of strong Scandinavian influences in the north-east) and spoke Gaelic. In contrast, the Lowlands and the south were predominantly influenced by Anglo-Saxon culture and spoke English - or rather 'Inglis' – (H. J. Hanham, 1969, p. 15). Anglo-Saxon knights had settled in the Lowlands from the sixth century and Norman lords had occupied lands in Southern Scotland from the eleventh century, thus providing cultural and political links with both England and the original motherland, France. The cultural distinctiveness of the 'two Scotlands' was enhanced by the Reformation, with the overwhelming majority of Southern Scots becoming Protestants, whereas important Catholic enclaves survived in the Highlands (*ibid.*, p. 20).

It was mainly the Highlanders, and especially the Catholic ones, who took part in the two Jacobite revolts in the first half of the eighteenth century. The repression that followed obliged many of them to leave the Highland estates and to migrate either to the Lowland towns or outside Scotland. This created the basis for a rapprochement of the two Scottish cultures. For the first time, the inhabitants of Lowland towns saw the Highlanders not simply as bandits but as nationalist fighters who were paying the price for having stood up the English. From then onwards, the cult of the Highlands remained a stable feature in Scottish popular culture (*ibid.*, p. 18). The subsequent waves of immigration from Ireland to Scotland in the nineteenth century were gradually absorbed into the pre-existing Presbyterian and, in greater numbers, Catholic Scottish structures. On the one hand, the Catholic Irish reinforced Scottish nationalism, as they were rather sympathetic to the Scottish Home Rule movement of the late nineteenth century, which took inspiration from the political developments in Ireland. On the other hand, the growth of the Catholic minority, which became ever more identified with 'Irishness' (Maver, 1996, p. 272), led to increased sectarian hostility, thus contributing to internal divisions.

The middle of the nineteenth century, from the 1830s through the 1870s, was a period in which Scottish elites found themselves rather comfortable within the UK framework. Beyond important cultural similarities across the border, such as language and religion, the Scottish economy performed rather well, with Scotland taking the lead in expanding industrial sectors, such as shipbuilding, steel and coal, as well as in technological advancements. The expanding British Empire brought its dividends to Scotland too and, for the first time, average incomes were not significantly lower than those in England. In this context of general acceptance of the British state, Scotland came to be conceived as simply 'North Britain' and the Scots' sense of being British became "stronger than any sense of particularism" (McCaffrey, 1998, p. 58).

However, from the 1880s a gradual slow down in the Scottish economy together with social transformations which the massive industrialization of the previous decades had brought about led to a re-emergence of Scottish nationalism. Calls for Scottish Home Rule were made by the dominant Liberal party in the early 1890s, largely after the drive for Irish Home Rule. After 1910, Home Rule for Scotland was re-proposed by the radicals within the Liberal Party and by the emerging Labour Party, this time mainly on the grounds of Scottish socio-economic peculiarities (Finlay, 1996, p. 72). However, World War 1, the decline of the Liberal Party and the progressive Anglicization of the Labour party during the 1920s (which led the party to adopt an ever more centralist approach to socio-economic reform), as well as outright opposition to Scottish Home Rule in the House of Lords, nullified all attempts to reform the constitutional relationships between Scotland and the Union. In 1929 a convinced Scottish nationalist wrote "To my mind it would be better to wait for thirty years and die at the end of it with every dream unfulfilled than accept such a parody of a nation's life as was offered by the Liberals and Labour" (Compton Mackenzie, quoted in Hanham, 1969, p. 153-4). This frustration amongst nationalists led to the birth of several organizations, such as the Highland Land League (HLL), the Scots National League (SNL) and the Scottish National Movement (SNM), which flanked the already existing Scottish Home Rule Association (SHRA). In 1928 the National Party of Scotland (NPS) was founded from the merger of the Glasgow University Scottish Nationalist Association (GUSNA), the

SNL, the SNM and the SHRA, on the initiative of the GUSNA's leader John MacCormick.

### **3.1.2 Party Birth, Electoral Expansion and Political Achievements**

In 1932 another nationalist organization was established by a small group of Tory and Liberal notables, the Scottish Party (SP). This was a much smaller, less representative and less active organization than the NPS, which had already started to contest seats with encouraging results in the general elections of 1929 and 1931, as well as at some by-elections. However, John MacCormick was very keen on uniting forces with the SP and to take on board its seemingly influential members (Finlay, 1994, p. 133). In order to achieve that, he forced the NPS to undergo some ideological and policy change which made it more compatible with the political aims set out by the SP. The content of such ideological/policy change will be analyzed in the following sections. Suffice to say here that such a move entailed the eviction of most of the literary/linguistic nationalist wing of the party (about a fifth of its membership), including the Gaelic militants of the Scots National League and prominent writers, such as Hugh MacDiarmid, Erskine of Marr and Edwin Muir (Hanham, 1969, p. 60). In turn, this provoked the resignation of other prominent members, such as Tom Gibson and future leader of the Scottish National Party, Arthur Donaldson (Finlay, 1994, p. 134). Arguably, MacCormick's choices had negative repercussions in the life of the future party, both in terms of electoral performance and internal unity.

The National Party of Scotland and the Scottish Party merged formally in 1934, giving birth to the Scottish National Party (SNP). The SP, in spite of being the junior partner, obtained the most important positions (Hanham, 1969, p. 163). Alexander MacEwan became the party Chairman (i.e. the formal leader) and the Duke of Montrose, a Tory member of the House of Lords, became the first party President. On the NPS's side, Cunninghame Graham maintained the position of Honorary President and MacCormick that of Secretary. The new party represented a compromise between the two founding organizations not only in terms of ideology and aims but also in terms of strategy. The NPS had been established because a group of nationalists had come to the



conclusion that nothing could be expected by the British parties and that only the electoral success of an independent nationalist party could bring about Scotland's self-government. From 1929 to 1933 the NPS had contested few seats in general elections and by-elections with considerable success, scoring well in some urban constituencies of the central belt, where the party concentrated its electoral activity, as well as in Inverness and in the Western Isles. In contrast, the SP was a loose organization and, although electoral activity was not excluded, had been conceived as mainly a pressure group.

The SNP initially adopted the policy of the NPS which forbade party members joining other political parties. However, almost immediately MacCormick gave way to former SP's members who were demanding the right to retain their affiliations with other parties. Even the party President, Montrose, who could have been the only representative of the SNP in Parliament due to his seat in the Lords, left the Tory group not to sit as a Scottish Nationalist MP but to join the pro-Home Rule group of the Liberal Party (Lynch, 2002, p. 47). In fact, Montrose even suggested the whole party should follow him and merge with the Liberals.

At the 1935 general election, the SNP did worse than the NPS had done in previous elections. That result determined the end of Montrose's presidency, but the party strategy kept moving towards pressure group activities, rather than the electoral route. However, the cross-party initiatives undertaken by MacCormick in the late 1930s did not lead to anything, mainly owing to the start of the war. If anything, they reinforced the image of the SNP as a cross-party pressure group, rather than a proper political party, and served to alienate some radical nationalists. The party scored well in war-time by-elections because the main parties did not present their candidates. It even managed to win a seat with Robert McIntyre in a by-election in April 1945. However, the SNP emerged from the war-time as a much weaker organization. In 1942, MacCormick had left the party because of continuing conflicts on the party aims and strategy. From 1945 to 1952 he initiated a series of cross-party activities (the Scottish National Assembly and the Covenant Association) which contributed to overshadow the SNP. In addition, the notoriousness of 'nationalism' as a general ideology in the post-

war context also contributed to keep voters and members away from the SNP. Lack of organizational and financial resources did the rest. As Table 3.1 shows, in the first post-war general election the party only managed to retain the same share of vote it had got in 1935 and the following four elections of the 1950s were complete failures, both in terms of number of seats contested and votes obtained.

**Table 3.1**  
**Electoral results in Scotland for the Westminster elections 1935-2005**

	<i>Conservatives</i>		<i>Labour</i>		<i>Liberals Lib-Dem</i>		<i>SNP</i>	
Year	Vote%	seats	Vote%	seats	Vote%	seats	Vote%	seats
1935	49.8	43	36.8	20	6.7	3	1.1	0
1945	41.1	27	49.4	40	5	0	1.2	0
1950	44.8	32	46.2	32	6.6	2	0.4	0
1951	48.6	35	47.9	35	2.7	1	0.3	0
1955	50.1	36	46.7	34	1.9	1	0.5	0
1959	47.2	31	46.7	38	4.1	1	0.5	0
1964	40.6	24	48.7	43	7.6	4	2.4	0
1966	37.7	20	49.9	46	6.8	5	5	0
1970	38	23	44.5	44	5.5	3	11.4	1
1974 Feb	32.9	21	36.6	41	8	3	21.9	7
1974 Oct	24	16	36.3	41	8.3	3	30.4	11
1979	31.4	22	41.5	44	9	3	17.3	2
1983	28.4	21	35.1	41	24.5	8	11.7	2
1987	24	10	42.4	50	19.2	9	14	3
1992	25.7	11	39	49	13.1	9	21.5	3
1997	17.5	0	45.6	56	13	10	22.1	6
2001	15.6	1	43.3	55	16.4	10	20.1	5
2005	15.8	1	38.9	40	22.6	11	17.7	6

Source: Peter Lynch (2006, p. 232).

The patient job of rebuilding party organization and credibility, which was carried out by McIntyre and James Halliday during the late 1940s and 1950s, started to pay off from an electoral point of view during the leadership of Arthur Donaldson in the 1960s and, even more, under the leadership of Billy Wolfe during the 1970s. At the 1964 general election the increase in the vote share was mainly due to the party's ability to contest fifteen seats, three times more than in 1959. However, at the following election in 1966, the party not only doubled its vote share but it also came second in three constituencies (Fry, 1987, p. 217).

Although the SNP had not built yet a stable basis of electoral support, by the late 1960s socio-economic and political trends started to work at the advantage of the nationalists. First, industrial decline in Scotland had become manifest. Initially, this economic trend produced a voting re-alignment in favour of Labour and generated a slow but steady decline of the Conservatives. However, at subsequent junctures in which voters were dissatisfied with particular Labour Government's policies, many of them did not revert to the Conservatives but, rather, turned to the SNP and, to a lesser extent, the Liberals (*ibid.*, p. 218).

The victory of SNP candidate, Winifred Ewing, at the Hamilton by-election in November 1967 signalled the start of a dramatic electoral growth in the following decade. As a result of Ewing's election (and of Welsh nationalist Evans's election in 1966), the Labour government set up the Kilbrandon Royal Commission for the Constitution. This gave even more impetus to the SNP. In 1970, the party won its first seat (Western Isles) in a general election and obtained more than ten percent of the vote across Scotland.

In the early 1970s, two more factors contributed to the party's electoral breakthrough. First, it had become clear that oil resources under the North Sea were extensive. This strengthened the credibility of the party's independence policy from an economic point of view. Secondly, the issue of UK accession in the European Economic Community became very salient amongst some sectors of Scottish society. The SNP's position on the latter (which will be discussed in more detail in section 3.4.2) attracted the social groups who had more to lose from UK's EEC membership, such as workers in the fishing industry, providing a further electoral stimulus and, for the first time, winning over an identifiable social constituency with stable links to the party.

As a consequence of the remarkable results of the two 1974 elections (see Table 3.1), the newly (re-)elected Labour government pushed on with the devolution project. The Scotland Act 1978 proposed the establishment of a deliberative Assembly without tax-varying powers, subject to popular endorsement by a referendum in which at least 40% of the total electorate would vote in favour. The good electoral results in the 1977 local elections (see Table 3.2) seemed to confirm the positive trend. However, in spite

of a ‘Yes’ victory and a relatively high turnout, the 1979 referendum was lost because the 40% threshold was not overcome.

**Table 3.2**  
**Scottish Local Election Results**

	<i>Labour</i>		<i>Conservatives</i>		<i>SNP</i>		<i>Lib/Lib-Dem</i>		<i>Others</i>	
<i>Year</i>	vote%	seats	vote%	seats	vote%	seats	vote%	seats	vote%	seats
Regional 1974	38.5	172	28.6	112	12.6	18	5.1	11	12.4	114
District 1974	38.4	428	26.8	241	12.4	62	5.0	17	14.1	345
District 1977	31.6	299	27.2	277	24.2	170	4.0	31	9.8	318
Regional 1978	39.6	177	30.3	136	20.9	18	2.3	6	4.9	89
District 1980	45.4	494	24.1	229	15.5	54	6.2	40	6.7	289
Regional 1982	37.6	186	25.1	119	13.4	23	18.1	25	5.1	87
District 1984	45.7	545	21.4	189	11.7	59	12.8	78	6.8	267
Regional 1986	43.9	223	16.9	65	18.2	36	15.1	40	4.8	79
District 1988	42.6	553	19.4	162	21.3	113	8.4	84	6.4	231
Regional 1990	42.7	233	19.6	52	21.8	42	8.7	40	4.5	73
District 1992	34.1	468	23.2	204	24.3	150	9.5	94	7.4	228
Regional 1994	41.8	220	13.7	31	26.8	73	12	60	4.2	65
Unitary 1995	43.6	613	11.5	82	26.1	181	9.8	121	7.7	155
Unitary 1999	36.6	545	13.7	108	28.9	201	13.6	148	11.8	135
Unitary 2003	32.6	509	15.1	122	24.1	181	14.5	175	13.4	234
Unitary 2007	n.d	348	n.d	143	n.d	363	n.d	166	n.d	202

Source: Peter Lynch (2006, p. 233).

The general election of 1979, which the SNP fought under the slogan “Scotland said ‘Yes’” represented a considerable setback, compared to the October 1974 election, especially in terms of number of seats won.

During the 1980s, under the leadership of Gordon Wilson, the party experienced a period of electoral decline and stagnation. Yet, it managed to hold onto its two seats in 1983 and to capture a third one at the 1987 general election, when the SNP and PC formed an electoral alliance. In contrast, at the 1992 general election, the considerable growth in the party’s vote share, achieved under the new leadership of Alex Salmond, did not gain it more seats. Yet, a nationalist party winning more than a fifth of the Scottish votes was a serious problem for a British Labour party that was desperate to recapture a majority at Westminster. In addition, lack of Scottish autonomy had also become an issue for the Labour Party in Scotland. Indeed, in spite of winning more than

two thirds of Scottish seats in 1987 and 1992, it had to suffer another Tory government. As a result, the Labour Party's commitment to devolution solidified and, after the party re-gained office in 1997, it pushed the reform through at Westminster. The SNP's good results at the 1994 European elections (see Table 3.3) and the 1997 general election also kept pressure on Labour to act quickly and to concede a substantial degree of self-government.

**Table 3.3**  
**European Election Results in Scotland**

Year	Labour		Conservatives		Liberals/LibDem		SNP	
	Vote%	seats	Vote%	seats	Vote%	seats	Vote%	seats
1979	33	2	33.7	5	14	0	19.4	1
1984	40.7	5	25.7	2	15.6	0	17.8	1
1989	41.9	7	20.9	0	4.3	0	25.6	1
1994	42.5	6	14.5	0	7.2	0	32.6	2
1999	28.7	3	19.8	2	9.8	1	27.2	2
2004	26.4	3	17.8	2	13.1	1	19.7	2
2009	20.8	2	16.8	1	11.5	1	29.1	2

The Labour government proposed to establish a Scottish Parliament which, pending confirmation by the Scottish people in a referendum, would have primary legislative power on all matters not reserved to Westminster.<sup>34</sup> If approved by referendum, the Scottish Parliament would also have tax-varying powers by up to 3%. In the 1997 referendum, the Scottish people approved the establishment of the Parliament by an overwhelming majority (see Table 3.4). The absence of the 40% clause, which in 1979 had determined the result, meant that the tax-varying powers were also devolved.

The establishment of a Scottish Parliament represented not only the most important achievement of the SNP, but also a new point from which to increase its weight in Scottish and British politics. The Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system which was chosen for the new Parliament - about 57% of seats elected by single member plurality system (SMP) and about 43% elected by proportional

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<sup>34</sup> These are: Constitution, protection of borders, defence and national security, Foreign policy and relations with Europe, civil service, electricity, coal, oil, gas, social security, employment, economic and monetary policy, abortion, broadcasting policy and drug policy.

representation (PR) in multi-member districts - was expected to favour the SNP and the other under-represented parties at the expense of Labour.

**Table 3.4**  
**Devolution Referendum Results in Scotland (1979 and 1997)**

	<i>% of those who voted</i>		<i>% of the electorate</i>		<i>Turnout</i>
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
1979	51.6	48.4	<u>32.9</u>	30.8	63.8
1997a	<u>74.3</u>	25.7	44.9	15.5	60.4
1997b	<u>63.5</u>	36.5	38.4	22	60.4

a=First question: "I agree that there should be a Scottish Parliament"

b=Second question: "I agree that the Scottish Parliament should have tax-varying powers"

**Table 3.5**  
**Scottish Parliament Election Results**

	<i>Constituencies</i>		<i>Regional lists</i>		<i>Total</i>
	Vote%	seats	Vote%	seats	seats
<b>1999</b>					
Conservatives	15.5	0	15.4	18	18
Labour	38.8	53	33.6	3	56
Liberal Democrats	14.2	12	12.4	5	17
SNP	28.7	7	27.3	28	35
Scottish Greens	0	0	3.6	1	1
Scottish Socialists	1	0	2.4	1	1
Others	1.7	1	5.3	0	1
<b>2003</b>					
Conservatives	16.6	3	15.5	15	18
Labour	34.6	46	29.3	4	50
Liberal Democrats	15.3	13	11.8	4	17
SNP	23.7	9	20.9	18	27
Scottish Greens	0	0	6.9	7	7
Scottish Socialists	6.2	0	6.7	6	6
Others	3.4	3	8.9	1	4
<b>2007</b>					
Conservatives	16.6	4	13.9	13	17
Labour	32.1	37	29.2	9	46
Liberal Democrats	16.2	11	11.3	5	16
SNP	32.9	21	31	26	47
Scottish Greens	0.1	0	4	2	2
Others	2.1	1	10.6	0	1

Source: Massetti (2009b)

As Table 3.5 shows, the first election of the Scottish Parliament confirmed these expectations, giving the SNP the second biggest parliamentary group and the role of formal opposition party. Labour failed to win a majority of seats and formed a government with the Liberal Democrats as junior partner. The great surprise of the 1999 was the emergence of two new parties, the Scottish Greens (SG) and the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), each electing one Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP). Being ‘only Scottish’ and pro-independence parties, they constituted a significant threat to the SNP’s aspirations to keep the nationalist and pro-independence front united under its banner. Indeed, the electoral growth of the Greens and Socialists in the 2003 election corresponded to a dramatic drop of the SNP, which lost nearly a quarter of its PR vote, and to a less dramatic drop of Labour, which could go on and form another Lib-Lab government. However, after two terms of Labour-led governments, the SNP was presented with a great opportunity at the 2007 election. The Conservative party had shown no sign of electoral progress and the Scottish Socialist Party had shot itself in the foot by splitting into two groups (the new group being called Solidarity) during the second term, with the leader of the splinter group being implicated in a scandal which developed into a court case and involved, as witnesses, other leading members of the SSP. At the 2007 election, the SNP emerged as the leading party in the Scottish Parliament by one MSP over Labour and, after several weeks of negotiations, managed to form a minority government committed to holding a referendum on Scottish independence by the end of term (Masseti, 2009b).

### **3.1.3 Party organization**

In the first fifteen/twenty years of its existence the SNP remained a political organization which fell somewhere between a political party and a pressure group. In this respect the NPS fusion with the SP represented a step back. Indeed, most members of the SP understood the new organization as a cross-party pressure group pursuing Home Rule for Scotland by means of winning the intellectual argument and bringing the other parties to commit to that policy. While the NPS had established that its members

could not join any other party, the SNP, under the pressure from former SP members to be permitted to retain their affiliations with the Conservative and Liberal parties, gave up on exclusive membership until 1948. The pressure group strategy, which was also endorsed by MacCormick of the former NPS, and the moderation policy on the constitutional objective (which will be discussed in section 3.2) damaged the new party electorally and in terms of membership. Table 3.6 shows how party membership has generally followed the same ups and downs as the party's electoral cycles, often anticipating them. It emerges quite clearly that, by 1960, the SNP was nowhere near having the same number of members that the NPS had attracted in the early 1930s.

**Table 3.6**  
**SNP's Leaders\***

Alexander MacEwan	1934-36
Andrew Dewar Gibb	1936-40
William Power	1940-42
Douglas Young	1942-45
Bruce Watson	1945-47
Robert McIntyre	1947-56
James Halliday	1956-60
Arthur Donaldson	1960-69
Billy Wolfe	1969-79
Gordon Wilson	1979-90
Alex Salmond	1990-00
John Swinney	2000-04
Alex Salmond	2004-

Source: Peter Lynch (2006, p. 242)

\*SNP's leaders were formally elected as party Chairmen and then as National Convenors

Membership fees being the main source of financial revenue for the party, low membership also meant very scarce funds to build up an organizational structure, to fund the party periodical *Scots Independent*, and to fight elections. For instance, from the mid-1940s to the early 1950s, the party could not afford to have a National Organizer constantly in post (Lynch, 2002, p. 74).



Things started to change from the early 1960s under Arthur Donaldson's leadership (see Table 3.7). Two men played crucial roles in turning the SNP, in just a few years, from a tiny and amateurishly run party into a mass party with an effective organization.<sup>35</sup>

**Table 3.7**  
**NPS and SNP's number of branches and membership**

Year	Number of branches	Membership
1930 (NPS)		4,000
1931 (NPS)		8,000
1934		14,500*
1944	30**	
1946	28	1,228
1947	38	
1950	45	2460
1960	23	2,000
1962		20,000
1965	140	42,000
1967	333	
1968	484	125,000
1971		70,000
1974	460	85,000
1979	486***	
1983		19,387
1987		12,115
1988	281	
1997		15,000
2003		9,450
2006		12,571
2008		15,097

\* 14,000 members came from the NPS and 500 from the SP. According to Finlay the figure claimed by the NPS was exaggerated (Finlay, 1994, p. 157).

\*\*Branches with more than 20 members, there were few more sub-branches with less than 20 members.

\*\*\*Only 186 of the 486 branches submitted membership list to the Head Quarter.

Source: Levy, 1990; Newell, 1998; Lynch, 2002, *The Scotsman*, 01/01/09, available at:  
<http://news.scotsman.com/latestnews/SNP39s-membership-surges-by-6037.4836805.jp>

<sup>35</sup> The information on the organizational reforms of the 1960s is taken from Lynch (2002, p. 99-101 and 106-11) and from Gordon Wilson (interview with the author, Dundee, 06/11/06).

The first was Ian Macdonald, who became the party's National Organizer from 1961. He was responsible for the growth and reorganisation of party membership in the succeeding years, spending a lot of time touring Scotland in order to recruit new members, establish new branches and dividing existing large branches into smaller ones. Crucially, he did all this on a self-funded basis, at no cost to the party. The second man was Gordon Wilson, the then National Secretary and future leader of the party in the 1980s. From 1963, he undertook a re-organization of the party structure which lasted for forty years. The reform mainly concerned the top institutions in the party. Until then there had been only four top office-bearers – the President, the Chairman, the Secretary and the Treasurer – dealing with the executive and organizational functions. To these, three new were added: the Senior Vice-Chairman, acting as a Deputy Leader, and two Executive Vice-Chairmen which re-organized and supervised the work of the National Executive's Committees. The most important effect of the reform was to free the Chairman, the National Executive and the National Council from time-consuming administrative tasks, so as to enable them to dedicate more time to developing party policy and strategy.

Party finances were also improved considerably during the 1960s, thanks to the increased membership and to the 'Alba Pools' scheme (Lynch, 2002, p. 110). By the late 1960s the party had turned from being in constant deficit to producing a surplus which was bigger than the total income of the early 1960s. This also allowed the SNP to expand its Headquarters (which at that time were still based in Glasgow), from three to eight employees, including a research officer hired in 1968.

The re-organization, however, did not address all the problems of the party. In particular, issues concerning the relationship of branches with the National Executive and the Council were left aside. In the context of a dramatic increase of branches and members during the 1960s, that meant that co-ordination problems also increased, in spite of the fact that new Executive Vice-Chairmen were added in the late 1960s. The policy making process was also addressed in the late 1960s, when a new collective body, the National Assembly, was established (Gordon Wilson, interview with the author, Dundee, 06/11/06). This was a dual structure made up of specialist policy committees

and an overall plenary body which discussed and approved policy proposals. In addition, since the SNP at that time was a completely extra-parliamentary party, issues of co-ordination between the MPs and the rest of the party were not addressed. As we shall see, this created several problems in the 1970s.

Overall, the 1960s reforms did not alter substantially the distribution of power within the SNP. The branches remained the backbone of the party (much more so than the underdeveloped constituency organizations) and maintained a strong say in the supreme policymaking and elective body, the National Conference, as well as in National Council and National Assembly. The inclusive and democratic policy making process meant that members were able to get policy proposals passed in party Conferences, independently of their political weight within the party.

This party structure remained largely unaltered until the early 2000s. In the 1980s, under Wilson's leadership, there was an attempt at reviewing party organization with the specific intention of strengthening the leadership but, at a 1985 special conference, the party rejected the proposed reform in all its aspects (Levy, 1990, p. 114). However, after the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the consequent opportunity for the SNP to become a (regional) governing party, the time was right for re-organization of the party machine. Indeed, a general shift of power towards the parliamentary party had occurred independently of the reform, almost by default. The resources of the SNP's Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) far exceed those of the party as a whole both in terms of research and media output (Lynch, 2006, p. 244). Therefore, the Shadow (from 2007 actual) Ministers in the Parliament have become the spokespersons in their respective policy areas for the party.

Reform was implemented by John Swinney, after he became leader in 2000. He streamlined the decision making process in the Conference and in the Council, and introduced a very tough disciplinary code aimed at containing the possibly disruptive 'loose cannons' in the party. More importantly, he strengthened the position of the party leader, who was now elected by 'one member one vote' system. He split more clearly the roles of the leader and the Chairman, the latter now being appointed directly by and accountable to the former. While the Chairman runs the party's finances and

organization, the leader is free to concentrate on political decisions. The rationale of the reform was to create “the best opportunity for the leader to pursue his political agenda without rival within the party” (John Swinney, interview with the author, 07/11/06).

Another part of the reform, “which was fiercely resisted within the party” (ibid.), was the centralization of party membership and collection of membership fees. The aim of this reform was to address the problem of the apparent inability of local branches to retain members and collect the annual fees: “we used to lose a thousand members a year” (ibid.). In conjunction with Plaid Cymru, which implemented the same reform at this time, the SNP created a centralized membership and a direct debit system for collecting fees. This reform not only made the revenue of the party more stable, it actually increased it considerably, as many members chose to devote a certain amount of their income (on the top of annual fees) to the party. The result was more money for the party’s HQ and more money for the local branches. As far as party finance is concerned, it has to be noted that in recent years the SNP has also benefited from large donations from individuals, normally businessmen. In the run up to the 2007 Scottish election, for instance, the SNP received a £500,000 donation from Brian Souter, the Stagecoach tycoon who had already made other donations, though of a much lower amount, to the party in previous years (BBC/Scotland, 17/03/07, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/6462119.stm>).

### **3.2. Party Ideology and Policy: The Centre-Periphery Dimension**

#### **3.2.1 The Initial Clash and the Home Rule period (1932-1945)**

The SNP’s birth, out of the merger between the NPS and the SP, was made possible only after the two groups had reached a compromise which involved not just the sharing of top positions within the new party but also, and most crucially, the party’s primary objective. The first clash on the party’s self-government policy, therefore, happened before the SNP was formed, in the period of mutual approach and negotiation between the two forerunners from 1932 and 1934. It is worth bearing in mind that the debate on constitutional aims was, at that juncture, still profoundly linked to the issue of

whether the new organization had to behave as a proper political party, as many within the NPS wanted, a cross-party pressure group, which was the preferred option within the SP, or a mix of the two, as MacCormick and others were inclined to conceive it. Indeed, while a moderate stance on constitutional policy would have kept the door open for cross-party activities, a pro-independence position would have set the new organization apart from other British parties.

Although the NPS had been itself a ‘broad church’, encompassing advocates of Home Rule, such Roland Muirhead (the former leader of the SHRA) and MacCormick himself, most members were in favour of full independence under the British Crown (Fry, 1987, p. 213). Amongst them, one of the most vocal groups was that of the literary men, some of whom advocated the creation of an independent state based on the revival of the Gaelic language, ‘Gaeldom’ (Hanham, 1969, p. 151-57). The official policy of the NPS was to achieve ‘Self-government for Scotland with Independent National Status within the British Group of Nations’ or, as the party periodical *Scots Independent* put it “to restore to the ancient Scots Nation and People their former Freedom to govern themselves” (ibid., p. 163). In contrast, the SP was clearly a Home Rule organization, whose members opposed political separation from England.

The compromise between the two organizations was reached in the original programme of the SNP which called for equal partnership of Scotland and England in the British Empire and the establishment of a Parliament in Scotland dealing with Scottish matters (ibid. p. 164). *De facto*, this was an almost complete surrender to the Home Rule position of the PS, which became even more apparent after the disappointing results of the 1935 election. Indeed, rather than interpreting the results as a consequence of the softened self-government stance of the SNP<sup>36</sup> and, therefore, reverting to a more radical stance, MacCormick used the results to argue that the electoral strategy was leading nowhere and pushed ahead with his preferred pressure group strategy, starting a prolonged negotiation with the Liberals and with the Labour party in order to create a consensus on Home Rule for Scotland.

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<sup>36</sup> This was the interpretation given by the party periodical the *Scots Independent* (Hanham, 1969, p. 165).

The turn from the independence stance of the NPS to the Home Rule policy of the SNP was not a smooth one. On the contrary, it represented the first bitter internal row in the party's history. The abandonment of the independence policy was proposed by MacCormick at the 1933 Conference of the NPS as a prelude to merging with the SP. However, many within the party blatantly opposed the policy revision, especially the former members of the Scots National League. MacCormick managed to win the vote by 69 votes to 49, but he lost a vote which should have given the party leadership the 'green light' to negotiate the merger with the SP (*ibid.*, p. 160). The deadlock was broken by MacCormick's decision to expel most of those who opposed his line. The 'purge' was carried out at a special Conference in July 1933, and targeted many of the 'literary men', thus giving the SNP a reputation as an anti-intellectual party (Fry, 1987, p. 213).

Having got rid of most dissenters within the party, MacCormick was now free to pursue his cross-party pressure group strategy based on moderate self-government. However, the long negotiations with the Liberal and Labour party produced the establishment of a Scottish National Convention only in 1939. With the start of the war, any hope of achieving Home Rule in the medium term vanished and the work of the previous years was entirely lost. In addition, internal dissent started to re-emerge around the issue of military conscription for Scotsmen and industrial conscription (often in England) for Scottish women. In particular the party had voted for a resolution in 1937 which obliged all male members to refuse conscription. However, when the war started MacCormick encouraged people to enrol in the British army and many followed his advice. Those who remained in favour of the 1937 resolution gathered around Douglas Young, who had become popular for his imprisonment due to the refusal to join the army. At the 1942 Conference, the dissenters nominated Young as their candidate as Chairman (i.e. party leader) against MacCormick's candidate William Power. At the end of a tense confrontation Young won by 33 votes to 29, causing the walkout of MacCormick and his followers (Hanham, 1969, p. 168).

The nationalist movement was now split. On one side MacCormick and the Home Rulers founded the Scottish Union, later renamed the Scottish Convention, and

kept trying to build a cross-party consensus. Although this activity led to nothing, it clearly overshadowed the SNP after the war and during the 1950s, hindering its electoral growth. On the other side, the SNP was now more similar to the NPS and many members who had left the party or had been expelled in 1933 started to re-join. However, the party's constitutional policy was not immediately reversed. After all, MacCormick had been beaten on the conscription issue and Young himself was a moderate nationalist. Yet, under his leadership, the pro-independence members quickly regained ground. In particular Dr. Robert McIntyre became the new leading figure, especially after he won a by-election in 1945 becoming the SNP's first MP, albeit for just few weeks.

### **3.2.2 One objective, two strategies (1946-1997)**

In 1946 the SNP adopted a new comprehensive policy statement which had been drafted by a small number of members led by McIntyre. In fact, more than a detailed policy plan, the document was rather a statement of intent, where the party's primary objectives and guiding values were outlined. The document put the SNP on a firm pro-independence footing. The opening paragraph of the document, headed "Aim of the National Party", states: "The People of Scotland...have...an inherent right to determine their own destiny. The aim of the Scottish National Party is therefore 'Self-Government for Scotland'. The restoration of Scottish National Sovereignty by the establishment of a democratic Scottish Government..." (*Statement of Aim and Policy of the SNP*, reported in Hanham, 1969, p. 213). The document also set out the strategy to achieve independence and a new Constitution for Scotland:

On the election to the British Parliament of a majority of Scottish National members from Scotland, a Scottish Constituent Assembly shall be summoned either (a) in virtue of an Act of Parliament passed by agreement with the English members of (b) failing such agreement, by the Scottish National members acting in terms of the authority conferred upon them by the Scottish electorate. (ibid.)

This strategic plan, which envisaged the achievement of independence, and nothing less than independence, in one stroke, would remain the 'guiding light' of the so called

‘fundamentalist’ tendency within the party until at least the late 1990s. According to this school of thought (which was obviously affected by the past failures of cross-party co-operation on Home Rule grounds and was still suffering from competition with MacCormick’s National Convention) self-government for Scotland could come only from SNP’s success. Nothing should be expected from the British parties and, if any proposal was put forward by them, it should be considered a trap, designed to embroil the SNP and make it lose momentum. In addition, even if such proposals were genuine and serious, they should not be taken into consideration unless they were designed to grant the Scottish electorate the chance to choose independence, since the achievement of a milder form of self-government could jeopardise the final objective.

In the late 1940s and 1950s, this point of view was widely shared within the party and helped the SNP to focus on improving its electoral score as its primary activity. However, in the absence of electoral progress, the idea of winning a majority of Scottish seats and, on the basis of such an event, secure independence from the UK looked even more unlikely. In 1957 Roland Muirhead, who had remained a member of the SNP in spite of also engaging in consensus building with his Scottish National Congress, wrote: “the present policy of the party has proved a complete failure” (Harvie, 1994, p. 170).

Ironically enough (or perhaps naturally enough) the electoral growth of the second half of the 1960s and 1970s also brought about the emergence of a ‘gradualist’ tendency within the party. As the British parties, and in particular Labour, started to take the SNP’s electoral challenge seriously, they became more prone to advance proposals for Scottish self-government, which lured many within the party (Levy, 1990, pp. 60-61). In the first half of the 1970s, the SNP obtained its electoral breakthrough, campaigning strongly in favour of full-blooded independence and using the issue of North Sea oil to strengthen its case. However, after Labour won the October 1974 election with a manifesto that included a commitment to devolution, the SNP found itself engulfed in internal debates on the position to be adopted for the following five years.



Divisions arose between the leadership and the grassroots and, because of lack of co-ordination, between the NEC (whose most prominent members were not MPs) and the parliamentary group at Westminster. Billy Wolfe, the party leader, struggled to find a balanced line between a largely fundamentalist membership and a devolution proposal which the SNP's parliamentary group had little or no chance to amend. Suspicion of the real commitment of Labour to devolution was widespread, as the first proposal was lost at Westminster in early 1977 and the second proposal was subject to approval by a referendum in which of at least 40 percent of the Scottish electorate would have to vote yes. The Labour government had itself to find a very delicate balance, between moderately pro-devolutionist Scottish MPs and largely anti-devolutionist English and Welsh MPs. The SNP leadership, at least in the venues where the grassroots had considerable power, such as party conferences, could not avoid criticizing the limited powers that the Scottish Assembly envisaged would have. This put them in a weak position when they tried to uphold a pragmatic line in support of the government proposal. Debates between the gradualist and fundamentalist factions at the annual Conferences from 1975 to 1978 were often tough, with different positions being adopted each year (Levy, 1990, pp. 68-85; Lynch, 2002, pp. 148-56). Although the gradualists managed to formally commit the SNP to support for a 'Yes' vote in the referendum, they never really won the argument fully within the party. In addition, the problems of co-ordinating a 'Yes' campaign with the other parties, especially with a scarcely motivated Labour, contributed to the overall ambiguity of the party's stance. The opinion polls, showing a sharp decline in support of devolution from 65% in April 1976 to only 49% in February 1979 (less than a month before the referendum), also did not help the gradualist faction to strengthen its position (Bochel and Denver, 1981a, p. 32). In the party's public discourse, the benefits of devolution were never convincingly exposed (while many opponents, especially in local campaigns, indulged in listing the shortcomings of the government proposals) and party's support for the 'Yes' vote was justified exclusively in terms of an incremental approach to independence (Levy, 1990, p. 86).

The referendum result was very disappointing for the party. As Table 3.8 shows, only a very slim majority of voters supported devolution, with some Scottish regions, such as the Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, not to mention the ‘Scandinavian’ Islands Orkney and Shetland, expressing a clear majority against. Crucially, the very narrow majority in favour of devolution meant that the 40% threshold was not reached. In spite of a relatively respectable turnout, the ‘Yes’ votes remained below the threshold by more than 7%.

**Table 3.8**  
**1979 Referendum Results on Devolution in Scotland**

<i>Region</i>	<i>Yes % of votes</i>	<i>No % of votes</i>	<i>Yes - % of the electorate</i>	<i>Turnout</i>
Borders	40.3	59.7	27.0	67.3
Central	54.7	45.3	36.4	66.7
Dumfries and Galloway	40.3	59.7	26.1	64.9
Fife	53.7	46.3	35.4	66.6
Grampian	48.3	51.7	27.9	57.9
Highland	51.0	49.0	33.3	65.4
Lothian	50.1	49.9	33.4	66.6
Strathclyde	54.0	46.0	34.1	63.2
Tayside	49.5	50.5	31.5	63.8
Orkney	27.9	72.1	15.3	54.8
Shetland	27.1	72.9	13.7	51.0
Western Islands	55.8	44.2	28.1	50.5
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>51.6</b>	<b>48.4</b>	<b>32.9</b>	<b>63.8</b>

Source: Bochel and Denver (1981b, p. 140-41), in Bochel, Denver and Macartney (eds) (1981) *The Referendum Experience: Scotland 1979*, Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.

The first reaction of the SNP was to push the Labour government to ignore the 40% threshold and implement devolution, on the grounds that the ‘Yes’ vote had won the referendum. With eleven MPs in Westminster and a Labour minority government which could not count anymore on the systematic support of the Liberals, the SNP decided to play the blackmail card. However, the choice turned out to be a failure as, confronted with a Labour’s government playing for time, the parliamentary party ended

up supporting a motion of no confidence together with the Conservative Party, thus bringing the government down and opening the door to eighteen years of Tory government in Scotland. Such a move was severely punished by Scottish voters at the general election in May 1979, which the party fought on a gradualist position and focused primarily on the 'broken promises' of the British parties, Labour being the primary target (Levy, 1990, pp. 95-96). In addition, the election of an anti-devolution Conservative government meant that the whole issue of Scottish self-government was now off the agenda.

The blow of the 1979 referendum and general election reignited factional confrontation with the party. The showdown between fundamentalists and gradualists led to the end of Billy Wolfe's leadership and the election of Gordon Wilson, the only MP amongst those elected in October 1974 who managed to get re-elected in 1979. It was Wilson himself who led the offensive on the party leadership for its divisive and ambiguous strategy:

The poor result is a direct consequence of the indecisive collective direction of the party, which has wandered in only two years from full-blood independence to an obsession with devolution. The NEC must bear responsibility for the dismantling of the oil campaign with its phase-out as a priority issue...Any party which does not know where it is going and is disunited on strategy, stands little chance of obtaining support from the public. (Gordon Wilson, May 1979, quoted in Lynch, 2002, p. 156).

Wilson himself, after being elected party leader, had to cope with increasing factionalism and, given his strong opinion on the deleterious consequences of internal divisions, did tackle the issue, even resorting to expulsions. However, as will be discussed in the following sections, the factionalism he had to deal with turned very quickly from being centred on a gradualist-traditionalist division to being centred on a left-right split. The opposition between fundamentalists and gradualists gradually lost salience. With the devolution issue off the agenda and electoral decline, both strategies were very unlikely to bring any concrete result in the short to medium term.

After the 1983 general election, in fact, the fundamentalist 'counter-revolution' started to lose strength. The proposal for the establishment of an elected constitutional convention which would discuss a scheme for a Scottish Parliament was defeated at the

SNP's September 1983 Conference but approved the following year (Lynch, 2002, p. 184). On that occasion, the SNP's proposal did not find a political context receptive enough and led to nothing. However, in the years that followed, and in particular after the 1987 general election, things were to change considerably. The growing unpopularity of the Thatcher government and the dramatic electoral decline of the Conservatives in Scotland created a 'legitimacy question': the Scots continued to be governed by a party which they increasingly rejected at the ballot boxes (Levy, 1990, p. 110; Mitchell and Bennie, 1996). This situation determined a sharp increase in public support for both devolution and independence (see Table 3.9).

**Table 3.9 Constitutional preferences (%) amongst the Scottish electorate (1979-1994)**

	1979	1981	1983	1984	1985	1987	1989	1990	1992	1994
Independence	14	22	23	25	33	35	35	34	37	38
Devolution	42	47	48	45	47	42	42	44	34	44
No Change	35	26	26	27	14	20	20	19	25	16
Don't know	9	5	2	3	6	3	3	3	3	2

Source: Kellas, 1989, p. 150 and Newell, 1998, p. 113.

As will be discussed in section 3.4, in the late 1980s the SNP managed to reformulate its independence proposal in a more attractive way by linking it to the process of European integration. In the context of growing Scottish nationalism, this move contributed to rebuilding the party's credibility and to regaining electoral momentum. Even more importantly, the rise of the 'legitimacy question' had pushed the Scottish Labour party and Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC) towards strongly pro-devolutionist positions. In 1988, Scottish Labour Action (SLA) was formed, an internal pressure group which proved effective in pushing the issue of a Scottish Parliament in the following years. Under increasing electoral pressure from the SNP, which won the traditionally Labour seat of Glasgow Govan in a by-election in 1988, the

Labour party re-took the initiative for a cross-party Constitutional Convention which was set up in February 1989 (Mitchell, 1998).

While the establishment of the cross-party Constitutional Convention and its foundational Claim of Right, with its emphasis on the right of the Scottish people to self-determination, represented an important intellectual victory for the SNP,<sup>37</sup> it also re-ignited internal debate over party strategy. Initially, the fundamentalists seemed to prevail again, as the SNP dropped out of the Constitutional Convention even before this was established. The memories of the disastrous experience of the 1970s added to the fear of being marginalized by the Labour Party within the convention, both numerically and, as discussion was going to be centred on devolution and not on independence, politically (Lynch, 2002, p. 184). However, with the election of Alex Salmond as party leader in 1990 the gradualists started to strengthen their position within the party. In fact, the fundamentalists retained considerable influence until the 1992 general election, when the SNP ran *de facto* two campaigns: one supported by the gradualists and centred on Salmond's idea of a multi-option referendum which included both devolution and independence; and one supported by the fundamentalists, such as Jim Sillars and Alex Neil, who campaigned on the unlikely slogan 'free by 1993' (ibid., p. 196-198).

After the 1992 election, Salmond and the gradualists strengthened their authority within the party further. In spite of a resilient internal opposition by the fundamentalists, in 1995 Salmond managed to push through a dual approach to independence which added a 'plan B' to the traditional 'one stroke' strategy. This plan B consisted of winning a majority of seats in a future Scottish Parliament rather than at Westminster's elections. *De facto* it was an endorsement of devolution as a stepping stone to independence. Such a move created the conditions for a commitment to support a 'yes vote' in the 1997 referendum on devolution which found little internal opposition.

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<sup>37</sup> Roger Levy argues that the 'legitimacy question' could have been addressed by Labour (and the Conservatives) by considering and implementing other reforms than devolution, such as proportional representation. The latter would have made both Labour-majorities north of the border and Conservative-majorities south of the border less overwhelming. The choice by Labour and the Liberal Democrats to convert to Scottish nationalism, and especially the formulation of the Claim of Right, represented a 'political gift' to the SNP (Levy, 1990, p. 138).

Compared with 1979, conditions were now much more favourable for a gradualist stance. First, the 1997 proposal envisaged the establishment of a Scottish Parliament with more powers than the Scottish Assembly proposed in the 1970s. Secondly, the Labour Party, both in Scotland and in London, was very much behind the devolution project from its grassroots to the leadership. This was a better guarantee for success and opinion polls kept confirming a stable and solid majority in favour of devolution (McCrone, 1998). Thirdly, because of these reasons, there were no major divisions between the SNP's leadership and the grassroots or the wider electorate. The fundamentalists were marginalized and a majority of party voters would have liked the SNP to commit to a 'yes' vote even before the 1997 election (ibid, p. 215). Eventually, the party backed a 'yes, yes' vote only after having checked they were satisfied with the content of the White Paper *Scotland's Parliament*. The formal decision was taken at a National Council in August 1997, about a month before the referendum date. As recalled by a prominent gradualist, the decision was uncontroversial: "I think that was a pragmatic, sensible response by the party to the prospect of having a devolved Scottish Parliament. It would have been unimaginable for the SNP to argue anything than that case in the referendum... it would have ridiculed the SNP." (John Swinney, interview with the author, Edinburgh, 07/11/06).

### **3.2.3 The new strategic dilemmas after devolution: between an independence referendum and 'accelerationism' (1997-2009)**

The victory of the 'yes, yes' vote in the September 1997 referendum opened the way to the establishment of a Scottish Parliament with limited tax-raising powers, whose first election was scheduled for the spring of 1999. Alex Salmond, who had had the opportunity to increase his popularity (and the SNP's) during the debates of the referendum campaign, adopted a gradualist approach for the first Scottish election, focusing mainly on devolution. Although the Labour party, which ran a largely negative campaign focusing on the 'dark side of nationalism' and the negative effects of independence, emerged as the major party, the SNP achieved its third best electoral result ever in terms of vote-share (just behind the results of the 1994 European election

and the October 1974 general election). More importantly, it established itself as the second party and the formal opposition in Holyrood.

The new political/institutional context modified substantially the range of strategic options available for achieving independence. In particular, since devolution a pattern of 'dual voting' appears to have emerged in Scotland, which fosters the nationalists' performances in the Scottish Parliament elections and hinders them in general elections (Hough and Jeffery, 2006). Although the number of seats won at general elections has barely changed, the SNP lost nearly 10% of its 1997 vote share in 2001 and a further 12% of its 2001 vote share in 2005. If the idea of winning a majority of Scottish seats in Westminster (with the intention of using it as a mandate for negotiating Scottish independence) had been over-optimistic before devolution, it has become even more unrealistic in the current situation.

To be sure, there is still a very marginal group of 'old style' fundamentalists within the party "who think that there should not be a Scottish Parliament, that that's a bit of a sell-out and that we should just fight the case for independence and nothing less" (Linda Fabiani, interview with the author, Edinburgh, 07/11/06). However, the 'new' fundamentalist strategy is now framed in slightly less disruptive terms and looks at Holyrood, rather than Westminster, as the crucial electoral arena that can lead to the goal. This path to independence was expressed in the 1999 Scottish election manifesto with the simple formula: "In Government, an SNP administration will hold a referendum on independence in the first four years of the Parliament" (SNP, Manifesto 1999, p. 10). In contrast to the 'old' fundamentalist path, therefore, the voters would have two opportunities to choose or reject independence: one at election time, when they could decide whether to vote for the SNP or not, and a second one at the referendum. Such change of strategy has a twofold positive effect which consists in presenting the independence process as a less 'all at once' option and allowing Scottish voters to vote for the nationalists without their vote being automatically interpreted as a mandate for immediate negotiations for secession. However, this strategy also entails legal issues and political risks which will be discussed below.

While the new fundamentalist strategy is slightly more moderate than the old one, the post-devolution gradualist strategy has become more assertive for the simple reason that it does not have to call for the establishment of a Scottish Parliament (or Assembly) but can build on the existing one, both in terms of a political institution which already has extensive powers and as a political venue where a consensus on further devolution of powers can be formed. This new gradualist position, which has been referred to as ‘accelerationism’, aims to improve on the devolution settlement incrementally until a condition of quasi-independence is *de facto* achieved and will make the passage to ‘full’ independence less traumatic: “we would like to have more and more powers being devolved to the Scottish Parliament, so as to get to a point where achieving independence would be more a matter of form than a matter of substance ” (George Reid, interview with the author, Edinburgh, 03/11/06). In particular, the issue of taxation and public spending seems to be the most likely starting point to re-open negotiations on the current settlement and to achieve more powers (Lynch, 2002, p. 253-55; Mitchell, 2006).

The distance between the ‘new’ fundamentalist and gradualist options seems, therefore, much less dramatic than the one between the pre-devolution respective positions. More importantly, they can be viewed as complementary and/or interchangeable, depending on the political conditions. Indeed, the old divisions appear to have shaded away. As a senior SNP member put it:

“One of the former fundamentalists in the SNP [i.e. Alex Neil] said: ‘We’re all gradualists now’. I think that means that anyone accepts the SNP’s core argument within the party that we’ll take whatever additional powers that we can. We are not going to be resistant to that. However, our *raison d’être* remains independence and our objective is to hold a referendum on independence within the first four years of an SNP term.” (Bruce Crawford, interview with the author, Edinburgh, 31/10/06).

Yet, relationships between the fundamentalists and gradualists have not always been harmonious since devolution. In 1999, having led the party into the first Scottish elections, Alex Salmond decided unexpectedly to resign as party leader. The 2000 leadership election contest between John Swinney and Alex Neil was described as a



competition between gradualists and fundamentalists. Although Swinney won with a large margin, his entire leadership was characterized by fundamentalists' attacks on him. A widespread perception of him as a more moderate leader than Salmond (Webb, 2001, p. 311), and disappointing electoral results left him open to accusation of being too soft on independence. According to Swinney, however, the contrasts within the party were not really related to a substantive division between fundamentalists and gradualists:

“During my leadership, these labels [gradualist/fundamentalist] were used as a cover for an internal power struggle by people that did not much fancy the way I was leading the SNP but the crucial thing is that, despite the fact that I am no more the leader of the SNP, the strategy of the party today is absolutely the same as the one I pursued when I was the leader.” (John Swinney, interview with the author, Edinburgh, 07/11/06)

After the resignation of Swinney in 2004 and the re-election of Salmond as party leader, the SNP seems to have left these divisions behind. The prospects of becoming the first party in the Scottish Parliament allowed the new leader to emphasise the referendum on independence strategy in the run up to the 2007 election. The SNP's victory and the formation of an SNP minority government led to the almost immediate publication of a referendum bill in draft form which, in the intentions of the nationalists, should translate in the referendum being held in 2010.

The SNP appears very united behind this strategy. Since the establishment of the SNP government, opinion polls have suggested that the executive enjoys high levels of support and that a very large majority of Scottish voters want to have a referendum on the constitution. This represents a strong weapon that, in the view of the minority status of the SNP's executive, can be used against those parties who would oppose this project. In terms of public support for independence opinion poll data are rather contradictory and the results vary a lot depending on how the question is framed. However, until the first half of 2008 support for independence appeared to be overall on the rise and, in a three option question (yes, no, don't know) a plurality view, though far from being the 'settled will' (Sunday Herald, reporting TNS System Three polls, 12/04/08). In addition, a later poll which found lower support for independence (35% in favour vs. 50% against) suggested that a victory of the Conservatives in the 2010 general election would be

likely to push up to 24% of those who were then against independence (or would have not voted in a referendum) to vote 'yes', thus producing a victory for independence (Sunday Times, reporting a YouGov poll 07/09/08).

However, as has happened before, the closer the SNP gets to its objective the more other parties' counter-moves are likely to create dilemmas which may trigger internal divisions over party strategy. Indeed, few factors may lead some SNP members to seriously consider other options than a 'yes or no' referendum on independence. First, this strategy presents a legal question mark. The constitution of the United Kingdom is a matter reserved to Westminster so, in strict legal terms, the Scottish Parliament does not have the authority to call a referendum on it. Even if Westminster, under strong political pressure, agreed to let the Scottish Parliament hold a referendum, it could demand to have the final say on the terms of the question being asked (Lynch, 2002, p. 250-52). However, the legal aspect is neither the only problem, nor the most compelling one.

The second factor which might trigger a new internal debate between new gradualists and new fundamentalists is genuinely political. Pursuing the strategy of a 'yes or no' referendum on independence is definitely isolating the SNP, and isolation is not something that a party leading a minority executive can afford, given its need for support from the other parties to progress its governing programme. The first sign of co-operation between opposition parties against the SNP and its new fundamentalist strategy was the decision, taken in December 2007, to establish a commission to review the current devolution settlement. The proposal was opposed by the SNP but was carried through with the votes of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, Labour and Conservatives (BBC/News, 06/12/07). The Commission, led by Sir Kenneth Calman, was launched in March 2008 and produced an interim report in late 2008. Although, it ruled out any possibility of recommending full fiscal powers for Scotland within the UK, the report did not balk at increasing fiscal powers and more devolution in other policy areas, such as broadcasting and energy policy (BBC/News, 02/12/08). The interim report was welcomed by the unionist parties both in Edinburgh and in London, included PM Gordon Brown, signalling that a consensus was likely to emerge on further, though limited, devolution of powers. In addition, the idea of devolving more powers to

Scotland and creating an English Parliament at Westminster - sending out Scottish, Irish and Welsh MPs when 'only English' matters are discussed or voted – is appealing for David Cameron, the most likely next PM (Nelson, in *Spectator*, 16/08/08). A gradualist SNP's strategy, therefore, could bring about further devolution even without resorting to a referendum, by direct negotiations between the SNP executive in Edinburgh and the Westminster government, be it Labour or Conservative.

Yet, the SNP has preferred to downplay cross-party consensus building and to keep emphasising its new fundamentalist strategy. Salmond dismissed the interim report of the Calman Commission as a 'constitutional mouse' (BBC/News, 02/12/08) and has kept pushing on the independence referendum. The appointment of a Minister for Constitutional affairs in February 2009 was understood primarily as a means to prepare for that event, trying to enhance the chances of victory for independence, although the Minister was also given a mandate to oversee a joint submission by the SNP and the Liberal Democrats to the Calman Commission on Holyrood being accorded borrowing powers (Telegraph.co.uk, 10/02/09).

In the face of the global financial crisis which exploded in 2008 and the consequent economic downturn, this insistence on holding a referendum on independence appears to have backfired on the SNP. In March 2009, the Scottish Liberal Democrats presented an amendment calling on the SNP to ditch its referendum plan and to concentrate on the economy. The three opposition parties won this crucial vote by a 25-vote majority, leaving the nationalists' proposal 'dead in the water' (Guardian.co.uk, 05/03/09). The SNP has already stated that, in spite of this vote, it will still present its bill for a referendum in early 2010 before the Parliament. The party has also tried to exploit the vote against the referendum plan accusing the three unionist parties of ignoring the fact that the Scottish people wants to have a say on the constitution (ibid.). However, in the current economic climate this strategy is becoming more and more risky. Opinion polls have started to register a considerable decline in support for independence and, for the first time in many years, only a minority of Scots (only 32%) are in favour of an independence referendum being held in 2010, whereas 53% are against (Sunday Times, reporting YouGov poll, 15/03/09).

The current strategy is set on a medium-term perspective which aims at winning the next Scottish election in 2011, also using the argument that the unionist parties have conspired to deny the Scottish people their right to express their constitutional preference. It is possible that in the next parliamentary term both the economic phase and the political conditions (such as a Tory government in London) will be more favourable for passing and winning an independence referendum (Preston, 2008). However, it is also possible that the SNP's insistence on a 'yes or no' referendum on independence during this term has isolated the party, with probable negative consequences for the executive's achievements in the last two years of the term and, therefore, on its prospects of winning the next election.

A third way, between independence referendum and accelerationism, could be represented by proposing a multi-option referendum which included a third choice such as more devolution short of independence. Nearly all opinion polls carried out in the 2000s have shown that such an option would be the most popular. Such a choice might avoid the SNP's political isolation and enhance the chances of winning a constitutional referendum. However, such a choice would probably mean giving up on independence for at least the next decade, a prospect that the fundamentalists would be unlikely to welcome.

### **3.3 Party ideology and policy: the left-right dimension**

#### **3.3.1 The SNP as a 'broad Church' and a centre party (1930s-1960s)**

The merger of the National Party of Scotland and the Scottish Party which created the SNP in 1934 not only resulted in a compromise between the two organizations on the self-government issue but also on the left-right ideological spectrum. The NPS was a rather heterogeneous party, but some of its most influential members came from the Labour party. Under the influence of Tom Gibson it developed a clearly left-of-centre ideological outlook and a set of socio-economic policies aimed at national reconstruction (Lynch, 2002, p. 35). This ideological positioning was linked to the socio-economic transformation that Scotland was undergoing in the late 1920s and

early 1930s. In particular, in the context of the Great Depression and growing political polarization both at national and international level, the NPS aimed to provide solutions to practical concerns. Indeed, the party's independentist stance on the self-government dimension was primarily justified in terms of the ability of Scotland to carry out leftist socio-economic reforms. In contrast, the SP was a clearly right-leaning political organization, whose most prominent members came from the Conservative party (the Duke of Montrose and Dewar Gibb) or from the Liberal party (like Alexander MacEwan). While the leadership of Montrose and MacEwan made the SP a mainstream centre-right political organization, some members, such as Dewar Gibb and George Malcom Thomson, advocated a "racially oriented nationalism which was politically to the far right and had quasi-fascist tendencies" (Finlay, 1994, p. 130). An issue which clearly reveals the ideological differences between the two groups both in left-right and self-government terms is their different evaluation of the British Empire. While the formal policy of the NPS was Dominion status for Scotland within the Commonwealth, many within the party had sympathy for republican ideas and for the IRA struggle against London. Most importantly, for NPS's members political separation from England was a means to reform Scotland in a social-democratic direction. In contrast, one of the reasons why SP's members opposed the Dominion status policy was that it would render the Scots, who had built the Empire together with the English, to the level of other colonized races (ibid., p. 133).

The formation of the SNP was made possible only through the expulsion of the most radical wing of the NPS and at the cost of abandoning its previous socio-economic plan. The new party was, therefore, constituted as a 'broad Church' which encompassed individuals and groups of different shades of ideological opinion and could not agree on any policy, except a common desire to bring about Scotland's self-government. The first victim of the merger was the 'Reconstruction Committee', which had been established jointly by both parties in the final phase of the merger process. Because of the contrasting ideological views of the individual members it could not make any significant progress (ibid, p. 156). The SNP was therefore left to face its first general election in 1935 without a single policy that could address any real issue of the day.

After the disappointing results of the 1935 general election, however, the party adopted a programme consisting of six main points: 1) national control of credit by means of a state bank; 2) national control of transport; 3) national control of power; 4) decentralization and ruralisation of industry; 5) land ownership for land workers; 6) development of Scottish fisheries (Hanham, 1969, p. 174). The drafting of this programme, which represented a compromise between the mildly socialist position of Douglas Young (who was also a member of the Labour Party) and more centrist positions inspired by the ideology of Clifford Hugh Douglas' 'social credit', represented an attempt to connect the party with the main issues affecting 1930s' Scotland. However, the start of the war in 1939 meant that the SNP was not able to test its proposals in a general election until 1945.

After the war, under the influence and leadership of McIntyre, the SNP repositioned itself clearly as a centre party, strongly resistant to recognising the importance of class and social conflicts: "To the Scottish realist the issue is not between the materialist creeds of state socialism and private enterprise... The Scottish National Party policy shows that the Scottish radicals have transcended that now sterile and empty conflict... The worldwide struggle of the age we are now entering is for the human rights of man" (McIntyre, 1947, quoted in Hanham, 1969, p. 174). However, the policy McIntyre was talking about was little more than a list of utopian statements based on notions drawn from 'social credit', rural (and protestant) populism, political radicalism, Christian socialism and anti-state anarchism. The basic idea underpinning the new statement of policy adopted in December 1946 was to reduce the risk of oppression by diffusing political and economic power. From here derived the emphasis on the 'little man', on small town democracy, on diffuse and small-scale private ownership and, by corollary, opposition to big corporations (especially if lacking financial roots in the territory) and massive state ownership. In terms of ideological outlook, as well as party organization, the SNP came to resemble very closely the 'social credit' movements of Canada and New Zealand and the populism of Scandinavia and American Midwest (Hanham, 1969, p. 175).

What was clearly missing from the policy programme was a realistic recognition of the modern state and of the major social forces acting within and upon it, such as industrial, commercial, and trade union bureaucracies. In addition, the SNP's ideological stance was not only detached from socialism and free market liberalism but also from the emerging Keynesian consensus. As a consequence the party was unable to develop any detailed policy which made particular sense in 1940s and 1950s Scotland. As pointed out by Lynch, having no detailed solutions to propose to voters remained a characteristic of the SNP up to the late 1960s, so that the other parties could ridicule the nationalists saying that their stance was 'Still No Policies' (Lynch, 2002, p. 7). Almost incredibly, at the end of the 1960s, the SNP policy programme was, to all interests and purposes, still the one drafted by McIntyre in 1946.

Analyses of the SNP's electorate appear to lead to the conclusion that the electoral growth of the 1960s was mainly due to protest voting and that electoral support for the nationalists had little or no distinctive sectional or demographic basis (Budge and Urwin, 1966; McLean, 1970). These findings are very much compatible with the ideological outlook of the party and with its inability to attract voters on the basis of sensible policies. However, the 1960s was not a decade of immobilism in terms of party ideology and policies. The relative success in attracting protest votes was also due to the party's position on some specific issues, such as its anti-nuclear weapon stance, which exploited internal divisions within Labour (Lynch, 2002, p. 96). In addition, due to the influx of new members and emerging figures, such as William (Billy) Wolfe, the SNP started to timidly reposition itself to the left.

### **3.3.2 The move to the left and the rise and fall of left-right factionalism (1970s-1990s)**

The SNP's ideological repositioning as a centre-left party gained momentum after Billy Wolfe was elected party leader in 1969. By then, Scottish industrial decline had become evident and the two major British parties had entered a phase of growing pressure to find concrete remedies to high unemployment and deteriorating living conditions. According to Wolfe, the SNP did not need to stress nationalism, since the

overwhelming majority of Scots were already well aware of their national identity. Instead, the electoral future of the party depended on its capacity to develop coherent policies, responding to socio-economic concerns of ordinary Scots and to link self-government to a project of economic growth and social justice (Lynch, 2002, p. 103-4). Overall, the development of a clearly social-democratic policy platform was the result of several factors: the need to penetrate Labour's electoral heartland (West Scotland); changing socio-economic conditions which called for more leftist (redistributive) policies; a changed membership (many new leftist members had joined the party during the 1960s); a new leadership; and a reformed organizational structure (the establishment of the National Assembly and of its policy committees in 1968) able to study and develop coherent policies.

In order to reposition the party to the centre-left, several initiatives were taken at different levels. At a policy level, the SNP started to develop a set of policies aimed at reducing unemployment and poverty. At a symbolic/rhetorical level, the party announced the establishment of a Standing Commission on Poverty and stressed the social-democratic ideological basis of its policies (SNP, 1974 Manifesto). At the 1975 annual conference there was even an attempt to formally recognize the SNP as a social-democratic party and to change its name to 'Scottish National Party (Social Democrats)' (Lynch, 2002, p. 133). However, the strong opposition of the traditionalists within the party prevented the motion from being discussed. Finally, at an organizational level, the party tried very hard to mobilize within the trade unions. While the overall operation was largely unsuccessful, party members' involvement in industrial campaigns, especially in the shipbuilding and oil sectors, brought publicity and gained the trust of some trade unionists to the extent that they seemed ready to contact the SNP on issues of redundancies or other industrial disputes (Brand, 1978, p. 287).

Although studies of the SNP's electoral support in the 1970s have tended to stress the importance of the party's 'oil campaign', its commitment to constitutional change, its emergence as the party of 'Scottish interests' and its attractiveness for protest voters (Brand, 1978; Brand *et al.*, 1983, Miller, 1981), it is arguable that the move to the centre-left had an indirect effect on the SNP's electoral growth during first



half of the 1970s. Indeed, constitutional change and a focus on ‘Scottish interests’ can be understood as an increasingly ‘selfish’ response to Scotland’s economic problems. In other words, the poor performance of the Scottish economy created the conditions for a breakdown (albeit a partial one) of working class solidarity across the border. As other electoral studies have pointed out, most of the new SNP’s votes in the 1970 and 1974 general elections came from those who normally voted Labour (Bochel and Denver, 1972; Hanby, 1976). However, this may not have occurred if the SNP had not developed a leftist ideological outlook which made the party sufficiently attractive for Labour defectors and for first-time leftist voters who would have otherwise voted for Labour.

Unfortunately for the SNP, the nature of the electoral swings that allowed them to elect eleven MPs to Westminster in October 1974 and to gain over 30% of the vote was not entirely understood. The confusion owed much to the fact that most of the new seats won in 1974 were previously held by Conservative MPs, whereas the nationalists did not win seats in the Labour strongholds. This (mis)led the party, or at least most of the new MPs, into believing that they had been elected thanks to Conservative defectors and, during the 1974-79 term, this created a series of tensions and clashes between the party’s non-elected leadership in Edinburgh and the parliamentary group in London. As discussed above, most of the tensions between the two groups concerned the strategy to be adopted on devolution. However, they also concerned MPs’ voting on socio-economic matters. While the SNP’s leadership in Edinburgh was keen in strengthening the centre-left profile of the party, the MPs voted more with the Conservatives than with Labour MPs, especially in the period 1974-1977 (Lynch, 2002, p. 138). This left the party vulnerable to accusations by Scottish Labour that the SNP was working for the Conservatives and that the nationalists were nothing other than ‘Tartan Tories’. Such accusations, which were very damaging for the party’s image, became even more credible when, after the failure of the 1979 referendum on devolution, the eleven SNP MPs contributed to vote down the Labour government and opened the way for Margaret Thatcher’s victory.

The outcome of the referendum on devolution and of the 1979 election threw the party into a period of open confrontation between internal factions of different ideological orientations. In the summer of 1979 the social-democratic and gradualist ‘soul’, led by party leader Billy Wolfe, was overwhelmed by the fundamentalist tide led by Gordon Wilson, who became the new leader. The primary concern of the fundamentalists was to re-establish independence as the only objective of the party and to end once and for all any flirtation with the idea of devolution. However, with devolution off the agenda and the prospect of independence getting more unlikely, the internal debate soon came to focus on other issues which enhanced the salience of the division between left-wingers and traditionalists, eclipsing of the gradualist/fundamentalist divide.

It is worth recalling that in those years (1979-83) British party politics was developing fast. The Thatcher government started to implement its neo-liberal policies aimed at bringing inflation under control (with all the implications they carried for levels of wages and unemployment), while the Labour party was drifting far to the left. Polarization between the two major British parties allowed a new centrist political force, formed by an alliance between Labour social-democratic splinter and the Liberals, to emerge. In this political context, the different ideological orientations within the SNP came to prominence.

In 1979, when the social-democratic wing realized they were becoming a minority within the party, they established a formal internal faction called ‘79 group’ and were warned by the new party leadership that such a move could constitute a breach of party rules (Levy, 1990, p. 98). The ‘79 group’ was formed by few young members, including future leader Alex Salmond, and more experienced figures, such as Margo McDonald, with the intention of moving the party further to left. The rationale for this strategic objective was provided by Margo McDonald’s analysis of the referendum on devolution: the working class had voted in favour of devolution while the middle class had voted against, therefore the SNP should see the working class as its electoral ‘hunting field’ (Torrance, 2009). While the group included individuals with different views, from republican hard liners sympathetic towards the Provisional Sinn Féin to

gradualist social-democrats who just wanted to continue on Billy Wolfe's early 1970s direction, the faction was united in supporting socialist ideology and policies, industrial campaign and civil disobedience.

The response of the new traditionalist leadership was to neutralise the industrial campaign by launching a centrist 'new oil campaign' in 1980. The oil campaign was part of a political/electoral strategy which found its rationale in a different interpretation of the political context and on the idea that the party had to remain open to nationalists of all ideological orientations. According to Wilson, the SNP did not have to follow the Labour in its drift to the left (nor in its factional politics). Rather, he saw the SNP as a natural competitor of the Social Democrats and the Liberals for the expanding centrist niche (Levy, 1990, p. 100-01).

The '79 group' contested this analysis on the grounds that it was based on British, rather than Scottish, electoral trends. Using data from election studies and surveys, the theorist of the group, Stephen Maxell, argued that the centrist niche in Scotland would be smaller than in England and that SNP voters were much closer on socio-economic issues to Labour voters than to Conservatives'. Therefore, he concluded, 'the evidence suggests that the SNP should challenge for the Labour vote by presenting itself, *inter alia*, as a party better equipped than Labour to achieve the goals of full employment and social welfare' (Maxwell, SNP 79 Group, Paper n. 6, 1981, p. 17).

The failure of the traditionalist leadership to revive the 'oil campaign' allowed the left to regain ground within the party in 1981. However, the following year Gordon Wilson managed to end the 'civil war' by dissolving all internal factions and expelling seven members of the '79 group', amongst them were Alex Salmond and Stephen Maxell. The presence of a right-wing (folkloristic) group 'Sìol nan Gàidheal' (in English 'Seed of the Gaels') had already been used, unsuccessfully, by the leadership to convince conference delegates to support a motion for disbanding all internal groups in 1980 (Levy, 1990, p. 101). In 1982, however, the '79 group' position within the party had weakened because of the bad publicity some direct actions, such as the occupation of Edinburgh's Old Royal High School led by Jim Sillars, had given to

the party. The formation of a traditionalist faction by Winnie Ewing, called 'Campaign for Nationalism in Scotland', strengthen Wilson's argument that factionalism was ruining the party and convinced party members to back the dissolution of all groups. When it became known that some '79 group members were trying to establish a Scottish Socialist Society, they were expelled from the party (Torrance, 2009).

Looking at the development of party ideology and strategy, however, it can be argued that the traditionalist wing won the struggle for party control but it lost, to a great extent, the 'battle of ideas'. The centrist strategy adopted for the 1983 general election held the two seats won in 1979 but did not prevent heavy electoral losses (about a third of the 1979's votes). In the following years, social polarization kept increasing, creating the conditions for a revived industrial strategy, which the party leadership could not resist. The left-wingers of the SNP started to regain positions within the party organization and in 1985 managed to halt a proposed reform which aimed to strengthen the party leadership at the expense of branches. In the same year it launched its new periodical 'Nationalist Left Review'. The review avoided carefully the divisive language and attitudes of the 'civil war' years. The editorial of the first issue stated: "...we hope to stimulate a serious debate regarding the SNP's strategy for obtaining independence. And a serious debate it will be. Sectarianism and personal mud slinging will have no place in Nationalist Left Review" (NLR, issue 1, autumn 1985, p. 1). However, the core arguments of the review were the same as those put forward by the '79 group: targeting Labour voters, adopting socialistic (if not socialist) policies, engaging in industrial campaigns and direct actions. Although the leadership managed to avoid the party formally adopting an ideological connotation beyond nationalism, Wilson's pragmatism and the emergence of left-wingers, such as Jim Sillars, within the party organization allowed the SNP to reposition itself.

After the 1987 election, the SNP's move to the left was almost inevitable. The Conservative government persisted in its neo-liberal drift to the right and started to manifest openly its disregard for Scotland, treating the Scots as guinea pigs for experimenting new taxes (McCreadie, 1991, p. 46). At the other end of the spectrum, the Labour party had clearly stopped its shift to the left and was now closing in on the

centre, thus squeezing the Liberal-Social Democratic Alliance. In this context, it would have been political suicide for the SNP to keep ruling out direct action and keep competing for moderate votes. In spite of Wilson's supplications to the party not to try to compete with Labour 'on the far left of the political spectrum' (Wilson, cited in Levy, 1990, p. 119), at the 1988 conference the delegates not only supported the continuation of industrial campaigns but also accepted SNP's participation in a campaign of civil disobedience for the non-payment of the poll-tax and the party's opposition to nuclear weapons and NATO membership. In addition, the rising figure of the gradualist left, Alex Salmond, was elected as deputy leader. The campaign against the poll tax was particularly important as it became the major issue in Scottish politics for the next few years. The SNP was the only party which stood for civil disobedience, while Scottish Labour split on the issue due to its duty to comply with the law as the party which controlled most Scottish local councils (Levy, 1990, p. 119). This allowed the SNP to win over a lot of sympathy among traditional Labour voters and from the grassroots of the Scottish Trade Unions, thus affirming itself as a competitor for the leftist voters. The election in 1990 of Alex Salmond as party leader and of Jim Sillars, former Labour member and winner of the 1988 by-election in Labour heartland Glasgow Govan, as his deputy reinforced the image of the SNP as a party of the left.

Survey data and election studies clearly confirm the increased appeal of the nationalists amongst social sectors traditionally associated with the left. Table 3.10 shows how the support from manual workers in the late 1980s and early 1990s reached the same levels of 1974, after a sharp decline in 1979 and in the early 1980s. Table 3.11 shows that in the period 1985-1993, support for the SNP from income classes A, B and C1 increased by one third, whereas support from D and E classes nearly doubled.

The 1992 general election's result strengthened the leftist strategy. The SNP won 50% more votes than in 1987, reaching the same levels as in February 1974, while the Liberal Democrats continued to fall and Labour declined considerably. Although both Labour and the Liberal Democrats did much better than the SNP in terms of seats won, the party established itself as the main competitor to Labour in the anti-Tory electorate. More importantly, the election of another Conservative government with

English votes contributed to solidify a new Scottish identity which, beyond the nationalist element (Scottishness), featured anti-Tory and left-wing orientations (Brown *et al.*, 1999).

**Table 3.10**  
**Party support by social class, 1974-1992**

Party	Class*	1974	1979	1984	1989	1992
Conservative	non-manual	31	46	45	34	34
	manual	20	28	19	15	18
Labour	non-manual	26	24	22	32	29
	manual	44	47	61	54	46
SNP	non-manual	29	18	9	22	21
	manual	26	14	10	24	26
Liberal Democrats**	non-manual	9	11	23	9	14
	manual	7	8	9	5	8

Source: Brown, A. *et al.* (1996, p. 151).

\*Class is reduced to the distinction between manual and non-manual workers.

\*\*Liberals, Alliance (Lib+SDP) and Liberal Democrats

**Table 3.11**  
**SNP support by social class and housing tenure, 1985-1993**

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Social class:									
ABC1	12	9	12	16	20	16	17	17	18
C2	15	14	14	22	23	18	20	23	23
DE	12	16	14	20	24	16	20	24	22
Housing tenure:									
owner-occupier	-	-	12	17	21	16	18	19	20
Council tenant	-	-	14	20	23	17	19	23	23

Source: Newell, J. (1998, p. 115).

Labour, the traditional party of the left and recently converted to devolution, was becoming the major beneficiary of the solidified anti-Tory sentiments of the Scots. However, during the Conservatives' years, the SNP had moved closer and closer to

Labour, even outflanking it on some issues, and was therefore well positioned to attract growing shares of the Scottish electorate. The perceptions of voters about the proximity of the SNP to Labour and to the Conservative party spells out very clearly the trajectory of the nationalist party: in 1979, 22% of voters thought the SNP was closer to the Tories and 47% thought it was closer to Labour; in 1997, only 10% thought it was closer to the Tories and 62% thought it was closer to Labour (Dodds and Seawright, 2004, p. 98).

### **3.3.3. Ideology and policy repositioning after Devolution (1999-2009)**

As discussed above, during the second half of the 1980s and the 1990s the SNP managed to overcome factional divisions and to position itself on the left. Under the leadership of Alex Salmond, the party re-discovered unity and electoral success by re-styling itself as a party of the left but avoiding the socialist radicalism of the '79 group in the early 1980s. The moderation strategy was greatly helped, or indeed dictated, by the emerging post-Thatcher consensus which saw New Labour accepting some of the basics of neo-liberism as a means of fostering economic growth. As New Labour's principles were injected, though not without some resistance, into the Scottish Labour party, it became easier for the SNP to maintain a leftist profile without flirting with socialist ideas. Nonetheless, Salmond led the party into the campaign for the first Scottish Parliament election in 1999 with a radical social-democratic manifesto which clearly outflanked Labour to the left in several respects (Dodds and Seawright, 2004, p. 98). The underlying strategy was to show how New Labour had absorbed Thatcherite ideas and was producing neo-liberal policies, while the SNP remained faithful to social-democratic principles and policies. The flagship of such social-democratic agenda was the 'Penny for Scotland', i.e. the proposal to use Parliament tax powers to increase taxation by 1% so as to fund education, health and housing (SNP, 1999 Manifesto, p. 2). Analysts and commentators considered the 'Penny for Scotland' policy as not particularly rewarding and perhaps damaging (Jones, 1999, cited in McEwen, 2002, p. 52). The proposal was adopted only two months before the election as a response to Gordon Brown's proposal to cut the basic rate of income tax by 1% and left the party

exposed to criticism of economic dilettantism. Beyond the tax rise policy, the manifesto proposed abolition of tuition fees and harshly criticized the privatization of public transport, health and education.

The resignation of Alex Salmond and the election of John Swinney as party leader in 2000 marked a clear departure from the socio-economic approach of 1999. Already in the 2001 general election, commentators had noticed a shift towards the centre (*The Herald*, 19/05/01, cited in McEwen, 2002, p. 56). Not only did the party drop the 'Penny for Scotland' (which also remained out of the 2003 manifesto for the Scottish Parliament) but it also abandoned the commitment to increase National Insurance contributions and to restore benefits for 16-17 year olds. For Swinney the priority was to establish the SNP as a party competent to run the Scottish economy in the modern globalised context, a party that the people could trust as the next office-holder in Holyrood. The focus on economic growth entailed the acceptance of the mainstream, New Labour approach on socio-economic matters. Now, New Labour policies were not criticized for their continuity with Thatcherite policies but for being tailored to English rather than Scottish concerns. Under Swinney's leadership, therefore, the SNP moved much closer to New Labour, absorbing the basics of the post-Thatcher neo-liberal consensus. As one MSP put it:

Thatcherism has had a profound impact in Scotland and the rest of the UK. What people expect from governments today is different from what they expected back in the 1970s, and the SNP has not been immune from this ideological change (Shona Robinson, 31/10/06).

Swinney saw this shift as the completion of a trajectory which brought the SNP back to its decentralists and anti-bureaucratic roots of the 1960s and 1970s:

Up to the 1960s and during the 1970s, in my view, the SNP was still a strongly decentralist and anti-bureaucratic party. That ideological perspective entailed a rather limited role for the state and for state ownership. This prevented the party moving too much to the left. However, as a result of Thatcherism and as a consequence of the 79 group's influence, the SNP adopted a much more leftist ideology. The state was seen as a solution to everything. In my opinion, in doing so, the party moved away from its decentralist ethos. But from the 1990s we started a process of stepping back from the view that the state should run everything. That brought us back to our roots of a party which is radical, decentralist and moderate



left of the centre, not hard left of the centre. That process... was a very important ideological jump for us. (John Swinney, Edinburgh, 07/11/06).

However, the adoption of New Labour's ideas was not confined to the economic policy sphere. The SNP also started to address social problems from an 'individual responsibility' perspective. This was particularly evident in the case of youth anti-social behaviour, for which the party started to propose repressive policies rather similar to those of Labour and the Conservative party (McEwen, 2002, p. 57). The adoption of a new approach to socio-economic matters, nonetheless, did not represent a rejection of social-democracy. On the contrary, it represented the maturation of a party which had been prone, because of its permanent position at the fringes of the political system, to make sometimes unrealistic promises. It was time now to come to terms with fact that "you've got to have a vibrant economy and high levels of economic growth if you want to spend money on social services that can improve peoples' lives and can create a decent society." (John Swinney, Edinburgh, 07/11/06).

As discussed below, the synthesis of pro-business, pro-economic growth policies with social-democratic ideals elaborated under Swinney's leadership has remained the guiding principle of the party to the present day. However, in the short run it did not pay off electorally. At the 2003 Scottish elections the SNP had to face three main problems. First, it was extremely difficult to push through an agenda of more constitutional reform as the devolution settlement was still too fresh. The party was therefore compelled to tie its economic policies to the actual powers of the Scottish Parliament, thus limiting the breadth of its proposals. Secondly, the SNP's anti-Iraq war stance was probably damaging as the UK government was able to announce 'victory' in the run-up to the election. Last, but definitely not least, the shift to the centre happened when new political competitors on the left were emerging, which resulted in a loss of votes. According to respondents of the Scottish Election Study 2003, the SNP lost 3.9% of the 1999 party list vote to the Scottish Socialist Party and another 3.9% to the Scottish Greens (Scottish Election Study 2003).

Since having been re-elected leader of the SNP, Alex Salmond has mainly built on the job done by Swinney and the party's economic experts, such as Jim Mather, to

make an economic case for Scotland's independence and to keep pressure on the Lib-Lab executive for delivering economic growth. One of the papers produced to develop new economic policies states: "it is time for us to stop talking about social democracy in Scotland and start earning it" (SNP, *Let Scotland Flourish 2007*, 2006, p. 4), a sentence which is definitely in tune with Swinney's approach. However, the SNP has also paid more attention to the way in which the party intends to use the benefits of a better economy. It now appears more united and comfortable with its centre-left positioning. As a senior member of the party and MSP revealed: "At the last meeting of the parliamentary group Alex Salmond said 'we are a social-democratic party' and everyone said 'yes'" (Andrew Welsh, interview with the author, 08/11/06)

In the manifesto for the 2007 Scottish election, economic growth (cutting business taxes) and the anti-social behaviour proposal (getting tougher on those who sell alcohol to teenagers) were 'sandwiched' between more spending on health services (to keep health centres closer to citizens) and a commitment to scrap the council tax and replace it with a local income tax (SNP, 2007 Manifesto, p. 6). The determination shown by the SNP executive to fulfil its pledge on the abolition of the council tax has caused the party, especially in the context of the economic downturn linked to the consequences of the global financial crisis, to clash with the CBI, the Institute of Directors and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland (*Telegraph*, 03/09/08). Opposition to the plan from the Labour and Conservative parties means that the policy has little chance of being approved. However, the Executive has already frozen council tax until 2011, with the Scottish Parliament compensating local councils for their consequent loss of revenue (*ibid.*). In February 2009, when the Liberal Democrats withdrew their support for the plan too, the executive had to come to terms with reality and decided to give up on their policy until the end of the term (*The Times*, 12/02/09). Although this climb-down has been exploited by the competitors, which painted the executive as a liability for Scottish economy, it can be argued that the SNP has prepared a favourable battleground for the next (2011) election. As the now super-minister of the economy John Swinney stated: "Make no mistake, this government will fight the [2011]

election to win a parliamentary majority that backs the abolition of the unfair council tax” (quoted in *The Times*, 12/02/09).

**Table 3.12**  
**SNP (and Labour\*) support by self-assigned class, 1997-2007**

	1997 %	1999 %	2001 %	2003 %	2007 %
Middle class	13 (28)	18 (20)	20 (26)	11 (9)	30 (19)
Working Class	16 (46)	21 (34)	21 (64)	16 (18)	43 (29)

Source: Scottish Election Studies 1997-2007

\*Figures in brackets refer to Labour

All data refer to constituency votes

**Table 3.13**  
**Best party for working class people**  
**and best party for people running a business, 2007**

	Lab	SNP	LibDem	Con	d.k.
Best party for working class	32	22.8	10	8.1	27.1
Best party for business	12.3	8.9	3.4	49.2	26.2

Source: Scottish Election Study 2007

In spite of the move to the centre and the attempt to create a more constructive relationship with the Scottish business community, the SNP remains a party positioned clearly to the left of the centre and, as far as party competition is concerned, to the left of Labour. This is confirmed both by recent studies based on MSP surveys (Masseti, 2009b) and on mass surveys, as reported in table 3.11 and 3.12. Actually, what surprises is that, after seven years of moderation and attention to business concerns, the SNP is considered the best party for business by less than 9% of voters, less than Labour and five times less than the Conservatives (table 3.12). Further evidence of the leftist stance of the SNP is provided by the analysis of the flow of vote between the 2003 and the 2007 elections, in particular, the collapse of the radical-left Scottish

Socialist Party (which during the term broke up due to the formation of the splinter group Solidarity). Of the 2003 SSP's (party list) vote, only 7.5% went to Labour in 2007; 33.9% went to either the SSP (11.33%) or Solidarity (22.6%); 20.8% went to the Greens and 30.2, the biggest share, went to the SNP (Scottish Election Study 2007).

### **3.4 Party Ideology and Policy: the European Integration Dimension**

#### **3.4.1 The Eurosceptic turn: 'No voice – No entry' (1950s-1970s)**

In the inter-war period, the SNP and the wider Scottish nationalist movement had played little attention to discourses about European integration. However, from the 1940s, under the leadership of the Young and McIntyre, the party started to consider projects of European integration as functionally positive for the advancement of Scottish independence. The European entity that the party envisaged had to be substantively intergovernmental and with Scotland participating on equal basis with the other states:

The SNP welcomes steps towards the Federation of Europe but emphatically declares that the only just basis for such a federation is the equal co-operation of self-governing democratic countries. Domination exercised by such as the British government over Scotland can have no place in a free Europe. Scotland is entitled to direct representation in any European Federation which may consider matters of customs, trade and military co-operation (Minutes of the 1948 National Conference, quoted in Lynch, 1996, p. 28).

Such pro-European attitudes were maintained during the 1950s, when the European project started to develop concretely through the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The SNP demanded direct representation for Scotland because of the centrality of the Steel and Coal sectors in Scottish economy and harshly criticized the decision of the UK government not to join the Community. However, until the early 1960s the party did not devote much of its attention to European integration. In *Aims and Policy of the Scottish National Party*, a 15-page pamphlet published by the party in 1962, 'European co-operation' was barely mentioned. The SNP interest in Europe increased when the UK government started to apply for EEC

membership. The party had two main interrelated concerns about EEC membership. The first was the feeling that the Common Market could have negative effects on the Scottish economy, in particular on the fishing, agricultural and steel industries. The second was that Scotland would be dragged into the EC not as a member-state but as region and that the accession negotiations would be dealt with by London on the basis of English, not Scottish, concerns. The second concern, in fact, reinforced the first one (Lynch, 1996, p. 31). These negative attitudes turned toward an explicit rejectionist position in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the negotiations for UK accession proved some of the SNP's concerns to be well founded, especially regarding fisheries.

The party leader, Billy Wolfe, was very critical of the bureaucratic nature and structure of the EC. In 1970 after a visit to Brussels he declared "The Common Marketers of today are as doctrinaire centralists as their opposite numbers in the Kremlin in Moscow" (Billy Wolfe, 1973, p. 139). In 1971 the party committed itself to campaign against UK membership of the EEC and proposed an alternative membership of a free trade agreement similar to those negotiated by Sweden, Norway and Austria. The SNP defended its position on several grounds. First, it was argued that Scotland had more affinities with the other Northern European countries of the EFTA rather than with the six member-founders (SNP Manifesto, February 1974). Second, in keeping with a longstanding British critique of European integration, the party perceived the EEC as an overtly bureaucratic organization (Ibid). From a 'domestic politics' perspective, the SNP could freely exploit the 'European issue', since it was not constrained by any governmental responsibility. The party focused on the sacrifices that the Scottish economy, in particular the fishing industry, was going to suffer from membership of the common market. In this way it tried to highlight the 'disgrace' of depending on London for the negotiations with Brussels, thus strengthening the argument for independence. In addition, given that all the major British parties were in favour of EEC membership, it attracted many voters amongst the 'losers of accession' - at the expense of both the Tories (who bore the responsibility for the negotiations) and Labour which, having returned to office in 1974, had renegotiated the membership terms. In particular, the SNP was able to capitalise in electoral terms in the costal

communities depending on the fishing industry. The SNP candidate for the North Angus constituency in 1974, recalls a telling episode: “I remember that the Tory MP had to escape from a meeting with the fishermen. He was photographed running away through fish boxes followed by the crowd” (interview with Andrew Welsh, Edinburgh, 08/11/06).

The extremely positive results of the two 1974 general elections, therefore, can be also explained by the increased visibility that the SNP acquired on the issue of EEC membership. Such visibility increased even further during the referendum on UK’s continued membership of the EEC which was held by the Labour government in 1975. A UK-wide referendum represented a unique opportunity for the nationalists since, if different majorities had emerged across the border (in particular an English ‘Yes’ vs. a Scottish ‘No’), the issue of Scottish sovereignty would have been pushed to the fore of public. The SNP, in spite of some internal divisions (interview with George Reid, Edinburgh, 03/11/06), was the only party in Scotland which campaigned against membership, using the slogan ‘No voice – No entry’ (Lynch, 1996, p. 35). This allowed the nationalists not only to reinforce their electoral grip on the coastal areas where the fishing industry was concentrated but also led to its taking up of some of the concerns of the Scottish Trade Unions, while the party also benefited from the evident divisions within the Scottish (and British) Labour party.

Opposition to the EEC, indeed, was also linked to the ascendancy of the nationalist left, represented at the highest level by the leader Wolfe, which saw the EEC as a free-market, capitalistic club caring only about big business rather than about people and communities (Interviews with Alasdair Morgan and Bruce Crawford, Edinburgh, 01/11/06 and 31/10/06 respectively). In addition the emergence of the EEC as a military (nuclear) bloc aligned with NATO, also clashed with the SNP’s anti-nuclear weapon proliferation stance (SNP, *Scotland’s Future*, August 1974, Manifesto for the October 1974 election, p. 11). Therefore, the rejectionist position was not only based on cost-benefit calculus regarding both Scotland and the party but also ideological distance. However, principled distance from the EEC was not restricted to the left of the party. European integration was, to a great extent, a cross-cutting issue

with many members of all ideological orientations opposing membership and few people being in favour. As a fundamentalist and traditionalist SNP MP declared during the referendum campaign, the EU “represents everything that our party has fought against: centralisation, undemocratic procedures, power politics and a fetish for abolishing cultural differences” (quoted in Lynch, 1996, p. 35).

The results of the referendum were rather disappointing for the SNP, as the ‘Yes’ won by 58.4 against 41.6. Although the ‘No’ votes were more than 10% higher in Scotland than in England, that was not enough to build up a political case. However, the party had succeeded in maintaining strong visibility and attracted the sympathy of a strong minority of the electorate. In the following years, the SNP focused on the devolution issue and there was little re-consideration of European integration. Actually the party leadership remained very convinced that the position adopted in 1975 was the right one and that it was the Scottish electorate that got it wrong in supporting the ‘Yes’ vote. As the deputy leader Gordon Wilson declared in 1978: “A massive re-think by Scots about the ECC may be needed soon. Evidence is growing that the EEC is proving hostile to Scotland’s national interest” (quoted in Dardanelli, 2003, p. 275).

### **3.4.2 From Rejectionism to Pragmatic integrationism (1980s-2002)**

The re-thinking on European integration started after the failure of the 1979 referendum on devolution but was slow and highly controversial even within the leadership. According to John Swinney, “the seeds of a change in the SNP’s position happened at the 1981 conference in Aberdeen” where the resolution to re-affirm opposition to membership of the EC was put aside for re-consideration. He recalls that “at the grand age of seventeen, I spoke against the resolution and, unexpectedly, I was supported by Winnie Ewing, who was then our only MEP and a deeply respected figure in the party” (interview with John Swinney, Edinburgh, 07/11/06). As confirmed by the then party leader Gordon Wilson, the election of Winnie Ewing as MEP for the Highlands Islands did much to change party members perceptions of and attitudes towards the European Community: “In the early 1980s the SNP softened its views, partially because of our MEP who was very active in establishing good relationships with MEPs of different

countries and different parts of the political spectrum.” (interview with Gordon Wilson, Dundee, 06/11/06).

In the 1983 general election manifesto, a first timid change was introduced. The party remained very negative about EEC membership: “we would not wish to join, since the EEC has been extremely damaging to many of Scotland’s interests and its centralist thinking from Brussels is as ill-suited for Scotland as that from London” (SNP, 1983 Manifesto, p. 11). Yet, the SNP would propose a further referendum where the Scottish people would decide again whether to remain or to leave the Community. The manifesto makes clear that the party would recommend a vote against membership (*ibid.*). However, a more substantive change of position was decided at the 1983 conference. At the peak of the fundamentalist counter-revolution, the party leader Gordon Wilson was keen to elaborate a new and more appealing policy of independence. Although the party did not endorse a fully pro-EEC position, the new stance was that, in a hypothetical independence scenario, if re-negotiation with the EEC was satisfactory, the party would recommend a vote for continued membership in the (hypothetical) referendum (Lynch, 1996, p. 38). The primary reasons for this change of position were very pragmatic. Beyond the need to develop a more credible and appealing independence policy there was the simple consideration that, like it or not, Scotland was in the EEC and there was no credible prospect of leaving. In addition: “I think there was also a feeling that the party was campaigning on too many negative things: we didn’t want to be in the UK, we didn’t want to be in the NATO, we didn’t want to be in the European Union” (interview with Alasdair Morgan, Edinburgh, 01/11/06). The overtly radical image projected by opposing all these *status quo* situations was felt to be damaging at the electoral level.

In the following years, a Europhile consensus started to emerge within the party leadership. As the factional divisions of the early 1980s were left behind the new unity was achieved in the context of growing opposition to the strongly Eurosceptic Tory government. The whole party, therefore, tended to converge towards leftist and pro-EEC positions. Indeed, the two architects of the SNP’s turn were Wilson, considered a traditionalist and a fundamentalist (though, as discussed in previous sections, he showed



a good dose of pragmatism on self-government), and Jim Sillars, a former member of the Labour party and the prominent figure of the SNP's gradualist left in the 1980s. It has to be considered that in the 1980s the EEC changed substantially and this made the emergence of a leftist and pro-European orientation much more compatible. Beyond the desire to distinguish itself from the Euroscepticism of Mrs Thatcher, the SNP's left appreciated the social democratic turn of the EEC, especially the distribution of European social and structural funds. As one MSP recalls: "it was also because Europe became more socialist, in terms of social policy and therefore we recognized there was an opportunity on being part of the game" (Bruce Crawford, Edinburgh, 31/10/06).

By the late 1980s the consensus on a pro-European turn had that the few anti-EEC members who remained were given the nickname 'Albanians', as a mockery for their isolationism (Lynch, 1996, p. 41). In the 1987 general election manifesto, all negative references to membership of the EEC had disappeared and the recommendation in favour of Scotland remaining in were made explicit, although the party opposed "moves for further centralization in the EEC to create a European super state" (SNP, 1987 Manifesto, p. 9). The pro-European turn was completed during the 1988 Conference, when the party approved the proposal "Independence in Europe", which was inserted into the manifesto of 1989 European election (SNP, European Election Manifesto 1989). The new policy became immediately popular, as independence within the European umbrella allowed the party to overcome old objections about Scotland's ability to stand on its own in the international scene, especially in terms of separation from the English markets. Opinion polls showed that support for independence within Europe was at least double that for independence without Europe (Lynch, 1996, p. 43; Newell, 1998, p. 113).

However, the SNP has not become a federalist party and has never given much credit to the idea of a "Europe of the Regions" (not even in the "Europe of Peoples" version), seeing the Committee of the Regions as a weak institution with no future (SNP, *Scotland's Memo to Maastricht*, 1991). According to Gordon Wilson there was an attempt by Sillars to move the SNP towards Eurofederalist positions but the party did not follow him (interview with Gordon Wilson, Dundee, 06/11/06). Instead, the party

supported the creation of a “Confederal Europe of the Nations”, where an independent Scotland would sit at the table of the European Council to cooperate with other member-states and, at the same time, to protect its own interests. The SNP realized that its final goal - secession from the UK and the creation of a Scottish state - fitted comfortably with European integration, as long as the EU remained a confederal, loose organization. Important objections, such as the negative consequences of separating Scotland from the English market, were thus overcome.

#### **2.4.3 From Europhile pragmatism to Eurosceptic revisionism? (2003-2009)**

The SNP kept supporting EU integration throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (SNP, Manifesto 1994; 1999; 2003). However, the constitutional process appears to have determined a new change of position. While the party was in favour of the 2004 enlargement, it seems rather hostile to deeper integration: “We prefer the widening rather than the deepening of the integration process” (interview with Brian Adam MSP, Edinburgh, 24/10/06). All the interviews conducted for this study with the SNP MSPs confirmed, as stated in the 2005 general election and the 2007 Scottish election manifestos, that the crucial issue for which the party opposed the new EU constitution was again the Common Fisheries Policy, still regarded as a vital national interest (SNP, Manifesto 2005 and 2007). A further pragmatic issue concerns energy policy, which the treaties aim to bring under the control of the EU:

There were also problems with the Constitution on energy: we are an extremely energy rich country. Currently we have oil, gas and coal but, looking at the future, we are also extremely rich in terms of renewables. So there’s no way we want to see Europe taking control over our energy (Interview with Stewart Maxwell MSP, Edinburgh, 01/11/06).

However, beyond specific issues concerning national economic interests and their electoral implications, more general Eurosceptic themes have re-emerged:

Our opposition to the European Constitution was driven by the fishing issue. That’s a very sensitive issue for us in electoral terms. But I think it also reflects the unease that, not only people in Scotland or in the UK but also in other countries... some are feeling that perhaps the European project has gone too far too quickly. They think that we need to stop and make sure that what we’ve got is working before we embark on yet more

constitutional change at European level. (interview with Alasdair Morgan, Edinburgh, 01/11/06)

In addition, arguments related to the party's secessionist goal appear to play a crucial role too. Many in the party are very uneasy about the creation of a new, more integrated Union before the achievement of Scotland's independence. As one MSP put it:

Fundamentally the problem with the constitution, as far as I am concerned, was that it made it more difficult for us to become independent: the closer the ties of the current members of the European Union, the more difficult is to extract Scotland from the UK and re-negotiate. (interview with Stewart Maxwell, Edinburgh, 01/11/06).

It is rather clear that what preoccupies the party is the pull of sovereignty from member-states to the EU level, which in a future scenario may turn against the interests of an independent Scotland or may make independence more difficult to achieve. As outlined in the 2005 (general election) and the 2007 (Scottish election) manifestos the official party position is to call a referendum on the European Constitution in which the party would campaign for a 'no' vote (SNP, Manifesto 2005, p. 37; Manifesto, 2007, p. 73). In this respect, the party's manifesto for the 2009 European elections could be interpreted as a slight move towards a more ambiguous position, as the party kept calling for a referendum but did not re-state explicitly which side it would campaign for (SNP, Manifesto 2009, p. 5). However, after at least five years of explicit rejection of the European treaties, the omission appears to owe more to the need to avoid Eurosceptic themes in a European election than a substantive change of position.

## **Conclusion**

After a period of strong internal disagreement on the self-government objective during the 1930s and early 1940s, the SNP settled unambiguously on an independentist line. Contrasts between gradualists and fundamentalists have, however, resurfaced whenever an opportunity has arisen to obtain self-government concessions short of independence, turning into bitter fights after the failure of the 1979 referendum, when the adoption of a gradualist strategy was perceived (by fundamentalists) as a negation of the independentist line that had ultimately achieved nothing. The endorsement of devolution in 1997 was much less problematic and divisive, as the party made very clear that it represented just a stepping stone towards independence. The strong

commitment to independence is witnessed by the plan of the SNP executive to hold a referendum on it by 2011.

The interwar period also saw strong divisions on left-right positioning. After WWII the party settled on a centrist position based on (protestant) populism: i.e. a rejection of both big-company capitalism and state socialism, a defence of diffuse ownership, a grassroots ethos, an emphasis on tailoring politics, economy and finance (i.e. credit) to the needs of small communities and small producers. However, the social consequence of Scottish industrial decline led the SNP to move moderately to the left during the 1970s and even more to the left during the 1980s, in spite of a strong resistance from the traditionalist leadership. With the emergence of the 'New Labour' consensus in the late 1990s, the party gradually returned to a more moderate but still left of centre position.

As far as European integration is concerned, the SNP adopted an anti-integration stance in the 1960s and campaigned for a 'No vote' in the 1975 referendum for continued UK membership of the EEC. It slowly changed its position during the early 1980s, due to an appreciation of 'social and regional Europe' and a realization that, if anything, the European framework made the independence objective more, not less, viable. In accordance with this objective, the party never went beyond its support for an inter-governmental Europe. One of the areas of integration which the party has always contested is the Common Fisheries Policy. This issue was the main (and, according to some interviewees, the only) reason why the party opposed both the Constitutional and Lisbon Treaty. However, some in the party are concerned about the concretization of further European integration before Scotland achieves full independence from London.

## Chapter 4

### The South Tyrolese People's Party (*Südtiroler Volkspartei*)

The SVP was born in 1945 as the party of the German-speaking minority in South Tyrol. It represents, therefore, a classic example of an ethnic party. Yet, its long struggle with the Italian state has concerned primarily the attribution of self-government to a precise territorial unit, South Tyrol (or Bozen province). Although the SVP, given its hegemonic electoral position in South Tyrol, has always managed to send MPs to the Italian national parliament, its core level of action is definitely the regional (i.e. provincial). The party has always dominated the provincial assembly and executive, as well as nearly the totality of local councils. Since the 1980s, the SVP has also been the biggest party in the assembly of Trentino-South Tyrol, the special status region made up of the two provinces of Trent and Bozen.

Having represented the overwhelming majority (indeed, virtually the totality) of German-speaking (and Ladin-speaking) voters until the early 1990s, the party did not need to undertake dramatic repositioning on the basis of electoral politics. In contrast to the other cases, its centre-periphery position has been deeply influenced by international relations, primarily between Rome and Vienna. Given the scarce weight of the party in the Italian parliament, even its main policy success, i.e. the achievement of extensive autonomy, owed more to international pressure and violent means adopted by terrorist organizations than to the SVP's electoral success. Since the early 1990s, increased electoral competition at regional (provincial) level and the chaotic development of Italian politics have, however, triggered some electorally-driven repositioning.

#### 4.1. Party Profile: Origins and Political Achievements

##### 4.1.1 The historical origins of the centre-periphery cleavage in South Tyrol

The territory which is now called South Tyrol and which, within the regionalized Italian Republic, corresponds to the Bozen/Bolzano province has been part of a larger territorial/political unit, Tyrol, for about seven centuries. In order to recall the roots of the South Tyrolean question, therefore, an outline of the political and ethno-linguistic/demographic history of Tyrol is necessary.

The year 1248 is officially considered to be the one in which Tyrol was born. In 1342 a constitution of Tyrol was drafted, which acknowledged the powers of the

*Landschaft*, the local parliament, in which different social classes were represented (and in which the Bishops of Brixen and Trent also participated through their emissaries), upon taxation, law making and governing the country (Peterlini, 1997, p. 41). The old liberties of Tyrol, as a whole, and of its local communities were upheld below the Habsburgs. In 1511 the Austrian Emperor conceded an additional liberty to the Tyrolese people: military self-defence of their country. They were allowed to form and keep a militia, the *Schutzen* (which as a cultural heritage, though not as an army, survives to this day), with the duty to defend their land from foreign attacks. In return, Tyrolese men were exempted from military service outside Tyrol. By that time the Italic archdiocese of Trent had been strictly bound to the Dukedom and the Austrian Empire, as the attempts of the Bishops to break away in the 15<sup>th</sup> century had failed. Tyrol, therefore, kept developing as a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual entity, with a predominantly Germanic area in the north (corresponding approximately to the current Austrian land of Tyrol and the Italian province of South Tyrol), a predominantly Italic area (corresponding to the current Italian province of Trent or *Trentino*) and a residual area in the Dolomite valleys (which today is split between South Tyrol, *Trentino* and Veneto regions) where the oldest ethno-linguistic group, the Ladins (whose language is a mix of old Reatian and Latin), was concentrated.

Before the rise of nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the coexistence of different ethno-linguistic groups within Tyrol was never a major issue. The people of Tyrol were united in their devotion to the Catholic faith and in their attachment to the ancient liberties and right to self-government. The attempts of the Bishops of Trent to break away in the 15<sup>th</sup> century had nothing to do with ethno-linguistic divisions. The Bishops were Germanic and Polish, whereas the people of Trent (who were mainly Italic) rose against the Bishops with the help of the (Germanic) Dukes of Austria-Tyrol (ibid. p. 41-42). During the so-called First War of Succession, in the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Tyrolese of all ethno-linguistic groups fought together against the French and Bavarian invaders. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, all Tyrolese rose together against the Austrian Emperors and their centralizing projects which limited the ancient rights of self-government. However, the most memorable cross-ethnic Tyrolese rebellion occurred in 1809, under the leadership of cattle dealer Andreas Hofer, against the Napoleonic troops and their Bavarian allies (Girardi, quoted in Peterlini, 1997, p. 57).

With the spread of nationalism across 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, however, the political situation in Tyrol, now a crown land within the Austro-Hungarian Empire with its own

*Landtag* (regional parliament), became more and more problematic. From the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the acceleration of the process of nation-state building in Germany and Italy (i.e. north and south of the Tyrolean borders) fermented a certain radicalization between the German and Italian groups within the region. The fact that the two main ethno-linguistic groups were not particularly intermingled gave rise to territorial claims.<sup>38</sup> In particular, Italian nationalism had clearly developed in anti-Austrian direction, given that the Austro-Hungarian Empire controlled most of Northern Italy.<sup>39</sup> After the *risorgimento*, Giuseppe Mazzini made clear that the Italian speaking areas should not have been left to Austria and, in 1877 Matteo Renato Imbriani founded the 'Association for unredeemed (*irredenta*) Italy' (ibid, p. 67).

However, it has to be stressed that, first, many Italians of *Welschtirol* and, even more, the Italian minority within the rest of Tyrol, were not particularly touched by Italian nationalism, the exception being the urban liberal elites and then the socialists and a small part of the Catholics. A clear demonstration of the affection of the *Welschtiroler* for Tyrol and for Austria is that most of them fought WW1 on the side of the Empire against Italy.<sup>40</sup> Secondly, only in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century did the claims of the *Welschtiroler* elites turn towards separatist irredentism. From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the Italians of Tyrol had asked for the autonomy of *Trentino*. However, both the Imperial Parliament in Vienna and the Tyrolean *Landtag* in Innsbruck voted down such proposals in 1848, in 1877 and in 1884 (ibid. p.65-67). When in 1890, an agreement on the Autonomy of Trent was reached, it was too late. The growth of both Italian and German nationalism had produced a radicalization of positions which could not be accommodated.

Eventually, it was not internal Tyrolean or Austrian politics which determined the fate of Tyrol. It was instead the international scene and, in particular, the First World War. In a secret pact agreed in London in 1915, the Entente promised to the Kingdom of Italy the Brenner frontier on the Alpine crest as a reward for the Italian involvement

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<sup>38</sup> According to the 1910 census, in what was then called *Welschtirol* (Italian Tyrol) and is now called *Trentino* (Trent province) the Italians and Ladins made up nearly 94% of the population, whereas the Germans constituted less than 3%. On the other hand, in what is today called South Tyrol or Bozen/Bolzano province (which was then the middle part of the whole Tyrol) the Germans were 89%, the Ladins less than 4% and the Italians less than 3% (Petrelini, 1996, p. 58-61).

<sup>39</sup> Beyond *Welschtirol* which was part of the Austrian heartland, the Austro-Hungarian Empire controlled directly Lombardy (until 1859), Veneto (until 1866) and Friuli Venezia-Giulia (until 1919), and indirectly, Tuscany and part of Emilia (until 1859).

<sup>40</sup> However, during the war, Vienna treated the *Welschtiroler* (especially the civil population in the battle zones) with little sensitivity, to say the least, thus losing some of their respect and affection (Stocker, 2007, p. 13-14).

in the war on their side. The war on the alpine frontier between Italy and the Austro-Germans contributed even more to the growth and radicalization of the respective nationalisms. Just a few months before the end of the war there was a meeting of the Union of Tyrolean People which issued a manifesto strongly influenced by Austro-German nationalism. In this document the following requests were put forward: a reasonable peace treaty, unity and indivisibility of Tyrol (including *Welschtirol*) within Austria, the creation of a monolingual (German) state, no-autonomy for *Welschtirol*, the strengthening of Germanism in *Welschtirol* through compulsory teaching of German in schools, the expulsion of all (Italian) irredentists, the substitution of the Italian Bishop of Trent with a German one, and the re-education of priests in the Diocese of Trent in pro-Tyrolean and Germanophile terms (Dughera, 1990, p. 6). However, at the end of the war, under the Treaty of St. Germain, Italy obtained the frontier it had negotiated with the Entente before joining the war, thus determining a break up of the old Land Tyrol. In spite of the opposition of US President Wilson and even of many Italian politicians (though almost exclusively from the socialist party),<sup>41</sup> not only *Welschtirol* but the part of the land up the Alpine crest, including the mainly German speaking area from Salurn/Salorno in the south to the Brenner Pass in the north (i.e. what is currently called South Tyrol or Bozen/Bolzano Province), was given to Italy. Between 1919 and 1920, there were numerous discussions on autonomy between the representatives of the three main parties in South Tyrol – the *Tiroler Volkspartei* (TVP - a Catholic people's party), the *Deutschfreiheitliche Volkspartei* (DFVP - liberals of the right) and the tiny *Sozialdemokratische Partei* (SP - social-democrats) – and the Italian government. The German regarded St. Germain as an open injustice, and the still growing Italian nationalism was a source of uncertainty and anxiety. A first consequence of this situation was the merger of the TVP and the DFVP into a new party aiming to represent and protect the interests of the whole German population of South Tyrol, the *Deutscher Verband* (DV- Federation of the Germans), whose symbol was the typical flower of the Alps, *Edelweiss*.<sup>42</sup> As a rally party (*Sammelpartei*) for the German population of South Tyrol, the DV can well be considered the forerunner of the *Sudtiroler Volkspartei*

<sup>41</sup> As Ballardini reports, "Filippo Turati [then leader of the socialists] exhorted the House of Representatives, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1919, 'to vote against the Annexation of over a quarter of a million Germans, whose pride in their heritage, their homeland and their freedom would represent an eternal seed of dissatisfaction and rebellion'. And on December 28, 1918, Minister Bissolati resigned from Orlando's cabinet, to testify, in a sensational manner, to his unbending opposition to the Annexation" (Ballardini, quoted in Peterlini, 1996, p. 70-72).

<sup>42</sup> The few South-Tyrolean social-democrats (SP) refused to merge and, until the rise of Fascism in 1922, maintained a much more open attitude towards the Italian institutions.



(SVP). In the 1921 general election, the DV obtained about 90% of the votes in South Tyrol, while the SP obtained about 10% (Stocker, 2007, p. 18). The results were similar in the following year's local elections. For instance, in Bozen/Bolzano the DV obtained 27 councillors and SP obtained 6, with no Italian party represented (Dughera, 1990, p 6).

However, the electoral hegemony of the German parties, in particular the DV, and the political under-representation of the Italians in local councils, even in bi-lingual areas, did not help increasing the sensitivity of the Italian government towards the minorities of South Tyrol, nor the cause of autonomy. The *Ladin* language was considered by Rome as just another Italian dialect. In fact, the Italianization of the Ladins began even before the rise of Fascism. The same happened for the Italians (mostly from *Welschtirol*) who lived in the multi-lingual area of South Tyrol (*Unterland* or *Bassa Atesina*) and who had undergone, more or less voluntarily, a process of Germanization in the previous decades.

With the rise to power of Fascism in 1922, the Italian ultra-nationalists, such as Senator Ettore Tolomei, were given the green light for their project of mass Italianization.<sup>43</sup> In 1923, senator Tolomei presented in Bozen/Bolzano his 32-point programme for the Italianization of South Tyrol. The most important points were: the appointment of Italian Municipal Secretaries; the introduction of Italian as the only official language; the establishment of Italian kindergarten and schools;<sup>44</sup> the dismissal of German-speaking civil servants and teachers, or their posting to Southern Italian provinces, and their replacement by Italians; the strengthening of the Italian police and military troops; a complete stop on German immigration in South Tyrol; Italian as the juridical language; the closure of German banks; the Italianization of the names of places (towns, roads, rivers, mountains, etc.) and the abolition of the name *Südtirol*; the Italianization of the Germanized family names; and the disbandment of the *Deutscher Verband*<sup>45</sup> (Peterlini, 1996, p. 73; Dughera, 1990, p. 7). In addition to the 32 points, the Italian government promoted, especially during the 1930s, the settlement of new industries from Lombardy and Piedmont and labour migration of Italians from other, primarily North-Eastern, provinces (Stocker, 2007, p. 27). The immigration of Italians was encouraged and helped through the building of thousands of new houses, especially

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<sup>43</sup> Tolomei gained himself the nickname of 'grave digger' amongst the South Tyrolean, as he went as far as to prohibit the use of German in cemeteries and to order deleting German words from the grave stones.

<sup>44</sup> In the following twenty years, the teaching of German language survived in secret schools, the so called *Katakombenschulen* (Catacomb Schools).

<sup>45</sup> Anyway, in 1926 all parties, except the Fascist one, will be disbanded in Italy.

in Bozen/Bolzano. In contrast, the planned substitution of the German clergy with Italians failed because of the opposition from the Vatican.

With the rise of the Nazi party in Germany, many people in South Tyrol hoped that their land could be brought within a German speaking state. In 1933 a movement of youngsters and intellectuals inspired by Nazi ideas was created, the *Völkischer Kampfring Sudtirols* (VKS, National Fighting Front). The hopes increased after Germany's annexation of Austria and after the invasion of German speaking areas in Czechoslovakia. However, the alliance between Hitler and Mussolini was sanctioned with the re-endorsement of the Brenner frontier. The two dictators had a different plan for solving the South Tyrolean question: those who wanted to be German could 'opt' for moving within the territory of the *Reich*, implicitly affirming that those who wanted to remain in South Tyrol had to accept Italianization. The population was given a deadline, 31 December 1939, to express their option. Given the Nazi propaganda of the VKS, which promised relocation in towns and villages very similar to the ones in South Tyrol, the threatening rumours spread by the Nazis and Fascists,<sup>46</sup> and the genuine desire of the people to live in a German speaking polity, 86% opted for the German Reich (these were called the 'optants'). Those who chose to stay (in German, *Dableiber*), strongly supported by the *Andreas Hofer Bund* (a Catholic political organization formed by former members of the DV) and by the low clergy, were targeted by the Nazi propaganda and called 'traitors' or *Walschen*, i.e. strangers or Italians (Stocker, 2007, p. 34-37). This created a fracture between the Germans of South Tyrol, which would take some time after the end of WW2 to heal. However, because of the difficulties created by the war, only around 75 thousand people left, mainly the proletariat or people without properties. Of these, only around a third came back after war. As a consequence, the German community of South Tyrol lost nearly a fifth of its population.

In 1943 the German people of South Tyrol were 'freed' from Italian oppression by the German army that invaded Italy and helped Mussolini to hold onto power in the northern part of the country, while the Anglo-American troops occupied the south. Under German occupation of South Tyrol, those who had not chosen to move within the Reich in 1939, the clergy and the members of the *Andreas Hofer Bund* were persecuted but most people saluted the fact that the German language and schools could be re-

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<sup>46</sup> In particular the 'Sicilian legend' went that even those who chose to stay would be moved to Sicily or Abyssinia or, anyway, South of the river Po (Stocker, 2007, p. 35).

established. However, any remaining hopes on the part of the South Tyrolese that they might re-join the Fatherland were shattered by Germany's defeat in 1945.

#### **4.1.2 Party birth, electoral success and political achievements**

At the end of April 1945, the administration of South Tyrol was handed over from the German SS to the Italian resistance militias of the CNL (Committee for National Liberation), excluding the South Tyrolese anti-Nazi movement 'Andreas Hofer Bund'. Just few days later, American troops occupied South Tyrol and took over the administration. It was in this context that a group of nineteen South Tyrolese men, led by Bozen businessman Erich Amonn, founded the South Tyrolese People's Party (SVP) with the explicit mission "to protect, by all legal means, the interests of the South Tyrolese people"<sup>47</sup> (i.e. the German and Ladin speaking people of South Tyrol). From the very beginning, therefore, the SVP was both an ethnic party and a regionalist party, as the link between the German (and Ladin) population and the territory of South Tyrol was considered indissoluble.

The formal approval for the foundation of the new party by the Allies' military government, however, could not be taken for granted. Italian propaganda aimed to portray the South Tyrolese people as Nazis to the American governor, recalling the overwhelming numbers who had opted to join the Third Reich in 1939. In addition, the programme of the new-born SVP included the 'right to self-determination', a thorny issue for the American governor, who did not know whether the allied powers would have backed or opposed such a claim at the peace table.

The approval of the military government was conceded, to the discontent of the local representatives of the (Italian) CNL, on the grounds that the overwhelming majority of the founding members were *Dableiber* (people who had not opted to move into the Third Reich in 1939) and many had been involved in the anti-Nazi organization 'Andreas Hofer Bund'. In addition, the party leader Amonn re-assured the American governor that the South Tyrolese people would never resort to violent means in order to achieve self-determination.

The most important political struggle that the party undertook in the following decades was the pursuit of autonomy for South Tyrol, as envisaged in the 1946 Paris Agreement between Italy and Austria. In 1948 the Italian Constitution created an

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<sup>47</sup> Article 1 of the SVP's internal statute.

autonomous region which included both South Tyrol (i.e. Bozen/Bolzano province) and Trent province (the old *Welschtirol*). In this way, the German and Ladin minorities remained as such not only within the Italian state but also within the autonomous region.

The dominant electoral position that the SVP managed to establish in South Tyrol from the first election in 1948 and that continued in the following decades was, therefore, of limited use. As Tables 4.1 and 4.2 show, the hegemonic position within South Tyrol became a minority one within the Trentino-Alto Adige region. This was also due to the fact that, like in the other regions of North-Eastern Italy, the Italian electorate was relatively united in its support for the Christian Democratic party (DC). Nor was the SVPs' dominant electoral position of much use at the central government level, with the party sending only three MPs to the Lower House of the Italian Parliament (Table 4.3).<sup>48</sup>

In time, the power relations at the regional level changed because of faster population growth in South Tyrol than in Trent and because of the electoral decline of the DC and the consequent fragmentation of the Italian-speaking electorate. As Table 4.2 shows, from 1983 the SVP became the plurality party at regional level, in spite of the Germans (and Ladins) remaining a minority within the region. However, at that time, the institutional arrangement of the region and of the two provinces had already changed substantially.

The reform of the autonomy was not driven by the exceptional success of the SVP at the polls. The Italian state remained largely insensitive to the grievances of the ethnic minorities of South Tyrol as far as these were simply expressed by the virtually unanimous vote for the SVP. It was primarily the violent struggle of few South Tyrolean terrorists/freedom fighters, from the late 1950s through the 1960s, and the pressure put by Austria on the Italian government that convinced the latter to negotiate a new deal on autonomy for South Tyrol.

In the second half of the 1950s the illegal organization *Befreiungsausschuss Südtirol* (BAS, Executive for South Tyrol's Liberation), led by Sepp Kerschbaumer, became more active. Initially, the activities went no further than organizing civil disobedience and submitting memorandums. However, from 1956/57 there was an ever growing number of dynamite bombings which culminated in the *Feuernacht* (the night of fires), between 11 and 12 June 1961, when about forty power pylons were blown up.

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<sup>48</sup> Beyond the three MPs of the Lower House the SVP constantly elected two Senators from 1948 to 1987, bringing the total number of MPs to five.

**Table 4.1. Provincial election results in South Tyrol  
(% of votes and number of seats), 1948-2008**

Year	1948	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1973	1978	1983	1988	1993	1998	2003	2008
Total number of seats	20	22	22	22	25	25	34	34	35	35	35	35	35	35
SVP	67.6	64.8	64.4	63.9	61.3	60.7	56.4	61.3	59.4	60.4	52.0	56.6	55.6	48.1
	13	15	15	15	16	16	20	21	22	22	19	21	21	18
<i>Die Freiheitlichen</i> (dF)											6.1	2.5	5.0	14.3
											2	1	2	5
<i>Sud-Tiroler Freiheit</i> (S-TF)*														4.9
														2
<i>Union fur Sudtirol – UfS</i> (WdH/SHB)**									2.5	2.3	4.8	5.5	6.8	2.3
									1	1	2	2	2	1
<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Sudtirols</i> (SPS)							5.1	2.2						
							2	1						
Other only-German parties***				2.4			1.7	1.3	2.4	1.3				
				1			1	1	1	1				
<i>Ladins</i>											2.0	3.6		
											1	1		
<i>Grüne/Verdi/Verc</i> (cross-ethnic party)								3.6	4.5	6.7	6.9	6.5	7.9	5.8
								1	2	2	2	2	3	2
Italian centre parties****	10.8	13.7	14.3	14.6	13.5	14.4	14.1	10.8	9.5	9.1	6.1	4.5	3.7	
	2	3	3	3	3	4	5	4	3	3	3	2	1	
Italian right parties*****	2.9	4.8	6.0	7.1	8.7	6.4	4.0	2.9	5.9	10.3	14.6	15.2	13.3	10.2
	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	4	5	5	5	5
Italian left parties*****	12.0	12.2	11.8	12.6	12.9	13.2	14.7	12.6	11.6	7.0	2.9	3.5	3.8	6.0
	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	5	4	2	1	1	1	2

Source: Holzer and Schwegler (1998, p. 159), Pallaver (2006, p. 170-71), Bozen/Bolzano Province, Election 2008 (available at: [http://elezioni.provincia.bz.it/home\\_li\\_vg.htm](http://elezioni.provincia.bz.it/home_li_vg.htm)).

\* A splinter party from *Union fur Sudtirol* (UfS). The new party is led by Eva Klotz, former leader of UfS and daughter of the irredentist fighter/terrorist Georg Klotz.

\*\* In 1983 *Wahlverband des Heimatbundes*, in 1988 *Sudtiroler Hemiatbund*. From 1993 *Union fur Sudtirol* (UfS).

\*\*\* In 1964 the *Tiroler Hemiatpartei* won one seat. In 1973 the *Soziale Fortschrittspartei* won one seat. In 1978 and in 1983 the *Partei der Unabhngigen* (PDU) won one seat. In 1988 the *Freiheitliche Partei Sudtirols*, a continuation of the PDU, won one seat.

\*\*\*\* From 1948 to 1988, data refer only to the Christian Democratic party (DC). In 1993, data refer to *Partito Popolare Alto Adige* (2 seats) and *Unione Centro Alto Adige* (1 seat). In 1998, data refer to *Popolari-Alto Adige Domani* and *Centro-Unione democratica dell'Alto Adige* (1 seat each). In 2003, data refer to *Unione Autonomista*, an alliance of *Margherita* (Ma), *Italy of Values* (IdV) and *Union of the Centre* (UDC).

\*\*\*\*\* From 1948 to 1960 and from 1973 to 1988, data refer only to the Italian Social Movement (MSI). In 1964 and 1968, data refer to the MSI and the Italian Liberal Party PLI (1 seat each). In 1993, data refer to the MSI (4 seats) and the LN (1 seat). In 1998 and 2003, data refer to National Alliance (AN) that won 3 seats in each election, *Unitalia* (1 seat each election) and Forward Italy (FI) that won 1 seat in each election. In 2008, data refer to *Unitalia* (1 seat), the People of Freedom (PDL), a merger of AN and FI, which won 3 seats and *Lega Nord* (LN) that won 1 seat.

\*\*\*\*\* In 1948, data refer to the Socialist party (PSI), the Communist party (PCI) and the Socialist Labour party (PSLI). Each won 1 seat. From 1952 to 1978, data refer to PSI, PCI and the Social-Democratic party (PSDI). Each party won 1 seat in each election, except in 1973 (when the PSI and PCI won 2 seats each) and 1978 (when the PCI won 3 seats). In 1983, data refer to PCI, PSI and the Republican party (PRI), with 2 seats won by PCI and 1 seat each won by PSI and PRI. In 1988, data refer to PCI and PSI, each winning 1 seat. In 1993, data refer to the Democratic party of the Left (PDS, then DS). In 1998, data refer to *Progetto Centrosinistra*, an alliance of DS, PRI and socialists (SI). In 2003, data refer to *Pace e Diritti/Fieden und Gerechtigkeit* (Peace and Rights), an alliance centred on the DS which tried to appeal to both the Italian and German groups. In 2008, data refer to the just born Democratic Party (PD).

**Table 4.2 Election results for the Regional Council (Trentino-Alto Adige)**

	1948	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1973	1978	1983	1988	1993	1998	2003	2008
DC/PPI/ Mar	36.7	41.1	42.8	41.0	36.6	37.1	35.6	30.4	27.0	27.0	14.3	10.7	12.4	-
SVP	30.2	29.4	30.1	30.0	29.3	29.1	27.0	29.8	33.7	30.4	26.0	29.2	29.7	25.4
PPTT/PATT*	9.3	3.4	2.3	2.0	3.0	4.2	4.7	7.1	-	4.9	10.1	6.0	4.3	4.0
PCI/PDS/DS	4.7	4.5	3.1	4.4	4.5	3.4	7.5	8.9	8.3	5.7	4.6	6.5	6.5	-
PD (DS+Mar)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13.4
PSI/SDI	6.3	7.2	2.6	9.5	8.2	11.4	8.4	6.3	6.7	8.3	0.6	-	0.9	-
PSDI	4.6	5.7	1.9	5.4	6.0	-	4.7	2.7	2.3	1.0	0.9	-	-	-
PRI	0.5	2.1	-	0.5	0.3	1.8	2.7	2.3	4.5	2.5	0.5	-	-	-
PLI	0.7	-	2.2	1.9	3.9	3.6	1.7	1.5	1.5	0.9	-	-	-	-
MSI/AN	1.3	4.0	3.9	4.7	4.0	3.2	3.1	2.3	4.4	6.5	7.3	2.9	6.4	-
FI/PDL	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.7	8.2	10.2
Greens	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.5	7.1	3.5	3.3	5.9	4.4
LN	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9.6	4.7	3.2	7.8
IdV	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.7	2.2
SPS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.1	0.7	-	-	-	-	-
dF	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.3	2.7	7.5
UfS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.8	3.6	1.2
S-TF	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.6

Source: Istituto Cattaneo (available at: <http://www.cattaneo.org/index.asp?l1=archivi&l2=adele&l3=regionali>)

\*Tyrolese Trentino People's Party, later Tyrolese Trentino Autonomist Party. A multi-lingual party (Italian, Ladin and German) based in Trent Province, which claims the belonging of Trentino to Tyrol. In the Regional Council, the PATT's elected members join with the SVP's members in a common group.

**Table 4.3. General election results (Lower House, % of votes and number of seats) in South Tyrol, 1948-2008**

	1948	1953	1958	1963	1968	1972	1976	1979	1983	1987	1992	1994	1996	2001	2006	2008
SVP	62.7 3	60.1 3	60.1 3	56.6 3	58.5 3	59.0 3	59.6 3	62.9 3	59.6 3	58.3 3	57.3 3	60.1 3	28.0a 3	60.5 4	53.4 4	44.3 2
DC	21.8 1	17.6 1	16.9 1	16.1 1	14.4	16.4 1	13.2	11.9	11.5 1	8.4	7.4	2.5				
PSI		5.8	6.3	8.3	8.8	5.2	5.5	4.3	4.3	6.0	4.4					
PSDI		3.2	3.4	4.5		3.5	1.6	1.8	1.3	0.5	0.6					
PCI/DS Ulivo/PD		4.1	4.1	5.1	5.3	5.7	6.8	8.4	8.0	4.6		3.4	5.2	3.0	10.8	16.2 1
Ma														6.5		
MSI/AN		4.6	5.5	4.6	4.1	4.6	2.7	2.5	3.4	10.2 1	6.7	11.0 1	13.8 1	10.3	6.9	
FI/PDL												8.6	9.1 1	7.5	9.7	14.0 1
dF															5.4	9.4
UfS													19.3			4.2
Greens										6.8 1		5.1	5.4	5.5	5.4	3.3
LN												2.4	4.3	0.6	0.9	2.0
IdV														2.2	1.1	1.8
UDC													1.6	0.4	1.7	1.8

Source: Holzer and Schwegler (1998); Pallaver (2006); Historical Archive of the Interior Minister (<http://elezionistorico.interno.it/>).

a: in 1996 the SVP presented itself together with PPI (Italian People's Party) for the proportional vote.

The SVP reacted by distancing firmly itself from the bombings but it was widely recognised that some members of the party had links with the BAS. The Italian Interior Minister threatened to disband the party and launched an offensive against the BAS. In July 1961 two members of BAS were shot dead by the police. Between late 1961 and early 1962 two others died in jail, allegedly because of torture – a crime apparently suffered by nearly all BAS members who had been imprisoned. Some of their letters were read at the provincial and regional council, provoking outrage against the Italian state and growing support for the BAS amongst the German and Ladin population. The most important trials started in 1963. Some were against the *Carabinieri* (one of the Italian police forces), who were accused of torture and abuses against the prisoners, others against the terrorists/freedom fighters. Most *Carabinieri*, however, were set free, while a few were sentenced only very lightly. For 91 BAS members a huge trial in Milan was held. It ended with 22 of them set free, 37 sentenced to less than four years of prison and 22 sentenced to up to 16 years.<sup>49</sup> Others who had escaped, some of them Austrian citizens, were sentenced to up to 26 years. Violent actions, however, continued throughout the 1960s, also with the involvement of external groups (mainly Austrian and German extreme-right organizations) that tried to exploit the ethnic conflict in South Tyrol to broaden their bases (Frasnelli and Gallmetzer, 1990, p. 45). In contrast to the terrorist activities of the 1950s and early 1960s (including the ‘night of fires’), some of the subsequent actions were conducted with the intention of killing. In total, political violence in South Tyrol claimed twenty-three lives.<sup>50</sup>

On the diplomatic front, things started to move in 1955 when Austria re-gained its full sovereignty. In 1959 the Austrian government brought the ‘South Tyrol question’ to the attention of the UN. Two resolutions were approved and ratified in 1960 and in 1961, compelling the two states to re-start negotiations and find a solution which would follow the principles of the 1946 Paris Agreement.

The double shock of violent actions and diplomatic initiatives broke the gridlock. In 1961 the Italian government established the so called ‘Commission of the nineteen’ (including a minority of SVP members) to analyse possible solutions for the South Tyrolean question. From 1963, with the inauguration of the so called ‘centre-left

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<sup>49</sup> The lawyer who defended the BAS members at the Milan trial, Sandro Canestrini, was a member of the regional council for the Italian Communist Party (PCI). His party did not approve his choice and he was not selected as a candidate for the following election (Stocker, 2007, p. 66).

<sup>50</sup> Fifteen policemen, seven terrorists/freedom fighters (three were shot by the police forces or secret agents, while four died for the premature explosion of the bombs they were placing) and two civilians. There were also several tens of wounded people.



formula' in Rome - i.e. the government coalition, still led by the DC, was now formed without the Liberals (PLI), but included the Socialists (PSI) instead - the negotiations between the Italian government, the SVP and the Austrian government proceeded much more constructively. The social-democratic and socialist Foreign Ministers (Saragat and Nenni) conducted fruitful negotiations with their Austrian counterpart Kreisky, while the DC politician Aldo Moro was the key figure in negotiating the new autonomy with the new SVP's leader Silvius Magnago.

By 1969, the three negotiating partners (Italy, Austria and the SVP) had reached an agreement on the new autonomy statute that would pass most powers and competences from the Trentino-Alto Adige region to South Tyrol (i.e. to the Bozen/Bolzano province). That required a change of the Italian Constitution, which was completed in 1972. That process, in which the Communists (PCI) voted with the governing parties, secured the constitutional reform without the need for a national (i.e. Italy-wide) referendum. The full implementation of the autonomy statute took twenty years. In 1992, the autonomy statute was recognized by all sides as fulfilled, with Austria releasing a formal statement on the complete solution of the South Tyrol question at the UN.<sup>51</sup>

The approval of the so called 'second autonomy statute' in 1972 and its implementation in the following years has represented the most important achievement of the SVP. Through it, the SVP was able to create the conditions for the survival and thriving of the two minority groups, fostering education in the German and Ladin language and implementing a system of ethnic quotas (*etnischer Proporz*) for the proportional distribution of public benefits, primarily jobs in the public sector and public housing, amongst the three ethno-linguistic groups. As Table 4.4 shows, since the 1970s the proportion of German- and Ladin-speaking people in South Tyrol has significantly grown, whereas the Italian-speaking population has declined. This was also a consequence of the 'job opportunities differential' determined by the re-balancing of the distribution of public employees amongst ethno-linguistic groups. Although, as Table 4.5 shows, the rebalancing has been pursued rather gradually, job opportunities in

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<sup>51</sup> The South Tyrolese who opposed the solution of the international controversy argued that Austria acted under Italian blackmail. Indeed, Austria was negotiating EU membership and Italy would have definitely vetoed the accession of a country with which it had on-going international controversies. However, as a matter of fact, the Austrian government waited to have 'green light' from the SVP before releasing the document at the UN.

the public sector have greatly expanded for the two minority groups and have dramatically shrunk for the Italian group.

**Table 4.4**  
**Population development in South Tyrol 1900-2001**  
**according to linguistic groups (%)**

Year	German	Italian	Ladin	Others
1900	88.8	4.0	4.0	3.2
1910	89.0	2.9	3.8	4.3
1921	75.9	10.6	3.9	9.6
1953	62.7	33.6	3.7	n.d.
1961	62.2	34.3	3.4	0.1
1971	62.9	33.3	3.7	0.1
1981	64.9	28.7	4.1	2.2
1991	68.0	27.6	4.4	4.0
2001	69.1	26.5	4.4	2.2

Source: ASTAT. The figures for 1953 come from A. Leidlmaier, *Bevölkerung und Wirtschaft in Südtirol* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1958), reported in F. Pristinger (1980, p. 167).

**Table 4.5**  
**Public employees in South Tyrol according to linguistic groups**

Year	German and Ladin	Italian
1972	15.2	84.8
1975	13.9	86.1
1979	27.0	73.0
1991	47.0	53.0
2006	58.5	41.5

Source: Stocker (2007, p. 83).

The achievement of the second autonomy statute has had contradictory effects for the SVP's electoral success. On the one hand, with the passing of many competences from the region to the Bozen/Bolzano province and the consequent growth of the provincial budget, the SVP has been able to display its administrative capacities and to exercise patronage. Together with the maintenance of the ethnic divide, this contributed substantially to the enduring electoral success of the party, especially in the

1970s and 1980s. Arguably, good administrative skills and patronage capability are the main reasons why the SVP has started to attract an increasing number of votes from Italian speaking people, though it is still an almost negligible portion of the party's total votes.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, the approval and implementation of the second autonomy statute represented the fulfilment of the party's 'mission'. Some of those (Germans and Ladins) who feel now secure about the survival of the minorities have moved away from the ethnic 'rally party' and have shifted their allegiance to inter-ethnic parties, i.e. the Greens. Many more, however, did not feel accommodated by the 'second autonomy statute'. In particular, the party's approval of the end of the international controversy at the UN was interpreted by many as the abandonment of any aspiration to self-determination and, therefore, to return to Austria. This resulted in a slight but steady electoral decline which culminated with the 2008 provincial election, when the SVP achieved, for the first time since its birth, below 50% of votes, though still gaining a majority of seats in the provincial assembly. The gradual defection from the SVP by German-speaking politicians and voters can be measured primarily by looking at the electoral score of the 'German' parties that stand for reunification with Austria, such as *Partei der Unabhangigen* (PDU, the Party of Independents), *Die Freiheitlichen* (dF, the Libertarians), *Union fur Sudtirol* (UfS, Union for South Tyrol) and *Sud-Tiroler Freiheit* (S-TF, South-Tyrol Free). The sum of their shares of vote has risen from 4.9% in 1983 to 10.9 in 1993, to 21.5% in 2008 (see table 4.1). In addition, during the 1990s there has also been a relatively successful (but it now seems evanescent) attempt by the Ladins to create their own political party, separate from the SVP.

Since the 1990s the party has tried to re-create a new 'mission' for itself by setting out new objectives which fall short of secession from Italy but, at the same time, aim to re-connect South Tyrol with North Tyrol. After the Austrian accession into the EU and the signing of the Schengen agreement, the creation of a Euro-region Tyrol has become a reality. However, this does not seem to have stopped the electoral decline of the party.

#### 4.1.3 Party organization

The most exceptional characteristic of the SVP's organization is definitely its extremely large membership relative to the number of voters. Although official

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<sup>52</sup> However, in the last provincial election in 2008 the 'Italian votes' were crucial in allowing the party to maintain a majority of seats in the assembly.

membership figures have usually been considered exaggerated (Pallaver, 2006, p. 186), the ratio between the number of members and number of voters has always been exceptionally high (see Table 4.6). This has prevented the party suffering from lack of funding, even before the Italian laws on party funding started to become extremely generous.

**Table 4.6**  
**Party Membership 1945-2005**

<i>Year</i>	<i>1945</i>	<i>1964</i>	<i>1973</i>	<i>1983</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2009</i>
<i>N. of members (thousands)</i>	50	35	51	71	78	71	69	72	69	60	55
<i>Ratio Members/ Voters</i>	-	26.3%	32.0%	43.5%	48.8%	41.5%	-	-	41.2%	-	-

Source: for 1945, Frasanelli and Gallmetzer (1990, p. 44). For 1964-2005 data elaborated by author on the basis of Pallaver (2006, p. 181); for 2009, SVP's official website (<http://www.svpartei.org/de/partei/ortsgruppen/>).

Such a large membership, which was desperately sought by the party founders in 1945 as means to legitimize the new party in the eyes of the American governor, testifies to the close links between the SVP and the South Tyrolean civil society. Since its birth, the party has had extremely close ties with the economic organizations representing business and agricultural interests as well as with the local clergy, which has always exhorted the South Tyrolean people to support the SVP (rather than the Italian DC) at the polls.

However, enduring large membership did not mean the absence of considerable fluctuations. As Table 4.6 shows, after gathering an incredible number of members in its foundation's year, the figures went down in the following fifteen years. Since 1964, when a comprehensive organizational reform was implemented, the number of members started to grow again until the early 1990s, approaching 80,000 people. The figures for the second half of the 1990s and the 2000s show a slow but steady decline which, unlike membership fluctuations of the past, appear to mirror the party's electoral trend.

Territorially, the party's structure is organized in local, district and central (i.e. provincial) bodies. Each level has a chairman and a committee, while at district and central level there is also an executive body. The central executive board consists of the

party leader (i.e. the party chairman), two deputy leaders (one German and one Ladin), the provincial first minister, the leader of the party's group in the provincial and regional assemblies, the MPs, the MEP, the district chairmen and the deputy Mayor of Bozen/Bolzano, the capital city of South Tyrol that, having an Italian majority, elects normally an Italian Mayor (Holzer and Schwegler, 1998, p. 172). Beside the executive board, there is also a smaller body called Presiding Committee (*Praesidium*) which meets only when top level decisions have to be discussed. The Presiding Committee is restricted to the leader, the deputy leaders, the provincial first minister and the speaker of the district chairmen (Pallaver, 2006, p. 179).

The decision making process is strictly formalized and hierarchical: the political decisions rest with the central executive board, whereas the administrative tasks are decentralised and left to the local and district organs (Holzer and Schwegler, 1998, p. 172). The party Conference, which is held annually, is the supreme organ and represents the link between the central executive body and the different territorial levels and vertical sections (such as the women and youth organizations) of the party. The main functions of the Conference are the election of the central governing bodies of the party, amendments to the party statute and the ratification/rejection of exceptionally important political decisions taken by the executive board.

The most important organizational reform occurred in 1964, after a process of intense internal debate that had started with the election of Silvius Magnago as party leader in 1957 (see Table 4.7).

**Table 4.7**  
**SVP's leaders (1945-2009)**

Erich Amonn	1945-48
Josef Menz-Popp	1948-51
Toni Ebner	1951-52
Otto von Guggenberg	1952-54
Karl Tinzl	1954-56
Toni Ebner	1956-57
Silvius Magnago	1957-91
Roland Riz	1991-92
Siegfried Brugger	1992-04
Elmar Pichler-Rolle	2004-09
Richard Theiner	2009-

The reform transformed the SVP from a party of notables (the group of founders who had led the party from 1945 to 1957) to a highly bureaucratized and centralized

mass party. In Panebianco's terms (1988), the 1964 reform represented the institutionalization of the party in the sense that it became more autonomous from the socio-economic organizations, primarily the *Südtiroler Bauernbund* (South Tyrolean Farmers' Association) and the *Südtiroler Wirtschaftsring* (South Tyrolean Economy and Trade Association), which had generated it. Until 1964, indeed, representatives of these two organizations had guaranteed seats in the SVP's executive board and could directly influence political decisions. With the reform, the link between the party and the main socio-economic organizations of the South Tyrolean society were made more indirect, as the latter lost their seats in the party executive. Instead, the new statute created two sectional units, *de facto* two highly formalized factions, which referred to the two (now) external organizations.

In 1964 the party also encouraged the formation of an ethnic (i.e. German) South Tyrolean trade union, separate from the Italy-wide union confederations. The birth of the Union of South Tyrolean Independent Trade Unions (ASGB) represented the first explicit recognition for the interests of a social class, the workers, which had always been a minority in South Tyrol, especially amongst the German and Ladin group. In 1975 a new sectional unit was formed within the party, the *Arbeitnehmer* (Labour), which flanked the already existing *Wirtschaft* (Economy) and *Landwirtschaft* (Agriculture), thus (re)creating the organizational conditions for a true *Sammelpartei* (i.e. rally party) (Stocker, 2007, p. 62).

In order to avoid destabilizing conflicts between the factions, the party also established formal venues, such as the social and economic committee and the agriculture and social board, for discussing and harmonizing socio-economic policies (Pallaver, 2006, p. 182). It worth remembering that, given the hegemonic position of the SVP at provincial level, the formation of policies within the party is taken very seriously as they become official policies of the provincial government almost automatically. The organization of the SVP, therefore, reflects the function that the party fulfills in producing a synthesis which can accommodate the whole German (and Ladin) society of South Tyrol.

Beyond the formalization of sectional factions, the reform of the 1960s introduced organizational tools for women and the young. According to Holzer and Schwegler (1998, p. 167), these two internal units have not generally had much political weight. The women's movement is oriented towards a traditional and conservative image of women in society, while the 'Young Generation' is an organizational unit

which serves to recruit and form new political personnel for the party. However, at the 2009 Annual Conference it was primarily the youth and women's organizations that, in the hope of regenerating the political class of South Tyrol, pushed through a highly controversial policy which prohibits party members staying in office, as council mayors or provincial councillors, for more than fifteen years (*L'Espresso*, 30/03/09).

## **4.2. Party Ideology and Policy: The Centre-Periphery Dimension**

### **4.2.1 From self-determination to moderate autonomism (1945-1956)**

At the end of WW2 the establishment of a table for peace negotiations, which would have inevitably dealt with issues of border re-definition amongst states, fostered the hopes of many South Tyrolese that they might rejoin their fatherland, Austria. After two years of 'cultural-linguistic freedom', under the occupation of Nazi-Germany's troops, the prospect of a re-imposition of control by an 'alien' state was extremely unappealing.

The most important point of the SVP programme in 1945 was to pursue the right of self-determination. Together with the Austrian government, whose Foreign Minister was a North Tyrolese, the SVP tried to lobby the four victorious Allies for the concession of a referendum through which the people of South Tyrol could decide whether to remain within the Italian state or re-join Austria. However, the conditions for such a diplomatic achievement were not good. First of all, three of the four winning powers (USA, UK and France) were the same ones that had decided on South Tyrol's annexation to Italy in 1919. What was being asked of them was, therefore, to overturn their own previous decisions. On the other hand, during the negotiations it became clear that the American and French governments had developed a pro-referendum stance and the British government was under pressure from public opinion to do the same. The real obstacles to re-unification with Austria came from the larger diplomatic capacity of Italy *vis a vis* Austria, the British fear that Austria would fall within Soviet influence (which made London resistant to concessions to the Austrian government) and, most importantly, the USSR's fierce opposition. Moscow was acting as the protector of Yugoslav interests, which aimed to annex various Italian territories. These annexations in favour of Belgrade would be easier to achieve if Italy limited territorial losses elsewhere.

In order to show that there were no doubts about the preferences of the South Tyrolese as to which alternative they preferred, in early 1946 the SVP organized a huge demonstration in Sigmundskron/Castelfirmiano and gathered about 155,000 signatures (i.e. much more than 50% of the adult German and Ladin population) which were submitted to the Austrian Chancellor in April (Stocker, 2007, p. 41). However, later in the same month the four powers formally rejected the request of a referendum for the self-determination of South Tyrol. The Tyrolese people, both north and south of the Austro-Italian border, responded with numerous demonstrations. Although these rallies could not change the decision, they had some impact especially on British public opinion and, therefore, indirectly on the British government (Voggler, 1985, p. 16).

After coming to terms with the idea that the foreseeable future of South Tyrol was within Italy, the SVP (and the Austrian government) tried to use the on-going peace negotiations to at least anchor the 'South Tyrolean question' to international jurisdiction. At that stage, the British government had joined its American and French counterparts in backing an internationally recognised agreement between Italy and Austria, in spite of the continued Soviet opposition. The Paris Agreement was signed in September 1946 and included in Italy's peace treaty in December of the same year. The main points of the Agreement were: equal status for the Italian and German<sup>53</sup> languages in South Tyrol, autonomy for South Tyrol (autonomous legislative and executive powers) to be drafted taking into consideration the requests of the local representatives (i.e. the SVP), reconsideration of citizenship for those South Tyrolese who had opted to become German citizens in 1939 (Voggler, 1985, p. 19-20). The importance of the Paris Agreement lay in the fact that the concession of autonomy was not only a simple internal Italian matter but a commitment that Italy had taken with the international community, with Austria as the recognized guarantor of the rights of German-speaking ethnic minority.

The shift from self-determination to autonomy by the SVP was, therefore, not driven by electoral strategies. Indeed, the most crucial elections, both at provincial and national level, would come only in 1948. The party acted under the rigid constraints of *realpolitik* which had denied it the path to self-determination, in spite of the fact that that was the preferred choice of the people the party wanted to represent. In fact, self-

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<sup>53</sup> The Paris Agreement does not mention the Ladin group and the Ladin language, which the then Italian PM Alcide De Gasperi, a man from Trent who had lived under the Austrian Empire before 1919, considered just another Italian dialect (Stocker, 2007, p. 45).



determination never disappeared from party discourses and documents. However, at the Conference in February 1947, the party programme was changed and the central objective of the SVP became the achievement of autonomy, as envisaged by the Paris Agreement (Voggler, 1985, p. 21).

However, in mid 1947, it became clear that the Italian Constituent Assembly, elected in 1946 for drafting the new Constitution, had no intention of complying with the Paris Agreement. Rather than conceding extensive autonomy to South Tyrol, where the German ethnic group would be the majority (about two thirds), it created an autonomous region of Trentino-Alto Adige which included South Tyrol (i.e. Bozen/Bolzano province) and Trent province (the old *Welschtirol*). The SVP protested and tried to negotiate a better deal but, being blackmailed on the issue of Italian citizenship for the 'optants', it had to accept the proposal of the Constituent Assembly. Although the so called 'first autonomy statute' did not satisfy the SVP, since the new autonomous region would be controlled by the Italian parties (primarily the Christian Democrats), the party leader Amonn sent a letter to the Italian government expressing his thanks, thus legitimizing the choice of the Italian Constituent Assembly. Many party members did not appreciate that move. After having withdrawn from self-determination, the SVP's leadership seemed to be now withdrawing even from the Paris Agreement.

Amonn's choice can be explained in two ways, neither mutually exclusive. On the one hand, he was effectively blackmailed by the Italian government, as the issue of citizenship for the optants had not been fully solved yet. Indeed, in 1964, Amonn revealed he had sent that letter because he had been put under massive pressure (Stocker, 2007, p. 46). On the other hand, the leader and the other notables that constituted the dominant group were both inclined to compromise with the Italian state and still optimistic about the possibility of implementing a satisfactory autonomy agreement through co-operation with the Christian-Democrats of Trent. This inclination of the SVP's leadership towards compromise and moderation had several origins. First of all, South Tyrol did not only need autonomy. Like most other regions of Italy and Europe, it needed to be rebuilt economically and in terms of infrastructure. The SVP's leadership of the 1940s and 1950s was very sensitive to economic issues, not least because most of the founding members were (mainly urban) businessmen who had interests in rebuilding a market economy. Such interests (and their Christian democratic ideology) meant they were close to the Italian DC both in Rome and in Trent, thus pushing them towards compromise and co-operation rather than open confrontation.

However, the strategy did not seem to pay off. The DC, both in Rome and in Trent, started to lean more and more towards Italian nationalism, not so much in terms of discourse but in terms of concrete policies. This situation left the German- and Ladin-speaking feeling insecure. For instance, by 1952 citizens could deal with state's public offices exclusively in the Italian language (Stocker, 2007, p. 49). This also entailed that Italian-speaking people were absurdly over-represented in public jobs. In addition, the public housing policy of the Italian government, helped by the regional government of Trentino-Alto Adige, strongly discriminated against the German minority and encouraged Southern Italians to move into South Tyrol. From 1946 to 1952, the number of Italians grew by about 50,000 (ibid, p. 49). In 1953 a very influential local churchman, Michael Gamper, spoke about a 'march towards extinction' of the South Tyrolean people. By the mid 1950s, discontent with the 'first autonomy statute' amongst the German and Ladin speaking groups had grown stronger and the party needed to respond.

#### **4.2.2 From 'Los von Trient' to the 'Package' (1957-1969)**

The turn to a more radical stance in 1957 was neither anticipated nor motivated by any electoral shocks. In the 1952 and 1956 provincial elections, as well as in the 1953 general election, the SVP continued to secure virtually 100 percent of the German and Ladin votes in South Tyrol. However, it had become evident that unanimous electoral support for the ethnic rally party did not coincide with consensus on the leadership's strategy. The most evident signs of this discontent were, on the one hand, increasing activities outside the limits of electoral (democratic) politics culminating in the establishment of the BAS (the illegal organization for South Tyrol's Liberation). On the other hand, the extremely close links between South Tyrolean civil society and the SVP allowed the pressure for change to be channelled within the internal organization of the party.

Internal debate became intense, with the traditional leadership increasingly pushed on the defensive because of the lack of progress on autonomy. Uneasiness with the direction of the party between 1948 and 1956 was witnessed by very high leadership turn-over: five leaders in eight years (see table 4.7). However, all leaders belonged to the group of notables that was created around the founding members.

Although disagreement on the party's stance and strategy cannot be simplistically reduced to precise pre-existing factions or groups, the two most important lines of divisions were age (i.e. an opposition between the older and the younger generation of SVP politicians) and socio-economic sector (i.e. an opposition between the urban businessmen and the mountain-farmers). The young and the farmers represented the groups in favour of a more radical stance. Until 1956, Josef Menz-Popp had remained the leader of the *Bauerbund* (the Farmers' Association). He belonged to the group of notables and had also been leader of the party between 1948 and 1951. However, the election of Hans Dietl, an advocate of strategy change, as new leader of the *Bauerbund* in 1956 represented the first important change in the balance of power within the SVP leadership (Stocker, 2007, p. 51).

The 1957 Conference, which sanctioned the so called 'Palace revolution', started in a tense atmosphere. The Italian government had shown resistance and irritation towards Austria's renewed diplomatic activism. Even more importantly, in 1956 the BAS' first dynamite bombings had begun. In that context, eleven members of the old leadership who had been proposed for re-election were rejected by the conference's delegates (Vogglar, 1985, p. 26). The new elected leader, Silvius Magnago, found himself at the head of a new leadership group that had a more intransigent orientation. The same conference approved a resolution which called for the establishment of a separate autonomous region for South Tyrol and for the protection of Germans' and Ladins' minority rights by Austria in all international venues.

The first move by the new leader was the calling of a mass rally of the South Tyrolese people to protest against the announcement of a new plan for public housing in South Tyrol. As much as 95 percent of the public housing built from 1955 had been allotted to Italian-speaking people (Stocker, 2007, p. 50). The new plan, announced in 1957, sounded very much like the continuation of the Fascist policy of Italianization. As a consequence, the mass rally had, on the one hand, a very high attendance (about 35,000 people out of about 240,000 Germans and Ladins) but, on the other hand, it represented a highly risky move. Indeed, the most radical elements, and members of the BAS, wanted to turn the rally into a 'march on Bozen', which would have ended up with violent confrontation with the Italian police (Vogglar, 1985, p. 27). Magnago, however, managed to keep the demonstration peaceful and announced the change of party strategy with the slogan 'Los von Trient' ('Break from Trent').

From now on, the alliance of the SVP with the DC in Bozen, in Trent and in Rome could not be taken for granted anymore. Political co-operation at all levels would now be subject to the DC's willingness to concede a new autonomy statute to South Tyrol. When it became clear that the DC in Rome refused to consider a draft-law for more autonomy, presented by SVP's MPs in February 1958, and that the Italian government, with the complicity of the Trentino-Alto Adige regional government, was interpreting in a very restrictive way the already limited competences of the Bozen/Bolzano province, the SVP took the decision (in 1959) to withdraw its regional assembly group.

To be sure the abandonment of the moderate stance in 1957 engendered some ambiguities about (and divisions over) the new policy. While Magnago pursued consistently the objective of increased autonomy within the Italian state, others interpreted (or wanted to portray) the policy turn as return to a position in favour of self-determination. The terrorist activities of the BAS obviously strengthened this perspective both internally and, even more, externally.

By 1961, the new dynamism of Austrian diplomacy and the terrorist attacks convinced the Italian government to start negotiations with the SVP (and with Vienna). At that juncture, as Magnago convincingly engaged in the negotiations, the divisions within the SVP became more evident. The party leader was now caught between a radical faction (whose most prominent members were Hans Dietl, Peter Brugger and Alfons Benedikter) oriented towards self-determination, and a moderate faction called *Aufbau* (Reconstruction) which in 1961 re-organized itself around some figures of the old leadership (such as Roland Riz, Toni Ebner and Josef Raffener) (Stocker, 2007, p. 59-60). The latter faction, who had the support of many SVP mayors, criticized the new leadership on several grounds. First, it urged the party to abandon its overtly nationalist rhetoric, its confrontational strategy and to return to co-operation with the DC in the regional assembly and executive. Secondly, it blamed the leadership for letting former Nazi collaborators reach influential positions within the party. Thirdly, although the *Aufbau* never went public in denouncing individual SVP's members for collaborating with the BAS, it condemned the terrorist activities of the BAS much more strongly than the party was doing and, more or less explicitly, accused the leadership of providing ideological fuel for the terrorists. This also led the BAS to threaten members of the *Aufbau*, thus increasing enormously the internal tensions (Stocker, 2007 p. 62). Finally,

it criticized the new leadership's obsession with nationalism for leading it to overlook the South Tyrolean economy.

It was from this faction that the first real electoral challenge to the SVP's monopoly of the German vote arrived. In 1963 Josef Raffeiner decided to leave the party and stand as an independent at the general election. Then he went on to create a new party, the *Tiroler Heimatpartei* (THP, Tyrolean Homeland Party), which contested the 1964 provincial election obtaining 2.4 percent of votes and gaining one seat (see table 4.1).

The THP disappeared at the 1968 elections. By that time, most members of the *Aufbau* who had remained in the SVP had been reabsorbed within Magnago's leadership. However, that did not happen by default. On the one hand, the progress in the negotiation process after 1963 legitimized Magnago's strategy, especially in the eyes of more moderate members. On the other hand, internal factionalism and the first serious electoral challenge by the THP were the main reasons why the party undertook a deep organizational reform which transformed it not only into a mass party, but also into a real *Sammelpartei*, where all different sections and orientations within the South Tyrolean society could make their voice heard. In spite of its small and brief electoral success, the THP had a great symbolic impact on the SVP, as it was the first time that the Germans' monolithic vote was broken and the rally party lost, momentarily, the exclusive role of representative of the minorities.

Having reabsorbed most of the moderate faction, Magnago was now heading towards a showdown with the hard-liners who had criticized or rejected the negotiations with the Italian government. By early 1969 an agreement on a new autonomy, called the 'package', had been reached. In May, Italy and Austria also agreed on the timing for the implementation of all the measures included in the agreement. It was now time for the SVP's supreme bodies to express themselves on the 'package'. The executive board took six days to examine in detail all the documents concerning the agreement. Eventually, 41 members voted in favour of recommending the Conference to approve the 'package', 23 members voted against and 2 abstained (Voggl, 1985, p. 36). The division within the executive announced an epic battle at the Conference that was held in November 1969. Many meetings were organized to inform the population throughout South Tyrol about the pros and cons of the agreement. The battle between Magnago and the radical faction led by Brugger was fought in each local branch and at each level of

the party organization. Eventually the Conference approved the package by 583 to 492 (ibid. p. 37).

#### **4.2.3 From the ‘package’ to the end of the full implementation of the ‘second autonomy’**

Although Magnago and Brugger committed to work together to maintain party unity following the autonomist path, the approval of the ‘package’ by the SVP provoked other splits. Already in 1966 a new hard-line party, the *Soziale Fortschrittspartei Sudtirols* (SFP, Social Progressive Party of South Tyrol), had been formed under the leadership of Egmont Jenny. This party enjoyed the support of the Austrian Social Democratic party, which was more intransigent than the Austrian People’s Party in the negotiations with Rome. In 1969 the SFP was the only German party that opposed the ‘package’ but was not able to capitalise much at the next provincial elections in 1973. It gained only one seat and 1.7 percent of total votes. By then, two more ‘anti-package’ parties had formed around Hans Dietl, a prominent figure who had been an SVP member of the provincial assembly since 1952, a member of the party’s executive since 1957 and MP in Rome from 1963 to 1972. In 1971 Dietl was expelled by the SVP because, as an MP, he voted against the Constitutional Law which introduced the ‘second autonomy statute’. Before the 1972 general election a group of independents was formed to support Dietl’s election in the Senate. After the general election, in which Dietl scored well but was not elected, he formed a new party, the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Sudtirols* (SPS). Some of those who had been in the group of independents that had supported Dietl in 1972 did not follow him into the SPS but formed another party, the *Partei der Unabhängigen* (PDU, Party of Independents).

By the first post-package provincial election in 1973 there were, therefore, already three parties competing with the SVP for the German votes from a more radical position. During the second half of the 1970s the hard-line parties of the left, the SFP and SPS, were eclipsed but new hard-line competitors were to emerge to the right of the SVP. As well as the PDU, which managed to win one seat in the provincial elections of 1978, 1983 and (under the new label *Freiheitliche Partei Sudtirols* FPS) in 1988, the 1980s saw the birth of a new radical nationalist party under the leadership of Eva Klotz, daughter of former BAS’ member Georg Klotz. The new party, called *Wahlverband des Heimatbundes* (WdH) in 1983 and *Sudtiroler Heimatbund* (SHB) in 1988, was the first

one that challenged the SVP specifically, almost exclusively, on the self-government dimension. All other splinter parties (THP, SFP, PDU and SPS) had criticized the SVP not simply on the issue of self-government. However, the WdH-SHB was a different matter. The core policy of Klotz's party was to go back to the objective of self-determination as professed by the SVP's original political programme of 1945. This made it the most attractive alternative to the SVP for all those who opposed the 'package' during the 1980s.

Did the emergence of all these harder-line parties affect the self-government policy position of the SVP during the 1970s and 1980s? It would appear not. The new SVP's programme adopted in 1972, which set the implementation of the 'second autonomy statute' as its main goal, remained unchanged until 1993. The constitutional change that established the new autonomy statute in 1972 represented only the first step. Between 1972 and 1992 the SVP, as the party in office at provincial level, had to co-operate with the national government in passing the necessary legislation to fully implement the 'package'. In this context, Magnago was very keen on avoiding any rhetorical, let alone policy, shift towards self-determination. In addition, opposition to the SVP's policy stance did not come exclusively from the hard-liners.

The hegemonic party also had to deal with the emergence of inter-ethnic parties, such as the *Neue Linke/Nuova Sinistra* (New Left) and the *Grüne/Verdi/Verc* (Greens), who criticized the ethno-nationalism of the SVP. These parties opposed all kinds of separatism in South Tyrol: not only the secessionist stances of the WdH-SHB but also the politics of 'ethnic apartheid' pursued by the SVP through the logic of census and the 'ethnic quotas' (Langer, 1990, p. 59). The obligation on all residents to register as belonging to one ethno-linguistic group and the subsequent allocation of public benefits (public jobs, houses, subsidies, studentship bursaries, etc.) according to ethnic proportionality had started in 1976 – a move which immediately re-ignited tensions between the Italian and the German groups (Pallaver, 2007, p. 585). In particular the Italian group started to feel threatened in its economic interests and increasingly developed a sense of 'minority syndrome' within the province. Initially some Italian speaking voters, mostly former supporters of left Italian parties, supported cross-ethnic lists in the hope of easing ethnic tensions and overcoming the system of 'ethnic quotas'. However, as table 4.1 shows, by the late 1980s the Italian-speaking people of South Tyrol had shifted to the right, with the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) becoming the biggest Italian party in the provincial assembly. The growth of the cross-

ethnic lists in the late 1980s and early 1990s was now due to increased support from German voters who, feeling less and less threatened in their cultural/linguistic survival, abandoned in slightly greater numbers the SVP and its insistence on the politics of 'ethnic cages' (Langer, 1990, p. 60). The latter was denounced as an obstacle to real bottom-up democracy, as the system created and perpetuated by the SVP of an ethnically segmented society could work only by negotiations between the elites of the ethnic groups.<sup>54</sup>

Therefore, the policy position of the SVP in the 1970s and, even more, in the 1980s was more or less a middle-way between hard-liners and secessionists (concentrated primarily in the mono-ethnic rural villages), on the one side, and supporters of political integration amongst the ethnic groups within the autonomy (concentrated in Bozen/Bolzano and in the other few urban centres), on the other side. Electoral results seem overall to have rewarded this policy. After having scored its worst result ever in the post-package election of 1973 (56.4%), the SVP recovered in the late 1970s and stabilized at around 60% by the 1980s.

#### **4.2.4 From 'dynamic autonomy' to a new (folklore) nationalist politics (1992-2009)**

With the full implementation of the package in 1992 and the consequent end of the international controversy a completely new phase began for the SVP. *De facto*, the party had fulfilled its historical 'mission', as it had been set out in the political programme of 1947 and restated in the subsequent programmes, including the last one in 1972. The adoption of a new party programme in 1993, witnessed the awareness of an urgent need to re-position itself so as to find a new *raison d'être* and communicate it to the electorate. That was not an easy task. Having underscored the party's courage and sense of responsibility for implementing the 'second autonomy statute' and posing an end to the international dispute, the first point of the 1993 programme lays out the new objectives: further expansion of the autonomy and the creation of a 'European region' called Tyrol (*Grundsatzprogramm, Das neue Programm der Südtiroler Volkspartei, Beschlossen von der Landesversammlung am 8. Mai 1993 - The New Basic Programme of the SVP, May 1993*).

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<sup>54</sup> On the traditional politics of South Tyrol as an example of consociational democracy governed by agreements amongst elites and on the difficulties of maintaining such political system in recent years, see Pallaver, G. (2008).



To be sure, the document also mentioned the right of the South Tyrolese to self-determination. However, in contrast to the original programme of 1945 (and likewise all the subsequent ones), the right to self-determination was referred to as an hypothetical option that could be invoked only if the Italian state failed to respect the rights of the minority as envisaged by the Paris Agreement. In other words, as argued by Alfons Benedikter in his indictment *The Facts about the Betrayal of the Homeland*, with the endorsement of the Dispute Settlement Declaration the SVP renounced both the right to self-determination and the possibility of raising the ‘South Tyrolean question’ again at the UN (Benedikter, quoted in Peterlini, 1997, p. 104). Such a decision created a fracture between the majority faction, led by Magnago’s successors,<sup>55</sup> and the most intransigent elements. The walk out of the latter, either joining forces with the already existing hard-line parties or creating new ones, has considerably enlarged the (German) political opposition and increased the scope for competition for the German votes.

Already in 1989, some members led by Benedikter had left the SVP, joining forces with Klotz’s SHB and the FPS to form the nationalist-irredentist party *Union fur Sudtirol* (UfS). In addition to that, other members left the party in 1992 following the so called ‘gang of four’ (four right-wing irredentist members who had led the youth organization of the SVP) to form another secessionist party, *Die Freiheitlichen* (dF – the Libertarians). At the 1993 provincial election these two parties managed to win nearly 11 percent of votes and four seats, causing the SVP to score its worst electoral result ever: only 52% of the votes.

The 1993 new programme represented the response to the new situation characterized by a re-invigorated challenge. This strategy has been rather rewarding in policy and electoral terms between the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s (see Table 4.1). The SVP-led provincial government obtained further concessions during the centre-left government in Rome (1996-2001) and the outstanding economic performance of the province favoured a certain relaxation in the cross-ethnic tensions. In 2003, the cross-ethnic party *Grüne/Verdi/Verc* achieved its best result ever and the SVP started accepting (bi-lingual) Italians in its ranks, even as candidates.

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<sup>55</sup> For more than three decades Silvius Magnago provided a complete leadership, acting as both party leader and provincial first minister. After his resignation the two positions were made incompatible. Several party leaders alternated from 1991 to the present day (see table 4.7). However, the new ‘strong man’ of the SVP has been Luis Durnwalder, the provincial first minister since 1993, and prominent member of the farmers’ section of the party.

In electoral terms, it is not entirely clear whether the recovery of the SVP was due to its own merits or to the damage that challenger parties inflicted on themselves. This was particularly the case for the Libertarians (dF),<sup>56</sup> a party linked to the Austrian radical-right Freedom Party (FPÖ). After the electoral breakthrough in the 1993 provincial election, the party was torn apart by personalistic factionalism and, most crucially, by the murder in 1997 of former leader Waldner by another party member (Pallaver, 2007, p. 585). This episode impacted negatively on the party's performance in 1998 provincial election. Only in 2003 did dF recover the same number of elected members to the provincial assembly and nearly the same share of votes that it had gained in 1993. Since then, however, the tide seems to have turned again in favour of the nationalist-secessionist forces in South Tyrol. Ethnic tensions have re-emerged, too, as a consequence of the campaign initiated in 2004 by the *Schützen* for the rehabilitation and celebration of the terrorists/freedom fighters of the 1960s. However, at the heart of these tensions there are very different constitutional preferences between the two ethnic groups. As table 4.8 shows, a majority of Germans prefers to secede from the Italian Republic whereas the overwhelming majority of the Italians want to remain within Italy, and probably would like more central government control over the province.

**Table 4.8**  
**Constitutional preferences of the German (2005) and**  
**Italian (2008) speaking population of South Tyrol.**

	Remaining within Italy	Secession	
		Independence	Re-joining Austria
German speakers (2005)	45.3%	33.4%	21.3%
Italian speakers (2008)	78%	20%	2%

Source: Soffi-Institute, Innsbruck, 2005 (available at: [Wissenschaftliche Meinungsumfrage des Heimatbundes und Cossiga-Vorschlag](#)); Institute of Social Research and Opinion Polling in Bozen/Bolzano, 2008 (available at: [Meinungsumfrage zur Selbstbestimmung: Nur 55% der Italiener würden definitiv für Italien wählen](#)).

<sup>56</sup> The UfS was also shaken by internal factionalism after the 1993 election but managed to re-discover unity behind Eva Klotz well before the 1998 election, increasing its share of votes both in 1998 and in 2003 (Pallaver, 2007, p. 583-84).

It is extremely interesting to note that, according to these figures, most German secessionists are not irredentists, as one might expect, but independentists. However, both independentists and irredentists are dissatisfied with the current settlement. This leaves the SVP confronting a dilemma: should it follow the secessionist majority or respect the pacts made with the Italian government?

The 2006 general election represented an extraordinary opportunity for the SVP to expand autonomy. The pre-election alliance with the centre-left, led by Romano Prodi, was built on an agreement which foresaw further concessions from Rome. The very narrow victory of Prodi made the SVP a relevant party for the government's survival in Parliament, thus putting pressure on the PM to fulfil his promises. Indeed, just few months after the formation of the new government, Prodi had a meeting in Bozen with a delegation of the SVP and with the first ministers of the Bozen and Trento Provinces to discuss the development of autonomy (*Alto Adige*, 02/02/07). The most important point was the introduction of a specific clause that would prevent unilateral change of the autonomy statute by Rome. In addition, the negotiations also included more concessions for the province, especially in the energy, post and broadcasting sectors (J. G. Widmann, SVP's MP 1992-2008, interview with the author, Meran/Merano, 16/11/07; Elmar Pichler-Rolle, party leader 2004-2009, speech at the 2007 Conference in Meran/Merano, 17/11/07). However, with the premature fall of the centre-left government in 2008 both the strong negotiating position and the envisaged reforms were lost.

With the election of a centre-right government in 2008, which includes the Northern League, the projects under discussion for the reform of the relationships between regional and central governments has changed considerably. For the time being, the agenda of the Northern League, has given priority to financial rather than political decentralization: so called 'fiscal federalism'. Since South Tyrol, as a consequence of its fiscal privileges granted by the special autonomy statute, already keeps 90% of the taxes collected in the province, this path of reform has little to offer to the SVP. If anything, given the extremely rich status of South Tyrol *vis a vis* the Italian average, the reform that the League's Minister Calderoli is negotiating with the SVP's South Tyrolean first minister Durnwalder will entail some financial sacrifices for Bozen (*Alto Adige*, 11/03/09). All in all, the reform of the Italian constitution and of the financial relationship between Rome and the regions driven by the Northern League represents more of a source of concern than an opportunity. On the one hand, it does

not seem to move autonomy far enough so as to counter the nationalist/separatist grievances politicized by the radical parties. At the last provincial election, the Libertarians, UfS and *Sud-Tirol Freiheit* (S-TF – South Tyrol Freedom), the latter being a new splinter party from UfS, gained 21.5 percent of the vote (a little less than a third of the German votes) and 8 members of the assembly. On the other hand, the project of the Northern League may disturb the extensive autonomy which South Tyrol already enjoys both politically and financially.

At provincial level, the further growth of the radical nationalist parties in the last years has not significantly changed the SVP's ideology and policy position on the self-government dimension. The first headline of the 2007 Conference resolution goes "Autonomy – the right way" (SVP, Resolution of the 54<sup>th</sup> ordinary Conference, 2007). The party has overall maintained a pragmatic and moderate line. As a prominent SVP member put it:

*Pacta sunt servanda* [Pacts must be respected]. We can not, on the one hand, demand self-determination and, on the other hand, negotiate about more responsibilities in the 'dynamic autonomy'. We have not given up on self-determination, but it would be the *ultima ratio* [last resort], in case of a one-sided violation of the Parisian agreement. (Elmar Pichler Rolle, SVP leader between 2004 and April 2009, email interview with the author, 12/03/09).

However, the SVP now seems persuaded that, in order to counter the emergence of the radical secessionist parties, they need to push more on ethnic-nationalism, at least at a rhetorical level. As stated by two prominent members of the party, the SVP needs to engage more on 'folklore' policy issues (Seppl Lamprecht, deputy leader of the SVP 2000-2004, email interview with the author, 30/03/09; Elamr Pichler Rolle, email interview with the author, 12/03/09). This has taken the shape of a full and official endorsement of the recognition of the BAS members as 'freedom fighters', the deletion of the headline 'Alto Adige' (i.e. the denomination of the province in the Italian language) from the documents and stamps in local councils populated exclusively by German speaking people (on the grounds that such headline has a Fascist connotation), requests to the central government for the removal of monuments that the German South Tyrolese consider offensive, the removal of signs in Italian (though that is against the autonomy statute), and even inflammatory statements by SVP's politicians occupying institutional roles. In particular, in the run-up to the celebration of the Liberation Feast in 2009 (25 April 1945 is taken as the date of the liberation of Italy

from Nazi-Fascism) the SVP's Deputy Major of Bozen declared "it's not our feast, we South Tyrolese were freed in 1943 by the *Wehrmacht*." (*Alto Adige*, 07/05/09). Even the powerful provincial first minister, Luis Durnwalder, appears concerned and desperate for some kind of (folklore) achievement that he might boast in front of the most radical elements: "I am worried...The confrontation between the two ethnic groups is ever more radical. We moderates of the SVP are chased by the [German] right... Italy has to give a non-hostile sign, removing the Fascist symbols from Bozen" (*ibid.*). It is not at all clear whether this current 'appeasement' strategy towards the nationalists/secessionists will prove beneficial for the SVP in the medium term or will actually legitimize and further strengthen the radical parties.

### **4.3. Party Ideology and Policy: The Left-Right dimension**

#### **4.3.1 Finding the balance between the economic right and the nationalist right (1945-1968).**

In 1921, at the last democratic elections before the advent of the Fascist regime the *Deutscher Verband* (DV), the forerunner of the SVP, obtained about 90% of the German votes while 10% went to the *Sozialdemokratische Partei* (SDP). In contrast, in the first six provincial elections, from 1948 to 1968, the SVP gained virtually 100% of the German (and Ladin) votes. No party of the left was able to emerge in this period. The *Sozialdemokratische Partei Sudtirols*, formed in 1945, dissolved immediately after its disastrous performance in 1948 (Pallaver, 2007, p. 560).

The failure of the (German) left in South Tyrol can be easily explained. From a psychological point of view, the 'minority syndrome' and the experience of Fascism has certainly pushed the German (and Ladin) speaking South Tyrolese towards a sort of 'fetishism of unity' (Pallaver, 2005, p. 196), thus avoiding divisions on socio-economic lines. From a sociological point of view, South Tyrol has always been a rather homogeneous territory. The electoral figures of 1921 already demonstrate that left voters have always been a small minority. The South Tyrolese society has traditionally been characterized by the prominence of agriculture over industry, by the prominence of ruralism over urbanization and by the prominence of a religious, conservative culture over a secular and progressive one (Pallaver, 2005. p. 199-202). Industrialization came with Fascism, also as a means of Italianization of the province. Most workers in the big industries were, therefore, Italians. Likewise, most public employees (teachers, doctors, police officers, civil servants, etc.) were also Italians. The German population was made

up of three main socio-economic groups: the mountain farmers (by far the most populous one); the urban business middle class (small but influential); and the proletariat (small and divided between those working in urban industries and those working on rural farms).

The policy of ‘options’ and the consequent emigration into the German Reich between 1939 and 1943 affected primarily the urban proletariat.<sup>57</sup> As a consequence, the already small South Tyrolean working class shrank even more. As Table 4.9 shows, in the first fifteen years after WWII, the industry and the tertiary sectors expanded, while employment in agriculture diminished. However, by 1961 the percentage of people employed in the primary sector was still higher than in any other economic sector.

**Table 4.9**  
**Occupational Structure of the Germans**  
**and Ladins in South Tyrol (%)**

	1951	1961
Agriculture	67	45
Industry	13	21
Public Administr.	5	4
Other sectors	15	30

Source: compiled by author on the basis of Pristinger (1980, p. 168-172)

Given such homogeneity and the presence of only two influential socio-economic groups – the farmers and the urban businessmen represented within and without the party respectively by the *Südtiroler Bauernbund* (South Tyrolean Farmers’ Association) and the *Südtiroler Wirtschaftsring* (South Tyrolean Economy and Trade Association)– the SVP was able to unite the entire German (and Ladin) electorate without renouncing to maintain a rather consistent Christian-democratic, conservative ideology, largely inherited by the *Deutscher Verband* (Holzer and Schwegler, 1998, p. 164; Pallaver, 2006, p. 167).

The two main social constituencies were ideologically keen in several respects. Beyond the common ethno-linguistic identity, which both emphasized, they were

<sup>57</sup> Divided by profession the ‘optants’ who actually emigrated represented 67% of industrial workers, 40% of workers in tourism, 83% of workers in transportation, but only 9% of workers in agriculture (Pristinger, 1980, p. 157).

deeply religious (Catholic), opposed to cross-class conflict, and socially conservative (Holzer and Schwegler, 1998, p. 168). In the emerging contest of the cold-war order, the SVP adopted a clearly anti-communist position. To be sure, all the tendencies within the SVP were fierce opponents of Fascism too. However, while many opposed Fascism because it was an extreme-right ideology (i.e. because of its general ideological content), others opposed it only because it had been an 'Italian' political movement and because it represented 'Italian' nationalism. The latter did not dismiss extreme-right ideologies, provided they were moulded to the German nationalist perspective.

Beside these ideological similarities, the two groups also showed some ideological differences. The urban businessmen were more in favour of free market policies and more moderate in their ethnic nationalism, whereas the farmers had a more centrist/populist approach to economic policy (protectionism, access to fair credit and some social provisions) and were more radical on ethnic nationalism.

From 1945 to 1957, the party was led by a group of notables who mostly represented the interests of urban (mainly Bozen) middle class. The left-right positioning of the SVP was therefore extremely close to that of the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and to that of Italian Christian Democratic party (DC) (Lill, 1991, cited in Pallaver, 2006, p. 167). In terms of alliance politics, the DC represented the best possible (if not the ideal) partner for the SVP. Indeed, in the tri-polar Italian party system, the Christian-democrats represented the pivot of the anti-communist and (to a lesser extent) anti-fascist political forces. The alliance with the DC was strongly pursued by the SVP leadership until 1957. In that period, not only did the SVP form an alliance with the DC at regional and provincial level, it also supported the DC-led governments in Rome. In spite of differences on the issue of South Tyrol's autonomy, the SVP never voted against the government in a confidence vote: indeed, it voted five times in favour, abstaining only twice (Tempestini, 1994, p. 11).

However, from 1957 the new leadership of the SVP decided to adopt a much more confrontational approach to the Italian DC. While co-operation at provincial level continued, the SVP withdrew from the regional assembly (and government) until 1970. The attitudes towards the DC-led national governments in Rome also changed. Out of the fifteen confidence votes in the period 1957-1971, the SVP never voted in favour; it voted three times against and abstained on twelve occasions. This change in the politics of alliances reflected a turn to the nationalist right. Paradoxically, the two parties remained similar ideologically: the DC embedded more and more former fascists within

its ranks (especially in Bozen), while the SVP did the same with former Nazis (Pallaver, 2007, p. 561). In the mid 1950s, there had even been an attempt by a local challenger party, the *Weisser Turm* in Brixen/Bressanone to politicize/criticize the infiltration of the SVP by former Nazis, though with very little success (Pallaver, 2007, p. 571).

As discussed above, the move from a socio-economic right to an ethno-nationalist right corresponded to the increased weight of the farmers within the SVP. Since the early 1950s, the agricultural sector of South Tyrol had been experiencing a period of deep crisis, due also to the wider process of rationalization of agriculture occurring throughout Western Europe, which had a particularly negative impact on marginal areas of low productivity, such as mountain areas (Pristinger, 1980, p. 169). In addition, the combination of a growing rural population with the primogeniture inheritance system of the South Tyrolean farming families - i.e. the whole land went to the first male-son, while all the others had to look for alternative sources of income - created a wave of unemployment and discontent in the South Tyrolean countryside. The turn to ethnic nationalism by the SVP and the start of violent actions in the last 1950s can be explained by this diffuse dissatisfaction (Stocker, 2007, p. 56-7). While in other circumstances, the frustration of the unemployed would be channelled towards social class struggle and lead to the call for leftist policies, in the context of diffuse nationalist feelings and of the ethnic division of labour that existed in South Tyrol, it was channelled towards an ethnic-nationalist struggle.

In the first three years of the new leadership, 1957-1960, the turn to the nationalist right was radical and met almost no opposition. However, after 1961 the tendencies within the party that were inspired by Christian-democratic moderatism and by economic liberalism started to re-organize around some of the figures of the old leadership. The internal faction *Aufbau* (reconstruction), was meant to bring back the party towards more moderate positions, also re-starting co-operation with the DC in Trent and Rome (following the advice of the Church), and to pay more attention to socio-economic issues (especially, though not exclusively, the interests of the businessmen), which had been overshadowed by the ethnic-nationalist struggle. The concerns voiced by the *Aufbau* internal faction soon became a political platform for external political actors who engaged in electoral competition with the SVP. In 1963, Josef Raffeiner a prominent figure of the *Aufbau*, left the party to create a liberal-conservative alternative to the nationalist swing of the SVP. In the 1963 general election he presented himself as an independent candidate, diverting 4% of the votes from the



SVP (Pallaver, 2007, p. 571). The following year he formed a new party, called *Tiroler Heimatpartei* (THP), which got 2.4 percent of the votes at the provincial election.

The combination of the internal action of the *Aufbau* and the external competition of Raffeiner's THP, the first to break the electoral unity of the German group since 1948, led party leader Magnago to accept some of the specific concerns of the business organization and, more generally, to re-organize the party in a way which would allow diverse opinions and positions to be heard. Ideologically, the compromise reached in 1964 also led to the inclusion of an explicit reference to Christian-democratic values, definitely a way to moderate the shift to radical nationalism. This was not only included in the party political programme (the 1947 programme already contained such a reference) but it was anchored in the party statute (Pallaver, 2006, p. 167). By the 1968 provincial election, the *aufbau* faction had been re-absorbed within Magnago's leadership and the THP disappeared.

#### **4.3.2 Reacting to the challenges from the economic left and of the 'new' left (1968-1992).**

The reform of the party organization in the 1960s aimed to transform the SVP from a party of notables into a true *Sammelpartei*, a rally party for the German (and Ladin) speaking people of all socio-economic classes and of all ideological leanings. However, the reform was incomplete. Following the 1940's and 1950s, the party created internal sections only for the two major socio-economic groups: the farmers and the employers. However, given the social transformation of South Tyrol and the changes in Italian politics, this was insufficient if the unity of the rally party was to be maintained.

From a social perspective, the share of workers employed in industry in South Tyrol increased from 23.3% in 1951 to 30.6% in 1971. Even more importantly, while only a minority of industry workers were German speaking in 1951, 54.7% of them were in 1971 (Pristinger, 1980, p. 168-70). In the same period the share of workforce employed in agriculture (almost exclusively German and Ladin speakers) halved (*ibid.*). The SVP had tried to address this issue in 1964, by encouraging the birth of a German trade union (ASGB). This union had the political task of parting the workers on ethnic lines and, following the tradition of the *Katholischer Verein der Werktätigen* (KVV)<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The KVV had never received the endorsement of the SVP because it was affiliated with the Italian sister organization ACLI (Pristinger, 1980, p. 177).

formed in 1948, directing the German workers towards a representation of their interests inspired by Christian-social values, rather than class-struggle ideas (Dapunt, 2000, cited in Pallaver, 2006, p. 182). The activity of the ASGB was characterized by diffuse anti-strike propaganda, allegedly entrenched in the Christian doctrine, hostile opposition to Italian workers and trade unions and “distortion in ethnic terms of the supposed Italian opposition to the demands of the workers of South Tyrol, a tactic designed to foment competition for jobs among the workers of the different ethnic groups” (Pristinger, 1980, p. 178). While the ASGB was initially quite successful, increased industrialization and the above-mentioned transformations in the occupational structure of the workforce led, during the 1970s, many German workers to join Italy-wide labour unions (ibid.).

Changes in the socio-economic dynamics of South Tyrol also reflected a dramatic increase in social polarization in Italy. The eruption of such social mobilization of the working-class in the so called ‘hot autumn’ of 1969 was just the beginning of a period in which polarization at the socio-economic level soon translated into increased polarization at the political level. The vote share of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) ‘jumped’ from 26.9 in 1968 to 34.4 in 1976, reducing the distance from the DC by a third (from a gap of about 12% to just about 4%).<sup>59</sup> While part of the political elites tried to face the new situation by pursuing an unlikely strategy of gradual power sharing between the DC and the PCI, political and social radicalization erupted in terrorist activities by extra-electoral organizations of the extreme-left and extreme-right.

In this polarized context, it became more and more difficult for the SVP to side with one of the blocs - the bourgeois and anti-communist one - and at the same time to keep representing the whole German (and Ladin) speaking society of South Tyrol, especially given the limits of the organizational reform of 1964. The attempt to create a *Sammelpartei* which would mirror the entire (German) society of South Tyrol was, indeed, incomplete. When in 1965 Egmont Jenny, a member of the provincial assembly who had close relationships with the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), tried to form a social-democratic wing within the SVP, he was expelled from the party. With the support of the SPÖ, he created a new party, the *Soziale Fortschrittspartei Sudtirols* (SFP – Party of Social Progress) that declared itself in favour of democratic socialism (Pallaver, 2007, p. 572). The party voiced the needs of a wide range of emerging strata,

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<sup>59</sup> It is worth stressing that in the rather sclerotic Italian electoral market, characterized by the presence of stable ‘sub-cultures’, such changes represented a shock. Data refer to the share of vote in the Lower House (Istituto Cattaneo, available at: <http://www.cattaneo.org/index.asp?l1=archivi&l2=adele>).

such as the workers, clerks, technicians and young college graduates, but was unable to create links with the labour unions and received scant support from the workers (Pristinger, 1980, p. 182). At the 1968 provincial election, it got 2.3% of votes but failed to win a seat, whereas at the 1973 provincial election it won a seat with just 1.7% of the votes<sup>60</sup> (Pallaver, 2007, p. 572).

By the 1973 provincial election, another new party had also appeared to the left of the SVP, the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Südtirols* (SPS). Ideologically, the SPS remained rather ambiguous until the walk out of its founder, Hans Dietel. He was social-Christian who had been expelled from the SVP because he had rejected the agreement with the Italian state on the 'package'. When he founded the new party, he attracted a rather heterogeneous group of people around him. In the first years, the SPS's ideological outlook resembled that of national-populist party which paid particular attention to the discontent lower strata (Pristinger, 1980, p. 183). Only in 1978, did the SPS explicitly declare itself a 'member of European social-democracy' and 'sister party' of the Austrian SPÖ and the German SPD (Pallaver, 2007, p. 573). In contrast to the SFP, the SPS immediately formed links with the ethnic(German) labour union ASGB, creating strong tensions within the union between the social-democrats and the members of the SVP (Pallaver, *ibid.*). In 1973, the SPS obtained 5.1% of votes and two seats in the provincial assembly. Although it did not score particularly well amongst the urban working class, it attracted many voters from rural workers employed in the agricultural sector, from the lower middle class and, in general, from those who opposed the 'package' (Pallaver, *ibid.*).

The reaction of the SVP to this challenge from the socio-economic left resulted in the completion of the organizational reform started in 1964. The words of a former SVP member, who contributed to the creation of the labour wing of the party, leaves little doubt about the causal relationships between the appearance and relative success of the challengers of the left and the decision of the SVP to concede more room and visibility to the interests of the workers:

At the 1973 election the SVP included in its party list Rosa Franzelin and Erich Achmuller, as candidates of the workers which, in my opinion, would not have happened if there had not been the presence of the two opposition social-democratic parties. In 1974 we started to create, within the SVP, the labour wing, whose

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<sup>60</sup> In between the two elections the number of provincial councilors had increased from 25 to 34, making it easier to win a seat.

establishment occurred in November 1975 (Hubert Frasnelli, reported in Frasnelli and Gallmetzer, 1990, p. 48).

In addition, following (albeit with ten years delay) developments in Italian politics, the SVP started in 1973 to include the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) in the provincial governments, which until then had been formed almost exclusively by the SVP and DC (Pallaver, 2008). The SVP's moves were very successful, due also to the inability of the two (German) leftist parties to unite forces or even to co-operate (Pristinger, 1980, p. 183). At the 1978 provincial election, the SFP remained without a seat and disappeared. The SPS dropped to 2.2% of votes and one seat, disappearing after further electoral failure in 1983 (Pallaver, 2007, p. 573). By the early 1980s, therefore, the SVP had reabsorbed the votes of the (German) working class, while the voters who opposed the 'package' had realigned themselves with opposition parties of the right, leaving the SFP and SPS without an electorate.

However, another challenge from the socio-cultural, 'new' left started to appear in the late 1970s. The political conditions for the emergence of the new left have to be found in the ideological stability of the SVP that, in spite of the creation of the internal labour wing, remained primarily a party of order, ethnic separation and conservation, emphasising its anti-communism but also its opposition to libertarian values (Pristinger, 1980, p. 184). On the eve of the SVP Conference in 1978, eighty-three authoritative figures of the cultural (but also political and economic) world of the German speaking population launched an appeal - the so called 'letter of the 83' (Pallaver, 2007, p. 574) - "for the liberty of opinions in South Tyrol", stating that "the monopoly on information and cultural activities which exists in South Tyrol has promoted and promotes intolerance" and deploring the climate of cold war that crushes "whoever does not let himself be tied by the train of anticommunism" (quotations from Pristinger, 1980, p. 184).

Beyond these political motivations, and likewise the emergence of the SFP and SPS, the challenge from the 'new' left also stemmed from transformations in the South Tyrolean society and in the ethnic division of labour in South Tyrol. The implementation of the 'package' started in 1972 and, in particular, the application of the 'ethnic quotas' policy in the distribution of public jobs (see table 4.5) starting from the mid 1970s has created a new (German) social class of public employees. This new social constituency, together with the young educated urban, mobile middle class

represented for the following decades a potential electorate for the parties of the new left (Holzer and Schwegler, 1998, p. 166).

Italian left parties, primarily the PCI and PSI, tried attracting voters from this constituency by presenting themselves as cross-ethnic parties. They presented themselves with the Italian and the German language and included German speaking candidates in their lists (Pallaver, 2007, p. 577). However, their electorate remained overwhelmingly Italian-speaking and they never attracted a significant share of the German progressive electorate. In contrast, the parties of the new left managed to build a true cross-ethnic political force that, though always remaining of modest electoral size, has established itself in the party system of South Tyrol.

The first new left list was presented in at the 1978 provincial election with the name *Neue Linke/Nuova Sinistra* (New Left), obtaining 3.6% of votes and one seat. Although in this first election its votes were attributed mostly to the Italian speaking voters, it managed to increase its cross-ethnic character, as well its vote share in the following elections. In 1983, the new list's name was *Alternative Liste fürs andere Sudtiro/Lista Alternative per l'altro Sudtirolo* (Alternative List for the other South Tyrol) and obtained 4.5% of votes and two seats. In 1988 the name changed again, in *Grüne Alternative Liste/Lista verde Alternativi* (Green Alternative List), signalling a shift towards a new centrality of environmental issues, and the list gained 6.7% of the vote, missing the third seat by very few votes. In 1993 this political movement, which was now called *Grüne/Verdi/Verc* (Greens in the three languages), increased slightly its vote share. In terms of ideology, the new left movement tended to stress more issues of democracy, freedom and inter-ethnic peaceful relationships during the late 1970s and 1980s, when the Italian speaking community was over-represented. From the 1990s, when its electorate started to substantially mirror the ethnic proportion of the population, the party became more narrowly concerned with environmental issues (Pallaver, 2007, p. 593).

Overall, the SVP did not show any evident reaction to the emergence of the new left (Green party), beyond devoting more rhetorical space to environmental issues. It has maintained its traditionalist, conservative and ethnic-nationalist ideology. However, this apparently non-reactive choice might be considered a strategic response in itself. On the one hand, the limited opening up of cross-ethnic electoral competition allowed the SVP to attract part (though a very small one) of the Italian electorate with traditionalist orientations (Pristinger, 1980, p. 184). On the other hand, the strict pursuit of the 'ethnic

quotas' policy, which also allowed the SVP to exercise ethnic patronage (Holzer and Schwegler, 1998, p. 167), created new tensions between the ethnic groups and meant that cross-ethnic voting remained a minority sport, thus taking away oxygen from the new left and ensuring the survival of the ethnic rally party.

In terms of coalition politics at national (Italian) level, the SVP re-started its co-operation with the DC as soon as the agreement on the package was reached in 1969. It supported all governments from 1969 to 1978, although it abstained when it came to the government of the 'historical compromise' in 1978, which foresaw co-operation with the PCI. There followed a period, between 1979 and 1987, in which the SVP oscillated between support, abstention and opposition, due to contrasts in the implementation of the 'package'. From 1987 to 1992, the party voted the confidence in all governments.

#### **4.3.3 The SVP in the bipolar 'Second Republic': the 'heart' to the right and the 'head' to the left? (1993-2009).**

The dramatic transformations of the Italian party system and the developments of the South Tyrolean one since 1992 have definitely increased the strategic dilemmas of the SVP. At national (Italian) level, the 1980s had seen the establishment of a new governing formula, still based on the pre-existing tri-polar structure. The centre alliance of five parties – DC, PSI, PRI, PSDI and PLI – of which the DC had remained the bigger if not always the leading party, guaranteed the formation of governments and the permanent exclusion of the most extreme part of the old left (PCI), the new left (Proletarian Democracy, the Greens and the Radical Party) and the old extreme-right (the neo-fascist MSI). In 1992 a regionalist, 'new right' party emerged, the Northern League (LN), which was also excluded from government in what was to be known as the last Parliament of the 'First Republic'. In this political context, the SVP found it convenient to keep an open dialogue with the parties of the centre coalition and, on the basis of the government's commitment towards the implementation of the 'package', decide whether to offer its support. The presence of a centre bloc afforded the SVP the possibility of avoiding having to choose between left and right. Ideological divisions within the party were, therefore, kept dormant more easily, while the internal dialogue between the different wings of the SVP focused on compromising over diverging interests, in a corporatist fashion, rather than arguing over conflicting ideas and principles.

However, the collapse of the government parties, the transformation of the PCI and MSI in post-communist and post-fascist parties (Democratic Party of the Left [PDS, then DS] and National Alliance [AN] respectively), the birth of new parties, particularly Berlusconi's Forward Italy (FI), and the change of the voting system from PR to a predominantly single member plurality system transformed the old party system into a new and dramatically different one.<sup>61</sup> In just a few years, the new party system was rebuilt around a binary coalitional logic, left vs. right (or centre-left vs. centre-right), where the two coalitions included not just moderate parties, such as the heirs of the DC (the PPI went with the left while the CCD-CDU, then UDC went with the right), but also the post-communists and the post-fascists. In addition to the bi-polar coalitional structure, the party system of the Second Republic has also been characterized by strong ideological polarization, which the most important politician, Silvio Berlusconi, has largely maintained, if not increased (Masseti, 2009a). In this context the SVP was pushed, especially after the new reform of the voting system in 2005,<sup>62</sup> to accept pre-electoral agreements with one of the two blocs, thus having to choose between left and right.

Between 1996 and 2006, the party preferred to negotiate agreements/alliances with the centre-left (or with individual parties within that coalition, such as that with the PPI in 1996), which allowed it to maintain or even increase its parliamentary representation and to incrementally expand the autonomy. According to prominent party members, the only reason for accepting agreements/coalitions was the constraints of the voting system and the possibility of extracting further competences (Elmar Pichler Rolle, speech at the 2007 Conference, Meran/Merano, 17/11/07). As all interviewees confirmed, the only criterion for deciding between centre-left and centre-right was not proximity on the left-right spectrum but, rather, on the self-government dimension, i.e. the different attitudes of the two coalitions towards South Tyrol's' autonomy. As the then party leader put it in 2007: "We chose Prodi because of autonomy... To choose Berlusconi and centralism would have been wrong... The Italian right has always been against autonomy" (Elmar Pichler Rolle, speech at the 2007 Conference, Meran/Merano, 17/11/07).

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<sup>61</sup> On these changes see and Katz R. (1996), Newell and Bull (1997).

<sup>62</sup> For the Lower House, the new voting system introduced one multi-member national constituency with a majority bonus for the plurality party or coalition. For the Senate, there multi-member constituencies and the bonuses were on regional basis. For details on the 2005 electoral reform and its consequences on the party system see Massetti E. (2006).

Coalition politics has created a lot of internal debate and tensions between the various ‘souls’ of the SVP, which cast a shadow on the future survival of the party. First of all, the more the SVP obtained for autonomy the more further minor achievements lost importance compared to governmental decisions on economic policy. Increasingly, certain social constituencies would not tolerate SVP support for unwelcome economic policies in Rome in exchange for minor extensions of the autonomy. The experience of the party’s support for the Prodi government between 2006 and 2008 was particularly divisive, as the latter abandoned the extremely permissive fiscal policy of the previous Berlusconi’s governments (2001-2006), which the business and farmers’ sections of the SVP’s had appreciated, and started to enforce taxation using ‘intrusive’ methods. This created enormous dissatisfaction amongst the SVP’s most important sections (business and farmers), as well as internal tensions with the labour wing. Secondly, the polarization of Italian politics has fostered internal debate not only in terms of interests but also in terms of ideology. At the 2007 Conference, the words of the then party leader strongly criticized this tendency towards ‘excessive’ internal debate over left and right, and looked forward to the return of the centre in Italian politics:

The SVP is neither a left nor a right party, it is a centre party. As an alliance of social-democrats and Christian-democrats we have anticipated the end of the left-right divide. The ‘grand-coalition’ in Germany between CDU and SPD and the birth of the Democratic Party in Italy confirm that our way is the right one... We don’t have to let ourselves get involved in the polemics between the two blocs of Italian politics... We would like an electoral law that would allow us not to choose... We remain very interested in developments in Italian politics that would see the emergence of the centre (Elmar Pichler Rolle, speech at the 2007 Conference, Meran/Merano, 17/11/07).

At the April 2008 general election, the SVP decided to run alone. This resulted in a very negative score, losing nine percentage points in vote share and two of its four seats in the Lower House. The SVP’s provincial first minister, Durnwalder, put the blame on the decision to support the Prodi government (*Alto Adige*, 13/04/08). Indeed, the increased support given to the (German) populist right can be seen as a vote of protest against the SVP’s coalition politics. However, other interpretations, such as the then party leader’s Pichler-Rolle, point to the management of the province.

The development of the South Tyrolean party system has also presented strategic dilemmas and created internal tensions, at least as much as national Italian politics. Within the German electoral arena, at the 1993 provincial election (the first



after the full implementation of the ‘second autonomy’) minor parties, such as the UfS and the cross-ethnic Greens, increased their votes, while a new party the Libertarians (dF), broke through. The latter (and to some extent the UfS) represented a radical-right challenge with strong links with the Austrian FPÖ. Their electoral appeal was based on an anti-establishment and anti-immigration rhetoric, as well as on radical nationalism (Pallaver, 2007, p. 584). Because of internal problems, which have been briefly discussed in section 4.2.4, the dF experienced an electoral setback in 1998. However, with an aggressive and xenophobic campaign, they managed to recover in 2003, gaining two seats in the provincial assembly (Pallaver, 2007, p. 585). At the 2008 provincial election, they increased their vote share by nearly three times and got five seats, becoming the second party (including the Italian ones) in the assembly and the most feared challenger to the SVP’s hegemony.

In addition to the ‘German diaspora’, the discontent of many Ladins with the way the SVP represented their interests and identity led to the formation of a rally party for this ethnic group, which gained representation in the provincial assembly both in 1993 and 1998. Ideologically, the Ladins’ party was very close to the conservative, Christian democratic section of the SVP, as well as to the old Italian DC. This allowed the SVP to re-absorb a great portion of their votes at the 2003 election (Pallaver, 2007, p. 588).

The Italian parties developed under the influence of the dynamics of the national party system. With the demise of the DC, its main heir – Italian People’s Party (PPI) - was the most appealing partner for the SVP (Pallaver, 2007, p. 588). However, because of the developments of Italian politics in Rome, the government alliance in Bozen was extended to the PDS-DS. To the left, only the Greens remained out of the provincial governments. The Italian right remained dominated by the main heir of the MSI, National Alliance (AN). This party represented the nationalist feelings within the Italian speaking community of South Tyrol. It won three seats in 1998 and in 2003, before merging with FI in the People of Freedom (PDL), which got three seats in 2008. The other heir of the MSI, the neo-fascist and radical nationalist *Unitalia*, managed to win one seat at each election from 1998 to 2008. The Northern League gained a seat in 1993 but then disappeared from the provincial assembly until the last election in 2008, when it won again a seat. Berlusconi’s FI, which participated in the provincial elections for the first time in 1998, tried to establish itself in South Tyrol by engaging in a strong competition with AN. Initially, it adopted a pro-autonomist stance hoping to occupy the

place of the old DC and to become the SVP's partner in the provincial government (Pallaver, 2007, p. 591). In terms of ideological orientations on socio-economic policies, FI is very close to the dominant sections of the SVP and many members of the rally party would not see such partnership as unviable. However, FI's strategy did not work out and the party found itself on the opposition benches with AN. At that stage FI changed its strategy and started to try and outbid AN on (Italian) nationalism. This move proved no more beneficial, jeopardising any possibility of co-operation with the SVP without leading to significant electoral gains. Before the 2008 provincial election, AN and FI merged into one party, the PDL, with disappointing results. Nevertheless, the PDL emerged as the main Italian party in the assembly and is now pursuing a strategy of courting the right-wing of the SVP, by slightly softening its nationalist and anti-autonomist position.

The main strategic difficulties for the SVP in the last sixteen years have come from three inter-related factors: the increased competences and responsibility of the provincial government, the transformation of the South Tyrolean society, and the transformation of the provincial party system just described. The attribution of many competences to the provincial government, including the management of relatively very large budget, has produced two negative effects. First, instances of disagreement between the internal wings of the SVP have increased. Overall, the business and farmers' section of the party have had the upper hand in taking policy decisions. This led the labour wing to the edge of splitting the party in 1998. Eventually, the party only lost two members of the provincial assembly, while the bulk of the workers' section remained within the SVP (Pallaver, 2007, p. 580). In the 2003 election, the labour section (and the women's section) was rather successful in electing candidates in the assembly, thus increasing their political weight (Pallaver, 2007, p. 582). The second negative effect concerns the fact that people started to blame Bozen rather than Rome if they were unhappy about the administration. Given the hegemonic position of the rally party, criticism towards the provincial government translated automatically in criticism towards the SVP. According to a prominent member of the party, the success of dF has not only been due to immigration and irredentist feelings but also to the protest vote of people discontented with the provincial administration (J. G. Widmann, interview with the author, Meran/Merano 16/11/07). This was especially the case with the success of dF in the last provincial election. The Libertarians were, indeed, very able to exploit discontent over the way the provincial government had implemented construction

projects (such as the expansion of the airport) against the wishes of wide sectors of the population, and giving the impression it was just serving the interests of the business wing (Elmar Pichler Rolle, second email interview with the author, 18/06/09). The anti-establishment rhetoric of dF is also very effective in criticising the SVP as a party permanently in power which, although providing a high standard of administration compared to many other Italian regions, has not been completely immune from public scandals (*Alto Adige*, 13/04/08).

The transformation of the South Tyrolean society in recent decades has also been a source of difficulties for the SVP in some respects. In particular the loosening of the ethnic division of labour, especially in the urban centres, the diffusion of higher education, the growth of cross-ethnic marriages and of multi-lingual people who grow up in such families has put into question the system of strict separation amongst ethnic groups. The trend towards transcending the ethnic divide has been particularly evident in the 1990s and early 2000s, coinciding with the electoral growth of the cross-ethnic party of the Greens and its peak at the 2003 provincial election and 2004 European election. In this period the SVP has tried to react to the increased electoral weight of the Greens by devoting more attention to environmental issues and by slightly softening its character as strict ethnic party. In the 1998 election manifesto the SVP spoke of “eco-social market economy” (Pallaver, 2006, p. 168). However, whenever environmental protection conflicted with economic growth, the latter took priority in the party’s decisions (ibid.). In terms of inter-ethnic relationship, the SVP showed a moderate opening towards the Italian speaking group from the late 1990s. In 1998 it ran, for the first time, an electoral campaign in Italian as well, which was appreciated by the majority of the Italian group and supported by an overwhelming majority of the German group (Pallaver, 2006, p. 184). This moderate opening has been opposed by the internal nationalist wing and has not led to a full transition from an ethnic-regionalist party to a simply regionalist one. This notwithstanding, some concessions to the access of Italian speaking people were maintained: not only they could become members of the party, provided that they accepted its statute and agenda, but could also be put on party lists as candidates at local council level, if the local branch gave its approval.

However, after the electoral setback of the Greens and the breakthrough of the radical-right dF at the 2008 general and provincial election, the SVP has inverted its policy. Caught in between the multi-cultural leaning of the (small) urban population and

the ethnic-nationalism of the rural one, the party has not taken long to realize where the most serious challenge is coming from:

Many people in South Tyrol live multi-culturally but only in the cities. The Greens have even lost one mandate during the state parliament election 2008. It should be much easier to build a moderate, liberal and open wing within the SVP than to cover the deficits on the folkloristic political right-wing. (Elmar Pichler Rolle, email interview, 12/03/09).

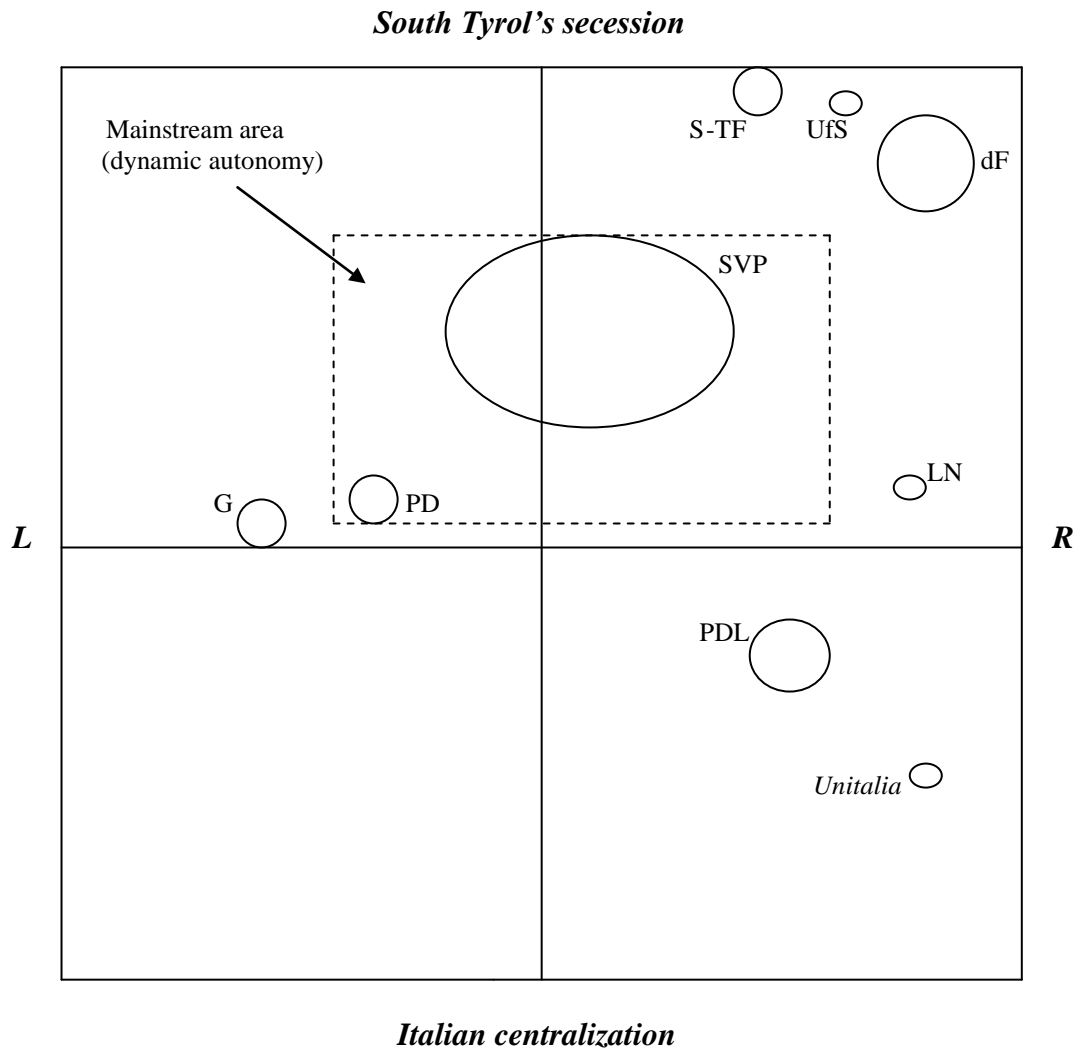
The SVP was built as a minority party and still sees herself as one today. She will remain the party of the German and Ladin minorities in South Tyrol... During the last election the Greens lost a mandate. The electors want a clear and direct position in times of crisis. It seems they want no multi-ethnic party in times of crisis but a clear direction/line... In times of crisis it is nothing new to see even employees vote increasingly right. They [Die Freiheitlichen] have made their election campaign a downright hate campaign against foreigners with very clear concept of the enemy. (Sepp Lamprecht, deputy leader of the SVP 2000-2004, email interview with the author, 30/03/09).

At the 2009 Conference, the SVP decided to change its statute to prevent Italian speaking people from being placed on the party lists as candidates at any level, thus re-stating its nature as an ethnic party (*Alto Adige*, 07/05/09).

The basic question for the SVP remains, however, how to reconcile the desire to maintain an ethnic divide and a consociational regime with the lack of a suitable Italian party which could act as a permanent government partner. Figure 4.1 represents the current (post 2008 election) party system in South Tyrol. As the figure shows, the SVP has managed to maintain a pivotal and dominant position. However, the distribution of votes and seats amongst the Italian parties, as well as their positioning constitute a dilemma for the SVP, especially in the context of ever more evident divisions between its internal factions. The PD represents an acceptable partner as far as the autonomy is concerned, although it would prefer a looser application of the principle of ethnic quotas. It represents an almost ideal choice for the minority faction of the SVP, the labour wing, which shares ideological proximity with it. It is also the party whose national leadership has proved more generous with the South Tyrolean autonomy. For this reasons, after the 2008 provincial election, the SVP's leadership has decided to continue its co-operation with it. However, the PD (and its originating parties) has represented less than a quarter of the Italian community, casting doubts on the legitimacy of a consociational regime in which one of the groups is barely represented. In addition, in terms of left-right positioning the PD has been rather distant from the majoritarian factions of the SVP, which share more ideological affinity and, even more, convergence of interests with the

biggest Italian party, the PDL. The latter party has been challenging the SVP for its rejection of co-operation with the Italian right and the consequent illegitimacy of a governance system that decides matters over the heads of the majority of the Italians.

**Figure 4.1**  
**Current Party System in South Tyrol**



However, it has also softened its position on the autonomy issue and courted the business section of the SVP. This strategy seems to have started producing some effects, as a prominent member of the business section of the SVP has urged the party to open to the Italian centre-right (*Alto Adige*, 25/06/09). Debate within the SVP on policy re-positioning and alliance politics is still going on, and the situation appears rather fluid.

However, it is very unlikely that the leadership would be able bring the whole party into an alliance with the PDL. The words of a prominent member of the labour wing of the party suggest that the issue has been thoroughly discussed amongst the social-democrats of the SVP and sound more like a threat than a simple prediction: “There is a component of the party [the business section] that does not like our alliance with the centre-left... But they know very well that if the party moves to the right the risk of a split becomes inevitable” (J. G. Widmann, interview with the author, Meran/Merano, 16/11/07).

#### **4.4 Party ideology and policy: The European integration dimension**

##### **4.4.1 A Europhile party throughout the integration process**

For a long time, the worst ‘nightmare’ of the SVP has been to be isolated in its struggle with the Italian state. In this respect, help and support was sought not only from the motherland (Austria) but, also, from the international community. The involvement of the UN in the South Tyrolean question has been the key to the success of the SVP in securing an extensive autonomy. For this reason, the party has developed from the beginning a positive attitude towards international and supra-national co-operation, including European integration. This basic inclination has been reinforced by several factors. First, the party’s ideology has played an important role. As a predominantly Christian-democratic party, the SVP had close relationships with the main political forces (especially the German CDU-CSU and the Italian DC) which started the integration process back in the 1950s and shared their philosophy of ‘social market economy’. As an anti-communist party, it also appreciated the development of the European Community as a political/economic/military bloc which counterbalanced (with the support of the US) the power of the Eastern bloc in Europe. Secondly, European policies also developed in a direction which suited in most respects the needs and grievances of South Tyrol. European regional policy with its structural funds, as well as projects for interregional co-operation, were particularly helpful to South Tyrol for the building of modern economic infra-structures. It was partly thanks to these funds that South Tyrol has become one of the richest regions in Europe (Pallaver, 2004, p. 207). The embracing of minority rights by the European Community was also welcomed by the SVP, which for long time saw the EEC (then the EU) as protective entity *vis a vis* the Italian state. Finally, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has

been very important for a largely rural region such as South Tyrol. The CAP and the Common Market have been major drivers in the restructuring of South Tyrolean agriculture in the 1960s (Pristinger, 1980, p. 169). Although the SVP has always complained that the CAP, having been designed for the farming businesses of the French and German lowlands, does not take enough into account the specific needs of the mountain farmers, European agricultural funds have represented an important resource for the South Tyrolean economy.

The political driver of European integration, however, has always remained the most interesting one for the SVP. The 1972 party programme stated: “The SVP approves the political union of European states in the protection of peoples’ peculiarities... [the SVP] sees in this process as the precondition for the overcoming of nationalisms” (SVP, 1972 Programme, quoted in Frasnelli and Gallmetzer, 1990, p. 48).

As Table 4.10 shows, the SVP has always been able to send a representative to the European Parliament, being in this respect one of the few exceptions amongst regionalist parties (Lynch, 1998; De Winter and Gomez-Reino, 2002).

**Table 4.10**  
**European election results and seats in South Tyrol 1979-2009**

Party	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009
SVP	63 (1)	63.1 (1)	53 (1)	56.8 (1)	56 (1)	46.7 (1)	52.1 (1)
PCI/DS/PD	7.4 (1)						7.2
<i>Grüne/Verdi</i>			7.2 (1)	9 (1)	6.7 (1)	13.1 (1)	10.9
MSI/AN/PDL			7.1 (1)				12.8

Source: Pallaver (2006).

Interestingly, the SVP’s MEPs have always joined the European People’s Party (EPP) group and never took into consideration the idea to join the EFA group. This choice owed much, in addition to ideological proximity with the parties of the EPP, to its wish to belong to a large and influential group:

In the EU parliament only big parliamentary groups can change something. Our delegates have been able to establish a connection between the Italian and Austrian as well as the German “People’s Parties” and often mediated between them and from that we have also benefited. (Elmar Pichler Rolle, email interview, 12/03/09).

Since the 1980s, the SVP has enthusiastically joined the discussion on the creation of a 'Europe of the Regions' and welcomed the Treaty of Maastricht and the 'subsidiarity' principle. The party's understanding of the 'Europe of the regions' project is the creation of a federal Europe in which the regions will eventually substitute the nation-states as the building blocs. As the new 1993 party programme states: "The SVP does not want a Europe of states, levelling out and central bureaucracy, but a Europe of the regions as manageable units in which the principle of subsidiarity is put in practice" (*Grundsatzprogramm, Das neue Programm der Südtiroler Volkspartei, Beschlossen von der Landesversammlung am 8. Mai 1993 - The New Basic Programme of the SVP, May 1993*).

Beyond strengthening the status of South Tyrol as an autonomous region within Italy, the 'Europe of the Regions' framework has also served another important objective of the SVP: re-connecting South Tyrol with the Austrian Tyrol as much as possible. This project, which has been discussed since the 1980s, acquired centrality in the SVP's programme in the early 1990s, when Austria's imminent accession into the EU made the project more feasible and the party was desperate to find a new mission to substitute the already accomplished autonomy. Beside 'dynamic autonomy', the creation of a Tyrol Euro-region with an influential role within the European multi-level system became the new long term goal of the SVP. The 1993 programme states:

It is the duty of the responsible policy in South Tyrol to restore this unit [Tyrol] at all levels and with legal and political means. A major goal is the creation of a multi-lingual, federalist Tyrol Euro-region within the framework of the European federalist system (*Grundsatzprogramm, Das neue Programm der Südtiroler Volkspartei, Beschlossen von der Landesversammlung am 8. Mai 1993 - The New Basic Programme of the SVP, May 1993*).

In the 1980s the idea of a Euro-region referred to an ethnic (German) Tyrol, rather than to historical Tyrol. The initial project included only South Tyrol, with its German majority, and Land Tirol in Austria. However, this project was fiercely opposed by the Italian minority of South Tyrol, and the ethnic connotation was not welcomed either by Rome or Brussels. Eventually, in order to make the project acceptable, the North and South Tyrolese had to include the old *Welschtirol*, that is Trent province, as well (Pallaver, 2005, p. 206). The name Tyrol Euro-region was officially used for the first time in 1995 for the joint representation of the three components to the EU Commission in Brussels, although the Euro-region was proclaimed only 1998 by the joint assembly



of the three territorial units (Markusse, 2004, p. 667). However, the project has not moved much further than pre-existing co-operation on areas of traffic, infrastructures and environment. Institutionally, it has not gone beyond the triennial meetings of the three regional assemblies, which by the way used to happen also before the proclamation the Euro-region. In the words of a SVP senior member: “For the time being, the Tyrol Euro-region is a cultural more than political project” (J. G. Widmann, interview with the author, Meran/Merano, 16/11/07). The 2007 Conference resolution also acknowledged the underdeveloped state of the project and urged the South Tyrolean society to do more, in the hope that deeper European integration created more favourable conditions: “We have to act for more European integration and give real life to the Tyrol Euro-region... it is in the people’s heads that frontiers must be abolished and transformed into a positive policy. A shared Tyrol must be built from below” (SVP, Resolution of the 54<sup>th</sup> Conference, 2007, p. 2).

The conviction that the best way ahead for South Tyrol’s future lies in a united and federal Europe has maintained the SVP in a Europhile position, in spite of concerns that have recently emerged about the EU’s dominant ideology and its possible repercussions on the EU’s policies. The liberal approach of the EU to social problems, which tends to give priority to individual rights, might sooner or later clash with the pillar of South Tyrol’s autonomy: the system of ethnic quotas (Pallaver, 2005, p. 207). The SVP is very aware of this potential source of tensions:

We must be watchful in order to avoid substantial aspects of our autonomy being unjustly limited. Defending our autonomy, also in respect to Europe, remains a primary objective of ours. Such an objective remains unchanged, independently of whether decisions are taken in Rome or in Brussels (Luis Durnwalder, South Tyrol’s First Minister 1992-today, Programmatic declarations, 28/01/99, quoted in Di Sotto, 2004).

In addition to the risks for the system of ethnic quotas, the SVP is also very wary of the EU’s immigration policy. The source of the disagreement is the same. While the SVP ideology is primarily shaped by ethnic regionalism – what Michael Keating calls ‘old regionalism’ (Keating, 1998) – the EU’s is mainly guided by individualistic cosmopolitanism. The latter stream of thought does not assign particular importance to the link between individuals (let alone ethnic communities) and the territory. However, this ideological divergence between the SVP and the EU, with the possible disagreements that may descend from it in the future, has remained dormant so far. As former party leader put it: “We see Europe very positively. I think that European

integration will proceed. The states will sooner or later assign more powers to the EU (defence, security, immigration policy and foreign affairs). This means regions will become stronger, especially those with a long common history” (Elmar Pichler Rolle, email interview, 12/03/09). The SVP has supported all European treaties, including the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe and the Treaty of Lisbon.

## **Conclusion**

As a hegemonic party attracting virtually all the votes of the ethnic electorate, the SVP has been for long time relatively immune to the challenges posed by electoral competitors. Although many tried to compete with the party for German-speaking votes, their challenge proved too evanescent to exert much influence on the SVP. Things have substantively changed, though, since the 1990s.

On the centre-periphery dimension, the constraints of international relations (i.e. peace treaties), prevented the party from adopting a stable secessionist position, in spite of the overwhelming irredentist aspirations of the German-speaking people and therefore of the majority of the electorate. Challengers proposing a more radical position were largely unsuccessful until 1992, when the SVP acknowledged the implementation of the Paris agreement. Since then, when its historic mission could be said to have been accomplished, the party has tried to escape electoral decline by proposing the pursuit of ‘dynamic autonomy’. However secessionist challengers have dramatically increased their electoral weight and are drawing the SVP towards more radical positions, at least as far as ‘folklore politics’ is concerned.

Left-right politics in South Tyrol from 1945 to the end of the 1960s was essentially an internal matter within the SVP, as the party represented all the main interests of South Tyrolean society. The first serious electoral challenge came in the early 1970s from the left. However, it was re-absorbed again in the form of internal politics, by creating a ‘Labour section’ within the party organization. Since then, the cohabitation of left and right within the party has not always been easy, with the labour section coming very close to splitting off in 1998. Important challenges have also come from the New Left, the inter-ethnic Greens, and the New (Radical) Right, especially the populist, anti-immigration and anti-Islam Libertarians. While the former propose an ideology which is at odds with the SVP’s, the latter just take some of the party’s ideological stances, such as ethnic-nationalism and nativism to more extreme positions. In addition, being relatively new and outsider competitors, they can deploy a populist

rhetoric which blames the governmental SVP for shortcomings that lie both within and without its responsibility. There is no doubt that, for these reasons, the challenge coming from the radical right is the most serious for the SVP and the one which is affecting its strategies the most.

As far as European integration is concerned, the SVP has not significantly changed its position on this issue. It strongly supported integration from the 1940s to the 1990s. Recently, it has been suspicious about the EU's emphasis on individual rights (since these might clash with the principle of ethnic quotas) about the EU's immigration policy, and about the omission of a reference to Europe's Christian roots in the EU Constitution and Lisbon Treaty. Nonetheless, it remains clearly a pro-European party, as further integration allows it to envisage new developments in South Tyrol's relations with Italy and Austria.

## Chapter 5

### The Northern League (*Lega Nord*)

The Northern League is a peculiar regionalist party. Like the other cases analysed in this work it represents a particular territory within the state. However, the construction of this territory has been a work-in-progress, which has led the party to focus on different territorial levels and to include different parts of Italian territory at different times. In addition, being a federation of different regionalist parties (the various regional leagues), it is primarily a national actor, in the sense that its size makes it a very relevant player in Italian politics at central level. In contrast to most regionalist parties, which try and exert pressure on central governments from the regional level, the League has mainly attempted to seize power at national level in order to carry out those reforms which would empower the regions it represents.

The party has been in office in Rome three times (1994-95, 2001-05, and since 2008). This national focus is also confirmed by the party's electoral performance, which tends to be better at national than regional level. Indeed, the League has never been the biggest party in regional assemblies and has never led a regional executive in the heartland regions of Lombardy, Veneto or Piedmont. On the other hand the League has always scored particularly well at local level (both provincial and council). In spite of its relatively recent appearance on the scene, the League has repositioned itself many times on all three ideology/policy dimensions analysed in this study. This was often driven by the rapid and chaotic developments in Italian politics over the last thirty years.

#### 5.1 Party Profile: Origins and Political Achievements

##### 5.1.1 The historical origins of the centre-periphery cleavage in Northern Italy

Northern Italy remained a politically fragmented territory until 1866, when Italian unity was completed - with the exception of Trent and Trieste (and Rome in central Italy). From the middle ages, the north-west part of Italy, of which Turin was the most important city, had been under the rule of the House of Savoy, who subsequently extended their control over Sardinia, thus acquiring a royal status, and over Genoa. The northern-central part of Italy belonged to the Dukes of Milan, though in the following centuries it often fell under foreign (i.e. non-Italian) rule, and roughly corresponded to contemporary western Lombardy. Contemporary eastern Lombardy (i.e. Bergamo and

Brescia provinces) belonged to the Republic of Venice, which controlled the north-eastern part of the peninsula, plus other possessions external to contemporary Italy. South of the Po River, were the Duchy (later Grand-Duchy) of Tuscany, the small Duchies of Modena and Parma, and the Papal States which extended from Gaeta in the south up to Bologna and Ferrara in the north. Roughly, this was still the political situation of Italy after the Congress of Vienna in 1815, with the only important change concerning the unification of Lombardy and Veneto (the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia) under the rule of the Austrian Empire.<sup>63</sup>

After unification, which was achieved by means of military conquest (though legitimized by popular referendums in the occupied territories), the new Kingdom of Italy was organized in a rigidly centralised way. The Napoleonic system of prefects (provincial governors appointed by the central government) was extended from the Kingdom of Sardinia to the new Kingdom of Italy. In spite of institutional centralization, strong economic and cultural differences between the various regions persisted, and national politics mainly consisted of a bargaining between territorial elites representing different socio-economic and socio-cultural constituencies. Large scale industrial development, starting from the late nineteenth century, remained circumscribed within the so called 'industrial triangle' (Turin, Milan and Genoa). The remaining part of the north was left agricultural and economically depressed, while southern regions, as well as being economically backward, were also afflicted by widespread social banditry (Hobsbawm, 1959). The inability of Italian governments to develop the depressed areas produced an immense wave of emigration which reached its peak in 1913, when in a single year nearly 900,000 people left (Monticelli, 1967). The Fascist regime addressed the 'southern question' more convincingly, expanding enormously public expenditure on health and social welfare (Pollard, 1998, p. 80). It tried to establish the state's 'monopoly of violence' by repressing not only social banditry but also, though not without some contradictions, the *mafia* too (Duggan, 1989). In addition, the Fascist regime, following its nationalist ideology, made great efforts to strengthen the Italian national identity. However, in terms of economic development, it did not manage to decrease the gap between the north-west and the rest of the country, which remained almost exclusively agricultural.

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<sup>63</sup> For a brief account of pre-unitary Italy and how previous territorial identities were embodied and, in many cases, reshaped within the unitary state, see Lyttelton (1996).

In 1948 the new Constitution of the Italian Republic recognised fifteen ordinary regions with administrative competences and four special status regions - Sicily, Sardinia, Aosta Valley and Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol (to which Friuli-Venezia Giulia would be added in the 1960s, after the solution of the 'Trieste question') – with legislative and tax-raising powers. However, fearing that the Italian Communist Party (PCI) could seize power in some of the regions, the governments led by the Christian Democratic party (DC) delayed implementation of the Constitution for ordinary regions until 1970. From the post-war electoral contests, in fact, it had emerged that the PCI - and the then allied socialists (PSI) - were the dominant force in Emilia-Romagna and central Italy (mainly Tuscany and Umbria). They were fairly competitive in the 'north-western industrial triangle' too, while the DC was dominant in the remaining parts of the north ('deep north') and in the south.

Public education, military service and the diffusion of mass media (especially TV) managed to spread the use of standard Italian language<sup>64</sup> across the peninsula and to create, to a large extent, a national cultural identity. However, from an economic point of view, the governments of the new Italian Republic did not succeed in closing (or even decreasing) the gap between the North-western regions and the Southern ones. The only novelty in Italian economic geography was represented by the rapid and sustained growth experienced by the central and, even more, peripheral northern regions (i.e. those outside the industrial triangle) since the late 1960s. Sociologists started to speak of a 'Third Italy' (Bagnasco, 1977), which through the diffusion of small enterprises, often organized in territorial networks (industrial districts), had started to resemble the 'First Italy' (i.e. the area of the industrial triangle) in several respects: reduction of employment in agriculture, increase in manufacturing workers, growth in the resident population and an increased share of Italian industrial output.<sup>65</sup> In contrast to 'First Italy', the 'Third Italy' was characterized by: first, lower levels of urbanization (the industrial districts grew outside the big cities) and a marked predominance of manufacturing over service businesses; second, a certain distance of the (small) entrepreneurs from the Italian financial and political elites (the former based in Turin

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<sup>64</sup> For the diffusion of the Italian language amongst the Italian population since 1861 and for the persisting complex relationship between standard Italian and dialects, see Lepschy *et al.* (1996).

<sup>65</sup> For instance, in Lombardy as a whole those employed in agriculture dropped from 28.9 in 1936 to 6% in 1981. In the same period the number of workers in industry rose from 57.9% to 68.9%. In the province of Como (in northern Lombardy), for instance, the number of self employed artisans grew from 33,262 in 1951 to 59,469 in 1981 (Tambini, 2001, p. 27).

and Milan, the latter based in Rome); and third, a much less marked distinction between owners and workers' social and political identities than in the industrial triangle (Bagnasco and Triglia, 1984). Owners and workers of 'Third Italy' had, in most cases, the same socio-cultural background. Until the late 1950s most of them (or their families) had been peasants (Cento Bull and Corner, 1993). In addition, many new enterprises were family businesses, where the members of the family both owned and worked for firm. Moreover, the small dimensions of economic units, the network system, the extremely rapid pace of the economic development and the good prospects for further expansion meant that many entrepreneurs had started their career as workers and many workers aimed to set up a new business on their own in the future. Therefore, a working class identity remained largely absent, in spite of extremely high levels of employment in industry. Instead, affiliation to the Catholic Church remained very strong until at least the 1970s (Dal Ferro, 1989). This explains why the DC, rather than the PCI (or the PSI) was the dominant party in the northern part of 'Third Italy' until the late 1980s (Diamanti, 1993).

Paradoxically, the emergence of a 'Third Italy', whose conceptualization was meant to overcome the traditional and simplistic North-South dichotomy, created the conditions to reinforce such dichotomy. The north as a whole became, in spite of the different socio-economic fabric between the large scale industrial triangle and the periphery, more homogeneous in terms of level of private wealth. In contrast, the southern regions, with few territorially concentrated exceptions, were left far behind. The creation of the European Common Market in the 1950s, in fact, created a further structural advantage for the North, which enjoyed geographical proximity with other well developed regions north of the Alps.<sup>66</sup>

This north-south economic divide had several consequences, amongst which three are particularly relevant here. First, from the 1950s to the early 1980s there was a continuous flow of internal migration from south to north (initially to the north-west but from the 1970s onwards to the north-east too). Although the southern immigrants were integrated relatively well, this massive flow of migrants led to some cultural clashes. In addition, from the 1980s Italy started to receive significant flows of foreign immigrants (the so called '*extra-comunitari*'). Given the north-south economic gap, most of them settled (and still tend to settle) in northern regions. Second, a certain division of labour

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<sup>66</sup> By 1991 the GDP of Northern and Central Italy was 122 percent the European Community average, while the GDP of the South was 68.9 percent (Levy, 1996, p. 3).

between northern and southern Italians started to emerge, with people in the north working primarily in the private economy and southerners taking up most of the jobs in the army, the police, the civil service, in the judiciary and, increasingly, in education. This trend also added to cultural clashes and, in times of economic slow-down, represented a cause for ‘northern grievances’ towards the central state. Third, in order to promote economic development in the south, the state transferred financial resources from the regions of the north to the south.<sup>67</sup> In 1950 the *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* was created. It has been reported that the *Cassa* has transferred an average of 3.2 billion euros per year from the state to the southern regions for over forty years (Stella, 1998, p. 84). While in the 1950s and 1960s, the money was primarily spent on building basic and useful infrastructures, from the 1970s it has been mainly used as a generator of political consensus in the degenerated form of clientelism.

The centre-periphery cleavage that the Northern League has politicized has, therefore, had a predominantly economic emphasis. In addition, it has had two different points of reference. One is internal to northern Italy, and concerns the divide between the centres of finance and big industry (mainly Turin and Milan) and the more peripheral or ‘deep’ North. The latter area has been identified with the provinces which follow the foothills of the Alpine arch and is labelled ‘*Pedemontania*’ (Diamanti, 1996). The second point of reference is the North-South divide. As it will be discussed in the following sections, from the League’s point of view, the central state has become the means through which the assisted south kept milking the productive north. The *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* was the symbol of this reality, or perception of the reality. It was eventually closed down on the wave of the Northern League’s electoral growth in the early 1990s. However, for the League that was just the beginning of a long struggle with the Italian state.

### **5.1.2 Party profile: origins, electoral expansion and major political achievements**

During the 1980s several regionalist ‘leagues’ were created in the ordinary regions of Northern Italy (Diamanti, 1993). Behind this political phenomenon lay the idea of Bruno Salvadori, a prominent figure in the ethno-regionalist party of Aosta Valley *Union Valdôtaine*, who professed co-operation between regionalist parties of

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<sup>67</sup> In 1991 the south received 53 percent of the capital transfers from the state, while it paid 20 percent of the national direct tax revenues, 29 percent of all indirect revenues and 16 percent of the national social security. In spite of these financial transfers, unemployment in that year was over 15 percent in the south compared with just above 5 percent in the north (Levy, 1996, p. 3).



different regions in order push for a federal reform of the Italian state (Tarchi, 1998, p. 143). In 1979, after having met Salvadori, Umberto Bossi founded the *Unione Nord-Occidentale Lombarda per l'Autonomia* (Bossi, 1992, p. 41). In 1982 he set up a new movement, which in 1984 was officially founded as *Lega Autonomista Lombarda* and from 1986 was renamed simply *Lega Lombarda* (LL). In 1980 the Venetian League (LV) and the Piedmont's Rebirth (AP) were born too. In the same period, regional leagues were also founded in Liguria, Emilia Romagna and Tuscany. Therefore, by the early 1980s all the major ordinary regions of Northern and Central Italy had their own regionalist organizations, though they were still something in between movements and proper political parties. The LV - 'the mother of all leagues', as the party leader Franco Rocchetta used to say (Diamanti, 1993, p. 43) - was the first to impose itself in the electoral arena by electing two MPs (one Deputy and one Senator) at the 1983 general election and two regional councillors at the 1985 regional election. However, both the LV and AP were torn by internal divisions, while Bossi's LL gained prominence electing two MPs (one Deputy and one Senator) at the 1987 general elections and projecting itself as the leading component of 'leaguism'.

**Table 5.1 Electoral Results of the Northern League  
at Regional elections in northern regions**

	1985**	1990	1995	2000	2005
<b><i>North</i></b>					
Lombardy	0.5	18.9	18.7	15.5	15.8
Veneto	3.7	5.9	17.5	12.0	14.7
Piedmont	1.1	5.1	11.1	7.6	8.5
Friuli-Venezia Giulia*	-	-	26.7	17.4	9.3
Trentino-Alto Adige/Sudtirol*	-	0.3	9.6	4.7	3.2
Liguria	0.9	6.1	6.5	4.3	4.7
Emilia Romagna	0.4	2.9	3.8	3.3	4.8
Aosta Valley*	-	-	7.6	3.4	-
<b><i>Centre</i></b>					
Toscana	0.5	0.8	0.7	0.6	1.3
Marche	0.5	0.2	0.9	0.3	0.9
Umbria	0.4	0.2	-	0.3	-

Source: Istituto Cattaneo. Data available at:

<http://www.cattaneo.org/index.asp?l1=archivi&l2=adele&l3=regionali>

\*Elections in the three special status regions were held two years earlier than in the other regions (1983, 1988, 1993, 1998 and 2003).

\*\*Data on the 1985 election refer to the individual regional leagues.

The 1989 European election represented the occasion for co-operation amongst the leagues and for the creation, under the Lombard leadership, of a federated, unitary party. The *Alleanza Nord* list, presented at European election, became *Lega Nord* (LN) in December 1989 (Tarchi, 1998, p. 114). In 1991, after the positive results of the 1990 regional elections (see Table 5.1), it celebrated its first Conference (*Congresso Federale*), at which Bossi was elected party leader and the individual leagues ceased to exist as independent parties. Beyond federating the existing leagues, the new party penetrated other regions – the three special status regions of the North (Aosta Valley, Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol and Friuli-Venezia Giulia) and two central regions (Marche and Umbria) – establishing regional branches.

With the creation of the LN, the new party became a political actor of national relevance and its main objective became the achievement of influence in the central institutions. The 1992 general election, in which the party obtained 8.7 percent of votes nationally and 17.3 percent in the North (Table 5.2), marked the entrance of the League into the Italian party system as a relevant party for government formation. The League's result, which came primarily at the expense of the DC (Diamanti, 1993), contributed decisively to weakening the party system that had emerged from the beginning of the Republic, thus opening the way for new developments. Between 1992 and 1993, the DC and its allies – the socialists (PSI), the social-democrats (PSDI), the republicans (PRI) and the liberals (PLI) – were swamped by judicial investigations which unveiled a widespread network of illegal party funding. With the collapse of the centre and centre-right parties, the LN found itself in a very favourable position. In the local elections of 1993 the LN 'conquered' Milan, electing Marco Formentini as city mayor, giving a further demonstration of its electoral strength in the north. The adoption, forced by a popular referendum, of a mainly majoritarian electoral system opened up a scenario in which the LN would electorally dominate the North, the PDS (the main heir of the PCI) the central regions and the PPI (the main heir of the DC) the south. However, the entry into politics of media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi and his new party *Forza Italia* (FI), together with his rehabilitation of the neo-fascist party MSI - restyled as *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) in 1995 – as a legitimate coalition partner (the so called *sdoganamento*), radically changed the political scenario (Morlino, 1996; Newell and Bull, 1997).

On the one hand the League was negatively affected. These new competitors considerably restricted its electoral 'hunting ground'. This was particularly true of the

FI, a party ideologically very similar to the League,<sup>68</sup> newer than the League<sup>69</sup> and with a leader who represented the northern entrepreneurial class. On the other hand, Berlusconi's project of creating a centre-right bloc to prevent the PDS and its allies getting into office (these had formed the *Progressisti* alliance for the forthcoming election) did not stand a chance without the support of the LN (Tarchi, 1998, p. 145).

**Table 5.2 General elections (Lower House) in Italy,  
votes % and seats (1992-2008)**

	1992	1994	1996	2001	2006	2008
De	-	-	-	-	-	2.4 (0)
LN	8.6 (55)	8.4 (117)	10.1 (59)	3.9 (30)	4.6e (26)	8.3 (60)
FI - PDL	-	21.0 (113)	20.6 (123)	29.4 (178)	23.7 (137)	37.4 (276)
MSI - AN	5.4 (34)	13.5 (109)	15.7 (93)	12.0 (99)	12.3 (71)	-f
PLI	2.9 (17)	-	-	-	-	-
MpA	-	-	-	-	-	1.3 (8)
CCD-CDU-UDC	-	(27)a	5.8 (30)	3.2 (40)	6.8 (39)	5.6 (36)
DC-PPI/PS-PPI-Ma	29.7 (206)	11.1 (33)	6.8 (80)	14.5 (80)	-	-
Radicals - RnP	1.2 (7)	3.5 (6)	1.9 (0)	2.3 (0)	2.6 (18)	-g
IdV	-	-	-	3.9 (0)	2.3 (16)	4.4 (29)
PSDI	2.7 (16)	-	-	-	-	-
PRI	4.4 (27)	-	-	-	-	-
PSI-Sdi-Ps	13.6 (92)	2.2 (14)	0.4 (0)	(9)c	-	1.0 (0)
PCI-PDS-DS-UI-PD	16.1 (107)	20.4 (164)b	21.1 (167)	16.6 (137)	31.3 (220)d	33.2 (217)
Verdi (Greens)	2.8 (16)	2.2 (0)	2.5 (14)	2.2 (8)	2.1 (15)	-
PdCI	-	-	-	1.7 (10)	2.3 (16)	-
RC-SA	5.6 (35)	6.0 (39)	8.6 (35)	5.0 (11)	5.8 (41)	3.1 (0)h
Others	7.0 (18)	6.6 (15)	6.5 (2)	5.3 (26)	6.2 (18)	3.3 (4)
Total	100 (630)	100 (630)	100 (630)	100 (630)	100 (630)	100 (630)

Source: Bardi (2007, p. 716-17); Massetti (2009a).

a: the CCD did not present its own list for the PR vote in 1994. Its candidates were elected in FI's lists or in FPTP constituencies.

b: includes elected representatives of the Greens and La Rete (The Net).

c: SDI candidates were only present in FPTP constituencies.

d: in 2006, DS and Ma formed a common list Olive Tree (UI). The following year they merged into the Democratic Party (DP).

e: LN+MpA.

f: in 2008 AN presented a common list with FI called People of Freedom (PDL). The following year the PDL became a unified party.

g: the radicals in 2008 were included in the PD's list.

h: in 2008 RC, PdCI and the Greens formed a common list, the Rainbow Left (SA).

<sup>68</sup> Eugenio Scalfari (columnist of the newspaper *La Repubblica*) has recently reported that FI's co-ordinator Denis Verdini declared that, before deciding to found FI, Silvio Berlusconi had flirted with the idea of joining Bossi at the leadership of the LN (*La Repubblica*, 23/08/09).

<sup>69</sup> It is worth noting that, in the aftermath of the fall of the old party system, 'newness' was a very precious resource to spend in the electoral market.

The tough conditions imposed by Bossi to Berlusconi for the alliance – 80 percent of all Lombard and 65-70 percent of all northern single member constituencies were reserved for candidates of the League – meant that, after the 1994 general election, the LN became the biggest parliamentary group. However, as Table 5.2 shows, the percentage of votes slightly decreased compared to the 1992 election, with Berlusconi becoming Prime Minister. The negative trend was confirmed in the 1994 European election (see Table 5.3), when the vote of the League went down to 6.6 percent nationally.

**Table 5.3 Electoral results of the Northern League in European elections**

	1989*	1994	1999	2004	2009
Lombardy	8.1	17.7	13.1	13.8	22.7
Veneto	1.7	15.6	10.7	14.1	28.4
Piedmont	2.1	11.5	7.8	8.2	15.7
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	0.5	11.2	10.1	8.6	17.5
Liguria	1.4	8.0	3.7	4.1	9.9
Trentino-Alto Adige/Sudtirol	1.0	4.5	2.4	3.5	9.9
Aosta Valley	0.5	5.7	1.9	3.0	4.4
Emilia Romagna	0.5	4.4	3.0	3.4	11.1
<b>Total North</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>19.3</b>
Tuscany	-	-	-	-	4.3
Marche	-	-	-	-	5.5
Umbria	-	-	-	-	3.6
<b>Total Italy</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>10.2</b>
<b>No. of MEPs</b>	<b>2**</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>

Source: Istituto Cattaneo. Data re-worked by author.

\*The various regional leagues participated in the election as Northern Alliance.

\*\*Both MEPs were elected by the Lombard League (LL).

In 1995 Bossi decided it was time put and end to Berlusconi's government and broke the alliance. After supporting for a year a new government led by a technocrat from the Bank of Italy, Lamberto Dini, the League withdrew its confidence and new elections were held in 1996. This time the LN went it alone and achieved its best result ever in terms of number of votes (20.5% in the North, 10.1 nationally). As Table 5.4 shows, in contrast to the electoral growth of 1992, which had reflected an expansion into regions such as Liguria, Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany, the result of 1996 was due to a new increase of votes in the party's heartland – Lombardy and Veneto (Diamanti, 1996; 2003).

**Table 5.4 Electoral Results of the Northern League  
at general elections (Lower House) in the northern and central regions**

	1983*	1987*	1992	1994	1996	2001	2006	2008
Lombardy	-	4.1	23.0	22.6	24.8	12.1	11.7	21.6
Veneto	4.3	3.1	17.8	21.6	29.8	10.2	11.1	27.1
Piedmont	-	2.9	16.3	16.2	18.4	5.9	6.3	12.6
Friuli-VG	-	0.8	15.3	16.9	23.2	8.2	7.2	13.0
Trentino-AA	-	-	8.9	7.5	13.2	3.7	4.5	9.4
Liguria	-	1.3	14.3	11.4	10.2	3.9	3.7	6.8
Emilia-Romagna	-	0.5	9.6	6.4	7.2	2.6	3.9	7.8
Aosta Valley	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.0	-
<b>Total North</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>17.2</b>
Toscana	-	0.3	3.1	2.2	1.8	0.6	1.1	2.0
Marche	-	0.5	1.3	-	1.5	-	1.0	2.2
Umbria	-	0.4	1.1	-	1.0	-	0.7	1.7
<b>Total Italy</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>4.1a</b>	<b>8.3</b>

Source: Istituto Cattaneo. Data re-elaborated by author. Original data available at:  
<http://www.cattaneo.org/index.asp?l1=archivi&l2=adele&l3=politiche>

\*Data for the 1983 and 1987 elections refer to the individual regional leagues.

a: In 2006 the LN presented a common list with Movement for Autonomy (MpA), a party which is active in Sicily and in southern regions. The figure reported in table, however, only refer to the votes taken by the LN in the centre-north. The total vote for the common list was 4.6.

However, Bossi's hope that the League could become a pivotal party in a hung parliament did not materialize, as the centre-left alliance obtained a clear majority. This deprived the LN of the opportunity of getting into office again. After two years, a rapprochement with Berlusconi started, which led to the creation of a new centre-right alliance *Casa delle Libertà* (House of Freedoms) for the 2001 election. Before the end of the parliamentary term, the centre-left government approved a reform of the Constitution which enhanced the competences of the regions. This reform, emphatically labelled as 'federalism' by the centre-left, was strongly opposed by the League on the grounds that it fell well short of its demands. Yet, to date, it represents the most important policy achievement of the party, albeit an indirect one. Although the reform did not introduce a federal structure, it transferred more powers to the regions and, crucially, allowed the possibility of implementing regional financial autonomy (or, as it is often referred to 'fiscal federalism') by ordinary laws.

The 2001 general election presented exactly the opposite outcome compared with the 1996's. The League scored its worst result in terms of votes but, due to the

victory of the coalition, it found itself in office once again. This time the party tried to make the most of its position. In 2002 the parliament approved a law, strongly desired by the League, on immigration (*Repubblica*, 12/07/02). By November 2005 the centre-right had passed an extensive reform of the Constitution which, amongst other important provisions, aimed to establish a federal state. However, as the reform was not negotiated with the opposition, the latter called a referendum on it. In 2006, the League and the centre-right lost the general election, which was held under a new voting system,<sup>70</sup> and the vote on the constitutional referendum. The federal reform was, therefore, rejected (Bull and Pasquino, 2007). After two years in opposition, in which the party multiplied its activities at local level, the LN came back to power in 2008, once again in coalition with Berlusconi. The party went back to similar levels of support as in 1992. In the first year of government the party has imposed a new law on immigration and a law which sets out the guidelines for the implementation of fiscal federalism. In the wake of these policy achievements, it scored extremely well at the 2009 European elections (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2009).

### 5.1.3 Party Organization

The Northern League is formally a federation of regionalist parties (i.e. the leagues). The party is active in eleven regions of Central and Northern Italy, divided into thirteen ‘nations’.<sup>71</sup> Each individual league corresponds to one of the thirteen ‘nations’ and, since the establishment of the federation in 1991, has *de facto* become a regional branch (*sezione nazionale*) of the central (federal) party. The *sezione nazionale lombarda* (i.e. the Lombard League) has always been the dominant component in the party and it shares the same headquarters, in Milan, with the federal organisation. The *Liga Veneta*’s leadership has never been in a position to compete with the Lombard component for the federal leadership. However, considering the importance of Veneto

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<sup>70</sup> The new voting system, as far as the Lower House is concerned, represents a sort of plurality system applied in one single multi-member constituency, where the plurality party (or coalition) gets at least 55 percent of the seats (distributed proportionally amongst the parties of the coalition) and the opposition shares the remaining 45 percent proportionally. Parties running alone have to overcome a 4 percent threshold, while coalitions need to obtain at least 8 percent of votes. A strong incentive in forming two competing coalitions is therefore maintained (Massetti, 2006).

<sup>71</sup> The eleven regions are: Lombardy, Veneto, Piedmont, Liguria, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trentino-South Tyrol, Aosta Valley, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Marche and Umbria. These translate into thirteen ‘nations’ because Trentino and South Tyrol, as well as Emilia and Romagna, are considered as separate national entities (*Lega Nord*, Party Statute, 2002, p. 1). The definition of the territorial borders – i.e. the territorial definition of the ‘nations’ as well as the inclusion/exclusion of them – is an exclusive competence of the executive committee *Consiglio Federale* (ibid, p. 2).

for the LN's electoral results (see Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.4), it could be argued that the level of marginalization of the *Liga* within the federal party has sometimes been humiliating.<sup>72</sup> Umberto Bossi has been the undisputed leader of the federal party and, until 1993, he maintained the leadership of the Lombard section too. Beside Bossi, who is from Varese, the other three most prominent figures in the LN, Roberto Maroni, Roberto Calderoli and Roberto Castelli, are from Lombardy too (respectively from Varese, Bergamo and Lecco).

The League's staff has grown enormously since the party has become a nationally relevant party. The Lombard League employed five people in the late 1980s. After the 1992 general election, the number of staff grew to about thirty-five and in the late 1990s it reached about hundred staff members (Tambini, 2001, p. 90).

Formally, the supreme body of the LN is the *Congresso Federale*, which elects the members of the other federal bodies, can change the party statute and takes decisions concerning the party's political and programmatic line. The *Congresso* is formed by the delegates of the regional branches,<sup>73</sup> plus the members of the federal organs, the 'founding fathers',<sup>74</sup> the leaders of the regional and provincial branches (*segretari nazionali* and *provinciali*), the MPs, MEPs, the representatives elected in the regional assemblies, the provincial 'prime ministers', and the mayors of the main cities.

The party leader (*Segretario Federale*) is elected by the *Congresso* and is the only person entitled to speak on behalf of the party. So far, there has never been a challenge to the leadership of Bossi and, therefore, there has never been a proper election where votes needed to be counted. The election has been simply carried out in the form of 'acclamation'. The *Presidente Federale* has rather unclear functions. The position was created after the creation of the federation to find a federal 'role' for the leader of the *Liga Veneta* Franco Rocchetta, who did not see eye to eye with Bossi's centralizing attitudes (Tambini, 2001, p. 94).

The *Consiglio Federale* represents a kind of executive committee devoted to managing the party organization. In its duties the Consiglio is assisted by the *Segreteria Amministrativa Federale*. It consists of the party leader, the president, the chairman of

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<sup>72</sup> For an account of the complexity and fragmentation of the autonomist/separatist movement in Veneto until the early 1990s, see Allum and Diamanti (1996). It is worth specifying that in the second half of the 1990s and in the early 2000s the electoral strength of regionalist competitors in Veneto has grown further.

<sup>73</sup> One delegate every 300,000 inhabitants plus two delegates every percent point in the late election, be it regional, general or European (*Lega Nord*, Party Statute, 2002, p. 3).

<sup>74</sup> The 'founding fathers' are those who signed the document establishing the *Lega Nord* on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December 1989 and those who swear to the independence of 'Padania' (the territory encompassing the thirteen nations) on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 1996 (ibid, p. 2).

federal administration, the co-ordinator of the regional branches and their respective leaders, twelve members elected by the *Congresso Federale* (four from Lombardy and the remaining ones divided amongst the other ‘nations’), the party presidents of the parliamentary groups in the House and in the Senate.

The *Segreteria Politica Federale* represents a sort of executive committee primarily devoted to developing policies. Its members are appointed by the leader and are flanked by research teams divided by policy areas. Many of the League’s legislative proposals come from the work of this organ.

The organizational structure of the federal party is more or less identically replicated at the level of the regional branches, which are governed by the *segeratrio nazionale, presidente nazionale, congresso nazionale, consiglio nazionale* etc.

Since the first electoral breakthrough in 1992, the party membership has remained relatively stable (see Table 5.5).

**Table 5.5 Membership of the Lega Nord, 1989-2008\***

<i>1989</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2008</i>
18,000	147,297	167,650	112,970	136,503	120,897	119,753	122,576	148,321	155,478

Source: figures for 1989 are from Tambini (2001, p. 54). All other figures are from Albertazzi and McDonnell (2009).

\*The figures should be taken with a pinch of salt. For instance, according to Tambini the 1993 membership was 43,308. Both works have taken their figures from documents provided by the party.

Party members are divided into three hierarchical groups. At the top there are the founders of the LN and the founders of Padania, who have the right to life participation and voting in the *Congresso*. The ordinary members (*Soci Ordinary- Militanti*)<sup>75</sup> have a duty to actively participate in the associational life of the party. Their access to different levels of the organization (local, provincial, regional and federal) depends on how long they have been ordinary members. This prevents the rise of people whose loyalty has not been proved within the party and guarantees continuity to the party organs. The bottom of the pyramid is constituted by the sympathisers (*Soci Sostenitori*), who do not

<sup>75</sup> Until 1998 there were four groups of members, as the ordinary members and the militants were distinct categories, the latter being lower ranking (Tarchi, 1998, p. 151).



have right to vote at any level of the party organization. They can apply for ordinary membership at least six months after having been enrolled as sympathisers (*Lega Nord*, Party Regulations, 2002, p. 2).

The LN also has a section for women and one for youngsters. In time the party has built a series of satellite institutions around itself: a daily paper (*La Padania*), a press agency (*AgeLega*), a technical consultancy to MPs (*Timer*), a labour union (*SinPa*, whose Lombard originators were *Sal* and *Confederal*), many associations for entrepreneurs, artisans and farmers (Tarchi, 1998, p. 151). This organizational structure makes the party resemble very closely a mass party. Indeed, grassroots participation has always been a strong resource for the League. Especially after Bossi had a serious stroke in March 2004, the maturation of a ‘political class’ formed at all levels of government; the territorial organization and the activism of militants have compensated for the loss of the leader’s rhetorical skills during election campaigns. This hard test, in which the party has responded by holding together until the return of Bossi to active politics, may have triggered or sped up a process of institutionalization (*La Repubblica*, by I. Diamanti, 09/01/05). As Diamanti noticed since the early 1990s, the LN’s organization and internal working falls in between several ideal types: “a little bit movement, a little bit mass-party, a little bit charismatic party” (Diamanti, 1993, p. 14).

In fact, the actual working of the party organization has appeared rather different from what the official structure would suggest. For instance, the informal summer gathering in Pontida (the locality where in the twelfth century the military alliance amongst northern Italian towns called *Lega Lombarda* was formed), in which Bossi speaks to party members and sympathisers about the latest and future developments of the League’s political action, are extremely important moments in the life of the party. Pontida is where the ‘ancient oath’ is renewed every year, strengthening members’ identification with the party and with the leader.<sup>76</sup> In fact, it has been argued that the formal structure was designed to project the image of an internally democratic party and deflect accusations of Bossi’s authoritarianism, or even Stalinism (Tambini, 2001, p. 93-95). Since the time of the Lombard League, Bossi had developed a certain ‘siege mentality’. The central state was perceived as a ruthless entity which used its power to stop, in one way or another, the new and scarcely resourced movement. In this representation, enemies were everywhere, in the police, the civil service, in the judiciary,

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<sup>76</sup> For an account based on participant observation at one of these gatherings, see McDonnell (2006).

in the national parties, in the press, in the academy, etc., and were ready to infiltrate and damage the party (Bossi, 1992, p. 81-109). Obviously, this vision of the reality had strong repercussions in (or was functional to) the way the internal organization was managed, that is with minimal or no tolerance for open internal dissent.

If you don't have iron-fist and steel-will it is better to give up before starting the fight, or maybe to leapfrog into the enemy's ranks, which are more comfortable and better remunerated... if you want to face the centralist state with some probability of victory, you need to be very firm and not to tolerate betrayals (Bossi, 1992; p. 39).

The fate of those who openly challenged Bossi on relevant political choices, people such as Castellazzi (former *Presidente Nazionale* of the Lombard League), Rocchetta (former leader of the *Liga Veneta*) and Miglio (considered to be the ideologue of the party in the early 1990s), has nearly always been the same: expulsion or voluntary departure from the party. This monarchical style of leadership has been, however, possible because Bossi has enjoyed an incredible level of support amongst the LN's followers, which has been due to his devotion to the cause, his capacity to make hard choices, his extraordinary rhetoric skills and his capacity to use the media. From the grassroots to the members of the executive, all members of the League have always recognized that Bossi is an absolute asset for the party (Francesco Miroballo, interview with author, Perugia, 10/04/07; Raffaele Volpi and Jonny Crosio, interviews with the author, Rome, 10/06/08).

Therefore, a mix of widespread respect for his capabilities and a strong grip on the organization has allowed Bossi a considerable concentration of power. As will be discussed in the following sections, this decision-making autonomy of the leader is at the basis of the League's capacity to adapt almost instantaneously to the frequent changes of Italian politics, repositioning itself according to the circumstances. Some of the decisions taken by Bossi represented real U-turns which disorientated party members, including top members and MPs. However, he has managed to quickly impose his vision and enforce his decisions in most occasions, often using the 'sacred' venue of Pontida to impress legitimacy to his ideology/policy shifts (Biorcio, 1997, p. 198).

## 5.2 Party ideology and policy: the centre-periphery dimension

### 5.2.1 From ethno-regional autonomy to the League of Federal Italy (1980-1993)

In order to understand the original project of the Northern League it is necessary to analyze the ideology and policy proposals of the major regional leagues which subsequently gave birth to the federated party. This section covers the period from the emergence of the various leagues to the end of the so called Italian 'First Republic'.<sup>77</sup> Although this period was characterized by several changes in the Italian party system, amongst which the emergence of the League is one of the most important (if not the most important), the reform of the national voting system and the dramatic changes in the party system which occurred between 1993 and 1994<sup>78</sup> set the period in question apart from the subsequent ones in terms of institutional and political incentives/constraints.

The first half of the 1980s, when the *Liga Veneta* was the dominant one, has been identified as the ethno-regionalist phase of the leagues (Diamanti, 1993, p. 17). In this period, the various leagues focused on the re-discovery of the historical, cultural and ethnic distinctiveness of their respective region *vis a vis* the Italian state. Great emphasis was posed on the re-interpretation of Italian history and, in particular, Italian unification, stressing the military aspect of the latter. In sum, the regional leagues engaged in a process of national identity building based at regional level:

These Leagues are improperly defined as 'regional'. Actually they embody the desire for autonomy of several European nations which have reached a very high level of modernity and efficiency. Those which officially, in the administrative language, are called regions are, actually, nations; which means peoples, organic societies, with a cultural, linguistic, social, economic, administrative and institutional consistency. I want to be clear: for Veneto – as well as Lombardy, Tuscany or Sicily – is a nation at the same rate as Denmark, France, Poland, Greece and the Netherlands (Rocchetta, quoted in Diamanti, 1993, p. 52).

The ethnic characterization of the 'regions/nations' manifests itself in the use of the regional dialects and in some calls to prevent further immigration from the southern regions, for immediate cessation of the '*soggiorno obbligatorio*' (the transfer of southern mobsters to northern regions for detention/rehabilitation), and for jobs in the regional and local administration to go to natives of the region (Diamanti, 1993, p. 53). These

<sup>77</sup> For a discussion on the terms First, Second and Third Republic in Italy, see Massetti (2009a).

<sup>78</sup> For the 1993 electoral reform, see (Katz, 1996). For the changes in the parties and party system see Newell and Bull (1997).

claims were not only confined to Veneto. The first programme of the Lombard League, amongst other things, proposed: public sector employment on an ethno-regional basis; government houses reserved for Lombards; industrialization proportional to availability of local labour; a guarantee of work for Lombard workers, or returning Lombard emigrants before those coming from other regions; recuperation of the cultural and linguistic inheritance of Lombardy and its diffusion through the school system; and stopping the use of Lombardy as a site for the *soggiorno obbligatorio* (Manifesto of the *Lega Lombarda*, 1983, reported in Tambini, 2001, p. 42). In spite of the paltry electoral results which this ethnic mobilization managed to bring about, Bossi was convinced that, as a first stage, “you need to pass through the conquest of your own linguistic identity” (Bossi, quoted by Diamanti, 1993, p. 56).

Since the beginning, however, the recognition of regional ethnic distinctiveness represented just one side of the leagues’ claims. The economic dimension of the leagues’ grievances was also very evident. While the focus on historical legacy and ethnicity was the result of a genuine interest in the cultural revival of the regions, it also served to build the legitimacy of requests for constitutional reforms. The three northern special status regions – Aosta Valley, Trentino-South Tyrol and Friuli-Venezia Giulia – had obtained extensive autonomy from the state on the basis of ethnic distinctiveness. The ‘*leghisti*’ in the ordinary regions had the opportunity to see how beneficial the special autonomy statutes had been for those regions in economic terms. Although Lombardy has always been the first region in terms of production, by 1970, the Aosta Valley boasted a GDP per head nearly 10 percent higher (Gold, 2003, p. 66). In 1980 Trentino-South Tyrol’s GDP per head was more than 10 percent higher than Veneto’s (ibid.). Salvadori’s ideas found fertile terrain amongst the ‘*leghisti*’ not only because of the prospects for ethno-cultural revival but also because of the economic consequences of autonomy. One of the first manifestos of the Lombard League stated: “The fruits of Lombards’ work and taxes should be controlled and administered by the Lombards through the arrangement of a financial system similar to that which is being implementing in Trent and South Tyrol” (*Lega Lombarda*, Manifesto 1983). It would not be an exaggeration, therefore, to argue that at the origins of the autonomist claims of the northern regional leagues there is a sort of ‘spill-over effect’, driven primarily by the economic privileges conceded to the special status regions.

As far as the policy proposals of the leagues are concerned, it is worth pointing out some differences between the two most important leagues in Veneto and Lombardy.

To be sure, the differences between Lombardy and Veneto as well as between different periods have to be taken with a pinch of salt, as both the discourses and the proposals were vaguely formulated. In addition, in the case of the League, rather than changes of policy positions, it is more appropriate to talk about emphasis put on different terms at different times. Yet, while the *Liga Veneta* has always leaned towards a more nationalist/independentist position (Diamanti, 1993, p. 52), the *Lega Lombarda*, though not renouncing to the idea of Lombardy as a nation, has boasted a preference for the autonomist/federalist solution. As mentioned above, Bossi was strongly influenced by Salvadori's ideas of integral federalism inspired by the Swiss model. In the original programme of the *Lega Lombarda* the first three objectives were: 1) "The transformation of Italian state into a confederation of autonomous regions"; 2) "Direct democracy with popular initiatives and referenda"; 3) "The decentralization of political power to the provinces (cantons) and to the local councils" (*Lega Lombarda*, Manifesto 1983).

With the coming to prominence of the *Lega Lombarda* from the 1987 general election the conceptualization of the regions and the policy proposals shift too. Given that Lombardy constituted a less favourable environment than Veneto for ethnic-regionalism, Bossi reconceptualised the regions as a 'community of interests', thus fusing together the ethno-cultural and economic dimension in an attempt to strengthen a territorial identity (Diamanti, 1993, p. 57). The fusion of the economic with the ethno-cultural was based on a set of stereotypes, such as the hard-worker, genuine, transparent, honest, altruistic, trustworthy and trusting Lombard (later, for extension, northerner) *vs.* the lazy, false, intrigue-prone (*furbo*), dishonest, egoistic, unreliable and suspicious southerner (Gomez-Reino, 2002, p. 120-21). After all these stereotypes had, to a large extent, been confirmed and spread by authoritative academic studies conducted by American scholars on Italian politics and society (Banfield, 1958; Almond and Verba, 1965; Putnam, 1993).<sup>79</sup> The economic differences between north and south were, therefore, explained in terms of virtues of the former and vices of the latter, thus delegitimizing the state's policies for territorial re-distribution of resources.

At the time of its formation in late 1989, therefore, the Northern League was positioned by the Lombard leadership towards a territorial-economic critique of the

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<sup>79</sup> For a critical discussion on the consequences of these studies on Italians' self-perception and on territorial (and non-territorial) politics in Italy, see Mastropaolo (2009). For a similar critique of the mainstream interpretation of the 'southern question', see Davies (1996).

state and an autonomist/federalist proposal for constitutional reform. At that stage, the electoral weight of the party at national level was still negligible (just two MPs). However, at the 1990 regional elections the LN confirmed its fast rising trend and the traditional parties started to take into consideration strategies for contrasting the emergence of the new party. As Bossi himself recalls in 1988 the DC very quickly approved a law to abolish the '*soggiorno obbligatorio*' in an attempt to stop the erosion of its electoral support by the League (Bossi, 1992, p. 113). However, it was the PSI which tried to pick up the core of the League's policy proposals by showing its willingness to discuss about devolution of more powers to the regions. This move was considered a threat by Bossi, an attempt to lure the League with vague promises and undermine its electoral support. However, he also recognized that the PSI helped legitimize the League's request. At that stage, in order to avoid being accommodated, the LN re-launched a much more radical programme. With the federation of the regional leagues, the territorial focus of the party shifted from the individual regions to the entire North (Diamanti, 1993, p. 73). In 1991, having being proclaimed *segretario federale* at the first *Congresso*, Bossi founded at the annual gathering in Pontida the 'Republic of the North' - an act without any real official value but highly symbolic and dovetailing with a plan for redefinition of the party's federal reform. This new plan, which was adopted after the suggestions of Prof. Gianfranco Miglio (the party ideologue) and which would be presented at the 1992 general election, envisaged the creation of a confederal state formed by three macro-regions:<sup>80</sup> North, Centre and South (*Lega Nord*, Election Manifesto 1992). The federal state would maintain the competence of national defence, foreign policy, defence of individual rights and the emission of currency. The macro-regions would control economic policy – taxation, industrial development, commerce and agriculture. The regions (within the macro-regions) would control education, health and co-ordination of local authorities, plus secondary powers on economic matters (ibid.).

With such a proposal the League again became a party which stood out for its radicalism on the territorial re-organization of the state, thus marking its electoral 'hunting ground':

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<sup>80</sup> In Miglio's proposition, in which he explains the division of Italy in these three entities, they are called *Padania*, *Etruria* (Etruscan land) and *Sud* (Miglio, 1992).

Craxi [the PSI's leader]... launched a series of regionalist proposals... hoping to outflank and then replace us in this battle. However, without knowing it, he built a bridge of boats which allowed us to reach the middle of the river. But we did not stop there, we jumped onto the other shore, where we were alone, without competitors. The other shore is, obviously, the proposal to divide Italy in three Republics: North, Centre and South... The [other] parties... will never digest an incisive reform that breaks once and for all the working of centralism (Bossi, 1992, p. 115-16).

The 1992 election sanctioned the entry of the League in the Italian party system as a relevant player. However, the political landscape was about to change dramatically. During 1993 the traditional parties that had governed Italy collapsed under allegations of illegal party funding and other political/judicial scandals. The vacuum created by the disappearance of these political actors created an enormous opportunity for the League, especially because they represented the political bloc, led by the DC, from which the party had harvested most of its votes. The League demonstrated it had become the biggest party in the North during the local elections, in which the party scored well even in metropolitan areas and captured Milan's Council. The temptation to replace the traditional parties in the whole Italian territory led Bossi to develop a strategy for territorial expansion of the League. This strategy, which faced strong opposition both amongst prominent figures, such as Miglio and Rocchetta, and from the grassroots, consisted of tempering the North/South opposition and transforming the League in to a state-wide federalist party (Bossi, 1995, p. 36). In late April 1993 Bossi announced his intention of presenting candidates at the next electoral contexts in southern regions too, using the label *Lega Italia Federale* (Diamanti, 1993, p. 95).

### **5.2.2 From federalism to secession (1994-1999)**

The idea of using the label *Lega Italia Federale* and the whole project of creating a national federalist party were aborted within months. According to Bossi:

The League did not manage to penetrate, because of its organizational limitations, because of the economic and cultural backwardness of the South, and because of the press who accused us of racism and prevented the people of the South from understanding the Southern Question (Bossi, 1995, quoted in Tambini, 2001, p. 60)

However, the anti-Southern image of the League was not an invention of the press, which had simply reported the more or less explicit anti-Southern content of the party's discourse (Pasquino, 1993, p. 8). After all, if Bossi had managed to overcome the regional borders of the individual leagues and create a 'Party of the North', this was

mainly due to the emphasis placed on the strong opposition to the south, which functioned as a cover for the differences within the north. In spite of some opposition by the hard-core Lombards to the inclusion of central regions such as Tuscany, the operation of creating a Northern (economic) identity, which encompassed all the local and regional (ethno-cultural) identities, had been more successful than Bossi expected. Breaking away from the territorial north/south divide proved to be not possible. Many militants perceived such an attempt as a betrayal of the party ideology and staged a protest that obliged Bossi to reverse his plans. The project was also undermined by the internal dissidents in the leadership, such as Miglio and Rocchetta, who retained a clear anti-Southern stance in public (Tambini, 2001, p. 59). This juncture represented one of the few episodes where Bossi did not succeed in getting his way.

However, had Bossi and the League had more time to prepare and carry out the penetration of the south, things could have gone differently. In fact, a new general election was called for the early spring of 1994, and by the end of 1993 the political scene had considerably changed, reducing the scope for both the League's electoral growth in the north and its penetration in the south. The collapse of the party system of the First Republic had revitalized, especially in the south, the electoral appeal of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI), a post-fascist party which, due to its isolation during the First Republic, had been largely left untouched by the latest political scandals. In addition, in December 1993 Berlusconi founded *Forza Italia* (FI), aiming to harvest the voters who had become 'orphans' of the moderate bloc of parties that collapsed in that year (Newell and Bull, 1997). Following the incentives posed by the new voting system, which attributed 75 percent of the seats according to single member plurality (FPTP) and only 25 percent to according to proportional representation (PR), he created a coalition with the MSI, which would re-style itself into *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) in 1995, with a tiny splinter party from the old DC called *Centro Cristiano Democratico* (CCD) and few liberal/conservative figures. Berlusconi, Fini and Casini – respectively the leaders of the three parties just mentioned – formed a right-wing alliance. The main heirs of the DC, the *Partito Popolare Italiano* (PPI) and *Patto Segni* (PS) formed a centrist coalition, trying to retain as many voters as they could, while the left-wing parties – *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (PDS), *Rifondazione Comunista* (RC), *Verdi* (the Greens) and other minor ones – formed the alliance called *Progressisti*.

None of these coalitions would have accepted the League's plan for transforming Italy into a confederation of three macro-regions. The party had therefore



to choose whether to compromise on policy and enter one of the coalitions, thus increasing its chances to get in office and implement a milder reform, or keep its policy unchanged and run alone, with the risk of remaining non-influential in the next parliamentary term.

In the event, Bossi opted for joining the right-wing coalition led by Berlusconi. The rationale of this choice will be better explained in the section devoted to the League's positioning on the left-right dimension. Indeed, from the point of view of the centre-periphery dimension, such a decision is rather difficult to explain. The MSI was a strong supporter of Italian nationalism and of the state's centralism. Bossi was very aware of this contradiction and, together with Berlusconi, worked out a façade operation which consisted of creating two territorially separated alliances: the *Polo del Buon Governo* – FI, MSI-AN and CCD – in the centre and south, and the *Polo della Libertà* – FI, LN and CCD – in the north.

This trick did not prevent the abandonment of the three macro-regions' project by the League, which had to go back to its previous proposal of implementing federalism on a regional basis (*Lega Nord*, 1994a, General Election Manifesto). The alliance, in addition, did not work well, in spite of the clear victory at the 1994 general election and the fact that the League became the biggest party in Parliament. Wide sections of the LN's membership and of the electorate were not reconciled to the alliance with the other parties. This emerged very clearly in Bossi's speech at the Pontida rally in June 1994, just a few months after the general election and a few days after the disappointing European elections. The bulk of the speech was devoted to justifying and explaining the rationale of the alliance, addressing explicitly the "ancient, independentist" soul of the party which "emerged at the dawn of our movement", and promising that he would oppose with all his strength any attempt to absorb the League by *Forza Italia* (Bossi, speech at Pontida, 19/06/04, reported in Bossi, 1996, p. 67-74).

From an *ex post* perspective, one could detect from that speech that not only the League but its leader too was already torn between the choice of remaining in the alliance and the temptation to break away. After four months of further fights amongst the partners of the government coalition, the League withdrew its confidence and voted the government down, accusing Berlusconi and Fini of being uninterested in carrying forward the federalist reform (Bossi, speech at the House of Representatives, 21/12/1994, reported in Bossi, 1996, p. 85-89).

The break-up of the centre-right coalition was just the first part of a process that would lead to the adoption of a new position on the centre-periphery dimension: secession. After giving its support to the new government led by technocrat Lamberto Dini and backed by the centre and left-wing parties, the League retrenched into Northern nationalism. The first move was a symbolic one. In June 1995 Bossi gathered in Mantua his group of MPs and of representatives in the regional assemblies inaugurating the 'Parliament of the North' (later also called the 'Parliament of Padania'), with the aim of generating "proposals, critiques and doctrines for the achievement of important political objectives, first of all the constitutional advent of federalism" (Bossi, speech at the first gathering of the Parliament of Padania, 07/06/1995, reported in Bossi, 1996, p. 109). The term Padania which had already been used in the past by the League was the word now used for referring to a northern fatherland (Diamanti, 1996, p. 76). In December Bossi announced the support of his party for the budget, adding an explicit threat: "The basic choice, at this stage, is between a federal state and the secession of the north: now, immediately" (Bossi, speech in the House of Representatives, 21/12/1995, reported in Bossi, 1996, p. 129). In this period Bossi started to add to the previous federalist discourse references to the 'independence' of the North or of Padania. A poll conducted in January 1996 on northerners' attitudes towards the 'independence of the North' reveals that the idea was not at all unpopular. As many as 29.2 percent of the respondents thought the idea was advantageous but unacceptable, while 23.2 percent thought it was advantageous and desirable (Poll conducted by Poster-Limes, reported in Diamanti, 1996, p. 77). However, the same poll revealed that the majority of those who desired it actually preferred the federalist solution to the break-up of Italy.

The invention of Padania served the purpose of creating a new nation and providing the legitimacy of an independentist project (Diamanti, 1996, p. 82). Bossi decided to fight the coming general election, called for the spring 1996, on an independentist position, which allowed the party to regain a clear distinctiveness from the other parties and from the two – centre-left and centre-right – coalitions. Before the election the so called 'Parliament of the North' approved a document called 'Constitution of the North' (*Lega Nord*, 1996, General Election Manifesto). At the general election the League obtained its best result ever in terms of votes. However, since the centre-left coalition (*Ulivo*) with the external support of the communists (RC) achieved a parliamentary majority, it found itself in an irrelevant position. In such circumstances, Bossi decided to push ahead with the separatist line. The league created

a Committee for the Liberation of Padania (Clp), a kind of militia called the ‘green shirts’ (*Camicie Verdi*) and most importantly, from a symbolic point of view, it staged a week-long event which, starting at spring of the Po river in Piedmont, concluded in Venice with a solemn declaration of independence of the ‘padanian nation’ (Biorcio, 1997). The event attracted so much attention from the media that, not only did the League remain for weeks at the centre of the political debate, but the whole process, which *per se* was just about virtual (and illegal) politics, gathered some kind of legitimacy (Diamanti, 1996, p. 97-98).

The secessionist option was endorsed even in the party name, which at the 1997 *Congresso Federale* was officially changed to *Lega Nord per l’Indipendenza della Padania* - Northern League for Independence of Padania – (*Corriere della Sera*, 16/02/1997). *De facto*, the new stance was maintained until the 1999 European election, which confirmed the downward electoral trend. In that period, the League was not only cut off from the government but it had also excluded itself from the work of the parliamentary commission for the reform of the Constitution, in distrust of the commitment and possibility of the Commission of bringing about a genuine federalist reform. Instead, it kept indulging in ‘virtual politics’ by staging the first election of the Parliament of the North (which was previously made of the League’s representatives in the real institutions). The election was held in the autumn 1997, using gazebos as polling stations, and attracted between five and six million people according to the League (*Repubblica*, 27/10/97). As usual, the operation managed to attract a lot of attention from the media and to keep the League and its themes at the centre of the debate.

### **5.2.3 From secession back to federalism (1999-2009)**

The secessionist stance coincided with political isolation. This mix provoked internal disagreement which eventually resulted in walk-outs by individual members and splits. In 1998 the *Liga Veneta* tried to break-away from the LN. The attempt failed but a new splinter party was created, the *Liga Veneta Repubblica* (LVR). In 1999 several prominent figures left the party: Fabrizio Comencini, who would become the leader of the splinter LVR, Marco Formentini, former mayor of Milan, Vito Gnutti and Domenico Comino. In a speech at the *Congresso Federale* held after the very poor result of the 1999 European election, Bossi tried to pull the party together and

denounced the splits and defections as operations orchestrated by Berlusconi (Bossi, speech at the Congresso Federale, 25/07/99).

However, it had become clear that the secessionism and political isolation were leading nowhere but electoral decline and policy irrelevance. In addition it was creating regionalist competitors in the northern regions, primarily in Veneto. The new strategic change consisted of forming a new a centre-right alliance with Berlusconi (*Repubblica*, 09/12/99), the corollary being a moderation of the party's position on the centre-periphery dimension. In 2000 the new alliance *Casa delle Libertà* (House of Freedoms) was created, including FI, AN, LN and CCD-CDU (later UDC). However, in contrast to 1994, the new alliance was based on a 'special relationship' between FI and the League. Such a special relationship, embodied by Giulio Tremonti (a member of FI who had publicly endorsed most ideas of the LN and who would become Italy's Economy Minister), was based on Berlusconi's guarantee of a federalist reform.

This strategic move immediately generated a policy success. Since the centre-left government was heading towards the end of term with little chance of winning the coming general election, it quickly passed legislation to which it gave the emphatic label 'federalism'. In fact, the reform expanded the powers of the regions but fell well short of establishing a federal regime.<sup>81</sup> Yet, as intended by the centre-left, it troubled the centre-right alliance, which voted united against the reform. From the perspective of the League it represented an attempt by the centre-left to steal its 'flagship policy', or at the least its flagship pitch to the electorate. Hence, the party was resolute in denouncing the 'deception' of the 'fake federalism of the centre-left' (*Repubblica*, 07/03/01). For the League's partners in the House of Freedoms, especially those less enthusiastic about federalism – CCD-CDU and AN - it represented an even thornier issue. For them, the centre-left's reform had, so to speak, raised the bar they would, it seemed, have to jump over. Once in office with the League, they would have had to grant the latter a reform which went well beyond the centre-left's.

After the centre-right's victory at the 2001 general election, federalism (now called 'devolution') became one of the four points of the government agreement. The

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<sup>81</sup> The new article 117 of the Constitution lists the (many) matters falling under exclusive powers of the state and the (even more numerous) matters where the state and the regions share legislative powers, leaving all remaining matters under exclusive legislative power of the regions. In addition, the new article 119 of the Constitution states that the regions and the local authorities can have financial autonomy in harmony with the Constitution and in accordance with the general principles co-ordinating public finances and the tributary system. Such financial autonomy, however, does not translate into actuality without the passing of ordinary legislation which regulates its implementation.

influence of AN and CCD-CDU on the drafting of the agreement can be observed in the following carefully-worded statement:

The scheme of devolution, as a progressive transfer of powers, upwards, from the state to the European Union, and downwards, from the state to the regions, is not, as the left maintains, outside but inside the 1948 Constitution, which foresees that, to the initial regional competences, ‘others indicated by the constitutional laws’ can be incrementally added. This is the scheme which we want to follow, with intelligence and prudence, exactly on the basis of the agreement reached on the 17<sup>th</sup> of February of last year. (Agreement of the House of Freedoms, 13/05/01).

In fact, the parliamentary work for the passing of the reform was a long and very difficult process. This was not only due to the complex procedures for Constitutional reform or to the fact that devolution was included within a much wider and ambitious plan for reforming the state. It also owed much to the internal contrasts and mutual suspicion between the government partners, with devolution often being at the centre of such tensions. Yet, between 2003 and 2006, the House of Freedom managed to pass the whole reform. As far as devolution was concerned, the reform attributed exclusive powers to regions when it came to the organization of health services, schools and regional and local police. However, the state maintained the power to veto a regional law if this was perceived as damaging the national interest (*Corriere della Sera*, 16/11/05). Leaving aside the technical criticism attracted by the reform, including the section on devolution (Vandelli, 2002), the problem was that the constitutional law had been approved only by a simple majority of MPs. That meant that the centre-left could call a referendum on it.

The referendum was held in the early summer of 2006, after the centre-left had regained power at the general election in the spring of the same year. The League, fearing a defeat, conducted a very temperamental campaign, which even involved accusations against its erstwhile allies, especially the UDC (formerly CCD-CDU) and AN, for their lukewarm commitment to the campaign for a ‘Yes vote’. Less than two weeks before the vote, Bossi went as far as to declare that in case of a victory of the ‘No’: “the country will not change democratically ever again. We will have to find other ways, because democratically it will never change. And this is a tragedy” (*Repubblica*, 15/06/06). Arguably, this threatening tone did not help the cause, as it was stigmatized by the press and obliged the allies, with the exception of Berlusconi, to keep their

distance from the League and, indirectly, from the federalist reform (*Repubblica*, 16/06/06).

Eventually the 'No' campaign won by a large majority in Italy as a whole but not in the League's core regions, Lombardy and Veneto. The first reaction of the League and its leaders appeared to prefigure another shift towards a secessionist position. The re-opening of the 'Parliament of the North' (this time based in Vicenza) was announced in late 2006 and held in February 2007. In public speeches Bossi kept up his bellicose approach and did not exclude the Parliament of the North deciding on a return to secession (*Corriere della Sera*, 29/01/07).

However, ultimately the party did not take that path. The centre-left government had a tiny majority in Parliament (in the Senate, to be precise) and in order to survive included in its programme issues which could lure the League, such as 'fiscal federalism' and a reform of the voting system (*Repubblica*, 02/03/07). In particular the issue of fiscal federalism or, in the terms of the Constitution, 'financial autonomy' of the regions had become rather urgent. The government was under pressure from the regional executives of Lombardy and Veneto, which were asking for the implementation of the 2001 constitutional reform, as well as from the Constitutional Court which, in the absence of due legislation, had already had to intervene with 'law-making sentences' and had demanded the Parliament to intervene for the implementation of the constitutional principles (Barbero, 2007). The LN, therefore, freed itself from the confrontational opposition led by Berlusconi and engaged constructively in parliamentary negotiations which eventually led to the passing of a 'framework law'<sup>82</sup> for the implementation of fiscal federalism (*Repubblica*, 29/06/07). However, the sudden fall of the centre-left government and the calling of a new general election in 2008, quashed the process.

Once back in office in coalition with the People of Freedom (PDL) – an alliance of FI and AN under Berlusconi's leadership – and the Movement for Autonomy (MpA) – a kind of 'southern league' that has its electoral stronghold in Sicily – the League decided to keep focusing on the achievement of 'fiscal federalism', leaving 'institutional federalism' to be carried out at a later stage in the parliamentary term. So far the League has managed to get a new 'framework law' supported by the parliament in April 2009. However, the complex set of legislative decrees for the actual implementation of

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<sup>82</sup> In the Italian legislation procedures, a 'framework law' (or delegation law) is an act of the parliament which allows the government to produce legislative decrees in the matter specified in that act.

financial autonomy of the regions has yet to be produced, leaving intact all the contrasts between the League and the other government partners representing southern regions too. It seems extremely unlikely that the reform will ultimately allow the regions to retain 90 percent of their taxes, as in the League's 2008 election pledges (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2009).

In spite of the partial progress in the direction of fiscal federalism and the government agreement for the creation of a federal state, sudden and unforeseen changes of position cannot be excluded. In September 2009, at the end of the usual celebration which starts at the source of the Po river in Piedmont and ends in Venice few days later, Bossi stated the final goal of its party:

is the freedom of Padania... It will be free by good means or by less good ones. Freedom is a right and therefore it is a right to achieve it by any means. We are here in Venice because we know that one day Padania will be a free, independent and sovereign state (Bossi, reported in *Corriere della Sera*, 13/09/09).

It might well be that such a message has to be interpreted in the context of internal difficulties in the government of which the LN is part occurred by revelations concerning Berlusconi. It might well be that it is just a way to prepare a sort of 'plan B' in case the Berlusconi government does not survive in the long term. In the perspective of a party system reshuffle the radicalization of the League's position on the centre-periphery cleavage might just serve the short term objective of maintaining its identity. However, it is also possible that Bossi has simply spoken the truth: the short-to-medium term tactic has been the moderation of the party objectives, while the long-term strategic objective remains the establishment of an independent state. After all, the party has not changed its full name since 1997: it is still the 'Northern League for the Independence of Padania'.

## **5.2 Party ideology and policy: the left-right dimension**

### **5.2.1 From no position to the centre-right (1980-1993)**

Detecting the ideological position of the LN along the left-right ideological dimension, especially in its early years, poses several problems. In fact, this is true for many regionalist parties which try and attract voters from both the left and right by avoiding declaring themselves as explicitly left-wing or right-wing. However, in the case of the LN the problem is made worse by three factors. First, the League has devoted a great deal of its political discourse to protest, resentment and anti-

establishment politics which, *per se*, are not classifiable as either left or right. Second, the LN has boasted a tendency to instrumentally mix up clusters of ideas without worrying too much about internal consistency and coherence over time. As some scholars put it, the LN “is too politically opportunistic to be ideologically coherent, hence its relatively chaotic ideological references” (Fieschi *et al.*, 1996, p. 241). Third, since the individual leagues and the LN have emerged as political outsiders, their politicians have often used a very colourful and/or extreme language, with the intention of attracting the attention of the media (Ruzza and Schmidtke, 1993). This strategy of getting visibility also entailed a negation or a partial revision of previous statements, once these were stigmatized by the media or by political opponents. For this reason some of the sources, public speeches, newspapers’ interviews, etc., have to be taken with a pinch of salt.

The combination of these characteristics, in addition to the extraordinary importance of the leader, has led several scholars to classify the League as a populist party (Biorcio, 1991; 1992; 1997; Kitschelt, 1995; Betz, 1998; McDonnell, 2006; Mudde, 2007; Tarchi 2008).<sup>83</sup> Especially during the years of the First Republic, the leagues characterized themselves as protest movements that fiercely criticised partitocracy, corruption and clientelism. The positive proposals did not go much beyond the request for autonomist/federalist reforms. However, as noted by Taggart, populism is like “a chameleon, adopting the colours of its environment (Taggart, 2000, p. 2). Indeed, looking at the message of the leagues, as well as at the profile of its voters, it is possible to detect from the very beginning a positioning to the right of centre. In the original manifesto of the Lombard League, the only purely economic point refers to the “strengthening of the artisanship and agriculture, which have to enjoy an easier access to facilitated credit schemes” (*Lega Lombarda*, Manifesto 1983, in *La Lega Nord attraverso i manifesti*, 1996). The leagues (in Lombardy and Veneto) were very aware of the social fabric of their territories and of the (Catholic) political culture that characterized them. Analysis of the electoral geography in the late 1980s and early 1990s show very clearly that the leagues stole most of their votes from the DC (Diamanti, 1993, p 37). The DC had been the hegemonic party in the provinces of ‘deep north’ where the leagues developed. It made, therefore, perfect sense to target its

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<sup>83</sup> Biorcio (1991, 1992, 1997) and McDonnell (2006) defined the Northern League precisely as a ‘regionalist populist’ party. Kitschelt defined it as a populist anti-statist party (1995). Mudde (2007) defined it as an ethno-regionalist (or nationalist) populist party. He considers it as a border line case of the populist radical right family.



electorate for electoral expansion. In addition, the process of secularization, linked to two decades of rapid industrialization and economic growth, and the increasing identification of the DC with corrupted, clientelistic, pro-southern politics, made that party rather vulnerable to the leagues' challenge (Diamanti, 1993, p. 49; 1996, p. 38-9). In the 1980s the profile of the *Liga Veneta*'s voter was: male, mature but not elder, with low education, belonging to the medium-lower socio-economic strata, such as artisans, shop keepers and workers of the small firms (Diamanti, 1993, p. 44).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s the centre-right, neo-liberal and anti-tax ideological orientations of the leagues and of the LN became more evident and consolidated. Obviously, the emphasis on excessive taxation fitted very well with the construction of the northern identity based on the north/south economic divide. A poster dated 1989 claimed: "The North pays for everyone. No more taxes to Rome! Taxes fair and paid to Lombardy!" (*Lega Lombarda*, 1989, in *La Lega Nord attraverso i manifesti*, 1996). The neo-liberal discourse of the League emerged in a more articulated form in the document 'Programme of work for the 1990s', which explicitly proposed neoliberal reforms – lower taxation on people and business, privatization, flexibilization of the labour market, reduction of the role of trade unions and reform of the welfare state (*Lega Nord*, by G. Bonetti, n.d.).

Besides proposing neo-liberal policies, the rightward leaning ideology of the League also owed much to messages which conveyed, often implicitly, anti-immigration, xenophobic and cultural-racist messages. Yet, in this period, the League tried to counter accusations of racism and extreme-right ideology by proposing an ambiguous discourse which tended to put blame on those who favoured immigration (the actual racists) and those who wanted a centralist state (the actual fascists). For instance an electoral poster stated "Le Pen is fascist like the parties in Rome. A firm NO! therefore to the fascists who call us fascists and to the racists who call us racists" (*Lega Lombarda*, 1988, in *La Lega Nord attraverso i manifesti*, 1996). Other posters stated: "To bring the blacks here to our land is slavery" or "Mass industrial immigration is a crime against humanity" (*Lega Lombarda*, 1990, in *La Lega Nord attraverso i manifesti*, 1996). In addition, the League took every possible opportunity to stigmatise the discrepancy between the soft law on immigration approved by the government parties in 1990 and the sometimes brutal methods used on immigrants:

Let's take the case of the Albanians who arrived in tens of thousands on Apulia's coast in the summer of 1991. They had to be sent back, no doubt, but they had to be respected as human beings, they did not deserve the brutal treatment that the Italian government reserved for its overseas ex-subjects (Bossi, 1992, p. 149).

This kind of ambiguous discourse allowed the League to plead innocent to charges of racism and to be perceived by large sections of the electorate as a presentable party. In addition, it allowed the party to appeal, to some extent, to the leftist electorate too. Indeed, since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the consequent loss of credibility/legitimacy of the post-communist PDS (the hegemonic party of the Italian left), Bossi had it in mind the goal of targeting the leftist electorate too (Bossi, 1992, p. 119). Softening the xenophobic rhetoric, or simply making it more confused, was part of this strategy. The most important opening to the left was, however, the League's opposition to war in Kuwait in 1991, which in Italy was perceived as an anti-American, left-wing stance. In the context of the late First Republic, characterized by decreasing polarization, loss of legitimacy of the governing (centre and centre-right) parties and loss of credibility of the left parties, the strategy of the League aimed to present itself as a party neither of the right nor of the left, but simply in favour of federalism and against corrupted partitocracy. The plan worked very well as, at the 1992 general election, the LN not only increased its vote in the traditional heartland but it also expanded in the urban areas and even in the red regions of the centre-north – Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Marche and Umbria (see Table 5.4).

However, the severity of the new government's fiscal policy, which aimed to avoid the bankruptcy of the Italian state, gave the League the opportunity to boast of both its protest-leaning style of politics and its anti-tax stance. In the autumn of 1992, the LN was the only party, together with the MSI, which openly sided with the demonstrations organized by traders, shopkeepers and self-employed against the government's tax policy (*Corriere della Sera*, 27/10/1992). In addition, the events of 1993 which brought about the collapse of the centre and centre-right parties, led the LN towards an explicit repositioning to the centre-right, in an attempt to replace them. A distinguished observer of Italian politics declared that the LN was “a centre-right movement, neo-Thatcherite, very centralist, strong and very organized with internal rules of iron” (G-P. Pansa, 1993, quoted in Allum and Diamanti, 1996, p. 161).

### 5.2.2 A centre-right party in coalition politics: from the right-wing to the centre pole (1994-1998)

The 1992 general election, in which the LN established itself as a relevant actor in the national party system, presaged a destabilizing period which fostered further instability and change (Bull and Newell, 1993; Di Virgilio, 2006, p. 181). The new voting system adopted in 1993 and used for the first time in the 1994 general election changed considerably the incentives and constraints affecting party competition (Katz, 1996). The new system assigned 75 percent of seats to single member constituencies operating under plurality rule (FPTP) and 25 percent of seats through multimember constituencies elected via proportional representation (PR). The latter share of seats was to be divided amongst those parties achieving at least 4 percent of national votes. The predominant majoritarian (plurality) logic established strong incentives for parties to form coalitions capable of winning as many FPTP seats as possible. Yet, the system guaranteed the survival of the old proportional logic and, therefore, of a large (and increasing) number of parties. This was not due to the 25 percent PR seats, which would anyway preclude representation to all parties not reaching the 4 percent threshold. It was granted by the ‘proportionalization’ of the FPTP seats, that is by the division of ‘safe seats’ amongst parties of the same coalition in proportion to their supposed electoral weight (Pappalardo, 2002, p. 230).<sup>84</sup> This technique allowed the survival (and the emergence) of many tiny parties and, therefore, of an even more fragmented multi-party system. So, while competition for the FPTP seats remained a matter between very few coalitions (2 or 3) and competition for the PR votes remained a matter for 6 or 7 parties, the actual number of parties represented in Parliament was always much higher (Pappalardo, 2002; Di Virgilio, 2006; Massetti, 2009a). The Italian party system in which the LN had to compete after 1994 was therefore characterized by two different sorts of actors and by two different logics: the coalitions responding to the plurality logic and the parties within the coalitions responding to a proportional logic (Bartolini *et al.*, 2004).

In this new political environment, the positioning of the League also depended on crucial choices about coalition politics. The first choice was whether to run alone, thus exposing itself to the plurality logic of electoral competition, or to join one of the coalitions, thus accepting the ‘shelter’ of the proportional logic. In the latter case, the LN had to choose between the three options on offer: the left coalition, formed by the

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<sup>84</sup> The share of ‘safe seats’ was usually negotiated on the basis of electoral results at previous general elections and/or at more recent local, regional and/or European elections, as well as recent opinion polls.

post-communist PDS and the communist RC, the centre coalition, formed by former Christian Democrats PPI and PS, and the right coalition, formed by Berlusconi's FI and the post fascist MSI-AN (Di Virgilio, 1994). The party's centre-right ideological orientation excluded any alliance with the left, thus limiting the actual options to the last two. As already recalled above, the LN reluctantly chose to form a coalition with FI in the north and accepted that FI and AN maintained a separate alliance in the south. This entry into the (two-fold) right-wing coalition represented, at least at the level of public perception, a shift towards the right, which also saw the party suspended from the European Free Alliance (EFA) group (Lynch, 1998, p. 198; De Winter and Gomez-Reino, 2002, p. 496-97).

The election saw a victory for the two (territorially separated) right-wing coalitions, with the result that the LN was practically obliged to join a government coalition not only including FI but AN too. The centre coalition was squeezed between the left and right, obtaining only 11 percent of votes and less than 6 percent of seats (see Table 5.2). This triggered a process of dissolution of the traditional centre which, during the parliamentary term (1994-96) split into two parts, one (PPI) joining the left and one (CDU) joining the right. At the same time, the League's cohabitation with FI and AN was particularly problematic. Not only were AN and parts of FI very resistant to the federalist ideas of the LN but they had become its most important electoral competitors. While AN competed with the LN on issues of immigration and law and order, the main challenge came from FI which, using the media power of its leader, had established itself as the main advocate of a neo-Thatcherite revolution. When the 1994 European election, held just few months after the general election, confirmed that the LN was losing many votes to FI, the fate of the government and of the coalition looked gloomy. Already in his Pontida speech in June 1994, Bossi was posing the rhetorical question of "whether the League, the creative factor, the catalyst of the new political age, which will be the age of federalism, should remain plebeian or let itself be absorbed by the Berlusconi aristocracy?" (Bossi, speech at Pontida, 19/06/94, reported in Bossi, 1996, p. 67).

The LN continued to sustain the government for few more months but, at the first opportunity, in autumn 1994, it announced the withdrawal of its support. The break-up of the right-wing alliance produced a split in the parliamentary group of the League and even Roberto Maroni, a prominent figure in the party from its infancy, came very close to leaving (*Repubblica*, 11/02/95). However, Bossi managed to hold the bulk

of the party together. In the speech at the House of Representatives before the no-confidence vote, he tried to distinguish the League, the true party of the “liberal and federalist right”, of the “small and medium entrepreneurial bourgeoisie” and “of the self-employed”, from the former government partners, labelled as “the fascist fringe” and the “paternalist and monopolist right” (Bossi, 21/12/94, reported in Bossi, 1996, p. 86-89). His strategy consisted of attempting to detach the small and medium bourgeoisie from FI and AN in order to form a liberal, right of centre pole under the League’s leadership. This was very evident in his speech to the House of Representatives before the confidence vote for the Dini government, which with the support of League and of the left was going to replace Berlusconi’s, and it was evident too that Bossi deemed crucial to limit Berlusconi’s media power if this strategy had to be successful:

The League has opposed this [i.e. Berlusconi’s and Fini’s] anti-democratic project, demanding reforms and the abolition of the monopoly on information, demanding the birth of a liberal-democratic pole which, alternating with a social-democratic one and excluding the extreme wings, could ensure democracy and reformism against these sorcerer’s apprentices of neo-fascism: as all over the world Mr. Fini and Mr. Berlusconi are defined as such... But there is a real danger, dear colleagues: many, too many, small entrepreneurs and artisans, self-employed and citizens believe this [i.e. Berlusconi’s] propaganda. (Bossi, 24/01/95, reported in Bossi, 1996, p. 92-93).

It emerges very clearly from Bossi’s words that, at that stage, the LN’s leader was most concerned about competition with FI over well defined socio-economic constituencies, rather than competition with AN over xenophobic voters.

At the same time as Bossi planned the secessionist turn, therefore, he also prepared the party to run alone at the next election as a centre pole in competition with both the left and right. The reconciliation of the party’s centre-right (or liberal right) ideology with the positioning at the centre of the party system can be best understood by, again, looking at Bossi’s speeches:

The League, actually, is clearly entrenched in the bourgeois structure. Therefore, we have got the vote of those people who have always thought that they could best protect their interests with the right, if right means free-market... The League, a force of the centre, represents those modern moderate strata that now do not have a pole to refer to. They are dividing up between the right pole and the social-democratic pole because of the absence of a centre pole. This is a danger because the moderate strata vote much more for the right than for the left... We cannot pretend to ignore that a stable alliance of us with Fini and Berlusconi would be dangerous, because it would drag the middle class, which the League represents, to unite itself with monopolism, thus creating the conditions for a second fascism. (Bossi, 12/02/95, reported in Bossi, 1996, p. 105).

The strategy was, therefore, set: the secessionist turn and the occupation of the political centre ground went hand to hand. Repositioning towards the centre was not such a difficult task even if the party retained its clear right-of-centre socio-economic and socio-cultural stances. Indeed, the voting down of the Berlusconi government, the break-up of the right-wing coalition and the support for a new government with the left were enough to project the image of a leftward moving party. In fact, Bossi even had to reassure its party members that, in contrast to what Berlusconi's propaganda wanted them to believe, "[d]ear friends, the League does not go to the left" (ibid.). In addition the 1996 party manifesto was rather prudent on issues concerning immigration. Although the party continued to demand more control, it did not indulge in its usual xenophobic rhetoric and the short paragraph dedicated to the issue was titled "Immigration – The Northern League is not racist" (*Lega Nord*, Manifesto 1996, p. 6).

The campaign for the 1996 election was, therefore, fought from a secessionist and centre position against what Bossi called the two 'Roman', centralising poles – *Roma-Polo* and *Roma-Ulivo*. The gamble was only partially successful. The party obtained its best score ever in terms of votes but, since the centre-left coalition won a majority in parliament, it condemned itself to quasi-irrelevance as far as office and policies were concerned.

The new situation soon became unsustainable for the League for a series of reasons. First, it drew accusations from FI and AN that LN had not only caused the fall of their government back in 1994 but had also, by subtracting them crucial votes, favoured the victory of the centre-left. Second, these accusations became particularly painful as the centre-left government, in a desperate attempt to heal public finances and to be able to join the European Monetary Union (EMU), started to raise taxes and to tackle tax evasion, a source of strong discontentment among those socio-economic constituencies which the LN was trying to retain in the face of FI's competition. Third, the centre-left government set up a 'bi-cameral' commission (i.e. with MPs from both the House and the Senate) to consider constitutional reform, including federalism. For the League, this was a threat to its 'issue ownership'. Fourth, the centre-left government adopted a new law for the regulation of immigration flows and the integration of foreigners which not only provided a general regularization and increased the possibility for legal entry but also called for a revision of the Constitution with the intent of enfranchising foreign long-term residents with the right to vote (and to stand as

candidates) in local and regional elections (Masseti, 1999). Finally, all these developments were occurring in a context of increased polarization between the left government and the right opposition, which made the centre positioning of the LN untenable. As a consequence, the party started to suffer electoral setbacks, such as the one it experienced at the 1997 local elections (Ruzza, 2006, p. 224). It also experienced growing internal dissent. Bossi's 'iron fist' generated expulsions and voluntary walk-outs, like the one by the pro-Berlusconi faction led by Comino (leader of the Piedmont's regional section). Opinion polls conducted in late 1997 showed that about a quarter of the LN's voters intended to vote FI at the next general election and a majority of them wanted the party to re-join forces with FI (*Corriere della Sera*, 15/12/97, cited in Chari *et al.*, 2004, p. 445). It was time, once again, for the party leadership to work out an 'exit strategy'.

### **5.2.3 From the centre to the radical right (1999-2009)**

The assault of the LN on the centre-left's new immigration law in 1998 signalled the beginning of a new re-positioning. After the negative results of the 1999 European election, the League pursued a strategy of rapprochement with Berlusconi and his right-wing coalition. At the end of the year, Bossi gave his consent to a new alliance (*Repubblica*, 09/12/99), which was tried out at the 2000 regional elections. Although the League continued to lose votes (see Table 5.1), the new centre-right alliance won control not only of Lombardy and Veneto but also Liguria and Piedmont. The following year the House of Freedoms - the name given to the new alliance - won the general election and, with Berlusconi as PM, formed a new government. The electoral performance of the League was extremely poor, just 3.9 percent nationally, which meant that the party gained representation in parliament only because of the agreement in FPTP constituencies with the other partners. Yet, the governing influence of the LN was not small: it obtained three important ministries - Justice (Castelli), Welfare (Maroni) and Constitutional Reforms and Devolution (Bossi and then Calderoli). More importantly, within the government coalition a privileged relationship between Bossi and Berlusconi was established, whereby Berlusconi committed himself to delivering devolution and to providing benevolent media coverage for Bossi's and other LN politicians' 'politically incorrect' (often xenophobic) public outbursts, while Bossi committed himself to backing any legislation (mainly concerning justice and media) directly related to the (conflict of) interests of the PM (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005,

p. 956). This bilateral pact was also based on the fact that the two parties shared the same socio-economic constituencies and, therefore, a very similar orientation on socio-economic policies. The economy minister Giulio Tremonti, a member of FI very well connected amongst the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie of the north and a staunch advocate of fiscal federalism, was the embodiment of the Bossi-Berlusconi axis. He was the cheerleader for the revenge of 'productive Italy' against the burden of taxes and for protectionism against 'unfair competition' from China.

Having secured a favourable governmental approach on economic policies, the League could focus on its preferred policy areas. Beside devolution, immigration and criminality – which in the discourse of the LN are nearly the same issue – became once again the flagship policy themes of the party. This new strategy led the League to become a classic example of populist radical right party and, after the 2008 general election, the most right-wing party in the Italian parliament (Massetti, 2009a). For the League turning from a party of opposition to a party of government was far from simple. Addressing its new allies (AN's leaders in particular) at the 2002 Congress, Bossi declared "...it is difficult to transform from a political movement of warriors, of people who cannot even remember how many sentences they have received". This difficulty was, however, overcome by launching their populist attacks on alternative targets to central government, such as immigrants, Islam, globalization and the European Union. The ability to maintain 'one foot in and one foot out' of government (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005), which allowed the party to retain its populist rhetoric, was primarily based on a communication strategy aimed at drawing public attention towards highly symbolic and emotive political battles and to drag attention away from the distance between party's declared objectives and actual outcomes (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2009). This style has been labelled 'simulative politics' (Cento Bull, 2009).

Before discussing the party's proposals and discourse, it is worth analysing the changes in the party's electorate through time. Table 5.6 shows the socio-economic profile of the League's voters. It is not easy to infer much about the party's left-right positioning from this data, especially in view of the fact that in the LN's electoral strongholds the correlation between workers and the political left does not hold and because the peculiar achievement of populist radical right parties is to attract workers to the right (Pelinka, 2005, p. 140). Yet, the growth in support from employees and teachers in 1996, a social constituency usually associated with the left, would appear to confirm the more centrist positioning of the party in that period.



**Table 5.6 Socio-economic profile of the LN's electorate (1991-2008)**

<i>Profession</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2008</i>
Entrepr., Manag., Profes.	14.0	15.8	12.4	12.0	4.4	13.5
Employees, Teachers	13.3	16.0	18.8	10.1	8.2	10.9
Artisans, traders, farmers	24.0	26.5	23.9	7.6	16.8	21.7
Workers	16.6	21.4	31.2	10.7	9.2	19.8
Unemployed	11.2	14.2	17.3	5.9	8.1	15.5
Total North	14.1	16.9	19.8	8.2	8.5	17.2

Source: opinion polls by Eurisko, Cirm, Abacus and Doxa. Reported in Biorcio (2008, p. 65).

The table also shows that artisans, traders and farmers have consistently represented the League's most important constituency except in 1996, when they were outnumbered by the workers, and in 2001 when most of them preferred to vote FI and wanted to punish the LN for exposing them to five years of centre-left fiscal policies.

Table 5.7, however, provides much more helpful data concerning the self-placement of the party's voters. The 1996 data clearly stand out for the balance in the left-right distribution of voters and for the fact that the single biggest group was constituted by those who placed themselves in centre. The voters placing themselves on the centre-right have always been a plurality except in 1996 and in 2009, when they were the second biggest after those placing themselves in no category. The disappearance of voters placing themselves to the left from 2001 and to the centre-left from 2006 clearly appears to confirm the party's ideological trajectory to the right.

**Table 5.7 Self-placement along the left-right dimension of the LN's voters**

	<i>1991</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2008</i>
Left	6.7	3.3	6.0	0.0	0.0	0.7
Centre-left	11.2	7.5	16.1	1.6	0.0	0.8
Centre	14.1	13.8	28.7	6.9	6.0	11.8
Centre-right	22.5	32.6	18.2	17.3	19.6	30.0
Right	22.2	28.1	8.1	11.4	19.9	22.8
No position	20.4	23.0	27.9	9.0	11.0	32.5
Total North	14.1	16.9	19.8	8.2	8.5	17.2

Source: opinion polls by Eurisko, Cirm, Abacus and Doxa. Reported in Biorcio (2008, p. 66).

The rightward repositioning of the League started in the late 1990s. Already in 1999 the LN had organized the gathering of signatures supporting a referendum against the centre-left immigration law. On that occasion the LN had co-operated with *Forza Nuova* (FN), an extra-parliamentary and extreme-right movement linked to the French *Front National* (*Repubblica*, 19/02/99). The change of tone and emphasis on immigration after the mid-1990s can be also detected by comparing the 2001 manifesto with the 1996 one. While in 1996 the chapter on immigration was short, prudent and titled “Immigration – The Northern League is not racist” (*Lega Nord*, 1996, General Election Manifesto, p. 6), the chapter on the 2001 manifesto<sup>85</sup> was much longer, it denigrated not only irregular but also regular immigrants and was simply titled “Clandestines” (*Lega Nord*, 2001, Ragionamenti per la campagna elettorale, p. 2).

Ownership over issues related to immigration and law and order remained contested between the LN and AN until 2002. In that year both leaders wanted to put their signature on the tough new immigration law which had been passed by the centre-right coalition and which was, indeed, labelled the ‘Bossi-Fini law’ (Geddes, 2008). However, with the launch of the proposal for the enfranchisement of regular immigrants for local and regional elections by Fini in 2003 (*Repubblica*, 08/10/03), the xenophobic and anti-immigrant ground was left entirely to the League which kept marking its thematic territory continuously. Beyond remaining the only openly xenophobic parliamentary party, the LN also established itself as the most important islamophobic actor in Italy. Two figures in the party played a major role in this respect, Roberto Calderoli and Mario Borghezio. The former, who was a minister at the time, revealed on a TV programme that he was wearing a t-shirt bearing the images of the so called ‘anti-Islamic cartoons’ which had been published by a Danish newspaper few months earlier. The move caused furious reactions in Islamic countries, especially in Libya where the Italian embassy was attacked (*Corriere della Sera*, 19/02/06). The following year he went on to declare that he would bring a pig to a site in Bologna which had been chosen for building a mosque “[e]xactly as I did in Lodi, where the mosque was not built anymore because the site was considered impure” (*Repubblica*, 14/09/07). In addition to Islamophobia, Calderoli was also one of the LN’s politicians who talked most about law and order. For instance, he launched proposals for the re-introduction of death penalty,

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<sup>85</sup> Strictly speaking, the official manifesto for 2001 was a different document drafted together with the other parties of the House of Freedoms. However, the LN also drafted an independent document called “Resolutions for the electoral campaign” and dated April 2001 (the month in which the election took place). That is the document to which I refer.

for the introduction of ‘head-money’ on criminals and the introduction of chemical castration for rapists (*Repubblica*, 14/03/05; *Repubblica*, 22/06/05).

Borghezio could be defined as the party’s man within the European extreme or radical right network. He has been an MEP since 2001, having been re-elected in 2004 and 2009. Beside having been condemned for setting fire to the personal belongings of some illegal and homeless immigrants who had settled themselves under a bridge (*La Stampa*, 02/07/05), he has led several campaigns throughout central and northern Italy against the building of mosques. In 2007 he was arrested together with Franz van Hecke and Filip Dewinter of the *Vlaams Belang* (VB) by the Belgian police for staging an unauthorized anti-Islam demonstration near to the European Parliament (*Corriere della Sera*, 12/11/07). In 2008 he participated, together with representatives of the VB and of the FPÖ, in an anti-Islam rally organized by an extreme-right local movement in Cologne (*The Local*, 18/09/08). In 2009, he was caught on camera while advising a group of French neo-fascists that infiltrated the main centre-right party *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP) (*Repubblica*, 28/03/09). In the recorded video Borghezio suggests his hosts refrain from the temptation to openly declare themselves as fascists, to emphasize regional identities or religious Catholic traditions instead, and to start by capturing local governments before getting “there where we want to arrive” (ibid.) – a strategy remarkably similar to the development of the philosophical work by the main European ideologue of the New Right, Alain De Benoist (Luverà, 1999; Spektorowski, 2003).

While these incidents and the behaviour of individual, though prominent, figures could be dismissed as not representing the actual and official position of the League,<sup>86</sup> the party’s activities and proposals at all levels of government seem to confirm the characterization of the LN as an example of a populist radical right party. Indeed, the party proposals put forward in the run up to the 2008 general elections included: islamic religious celebration to be hold exclusively in Italian (presumably to facilitate monitoring by intelligence services), compulsory local referendums on giving the ‘green light’ to build new mosques, a total ban on the construction of camps (even regular ones) for the Roma, and the granting to mayors of new powers to deport illegal immigrants (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2009, p. 13). Although most of these proposals were not

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<sup>86</sup> For instance, the participation of Borghezio in the anti-Islam rally in Cologne was criticized by Bossi: “You cannot accept all invitations. I am a liberal leader so I leave the party members the freedom to reason with their own heads, but I would not have gone there” (*Repubblica*, 21/09/08).

and could not be passed, given their evidently unconstitutional nature, in 2009 the League managed to push through a ‘security package’ which, amongst other provisions, introduced the offence of ‘clandestine immigration’<sup>87</sup> and obliged medical staff to denounce to the authorities any illegal residents who received medical treatment in hospitals. Ironically enough, the new offence has created some panic amongst the many Italian families who (irregularly) employ illegal immigrants as domestic workers, which has provided an opportunity for the Catholic establishment and charities to advocate and push through a new regularization.<sup>88</sup> In addition to the new offence, the League’s Interior Minister Maroni has started since the early spring of 2009 to reject boats overcrowded with asylum seekers and send them back to other shores of the Mediterranean.

These policies have created tensions with the EU, the UN and with the Italian Catholic establishment (*Corriere della Sera*, 07/07/09; *Repubblica*, 20/07/09; *Repubblica*, 15/07/09). In fact, the relationship between the LN and the Catholic Church has never been an easy one. The League’s ethnic-regionalism, the secessionist turn in the mid-1990s and, even more, its xenophobic positions have never met with approval from the Church. On the other hand, for the same reasons, the League has often manifested anti-Christian sentiments and has stigmatised the hypocrisy of the Catholic establishment regarding certain issues (“illegal immigrants are not allowed in the Vatican state”). Yet, the League has found itself on the same side as the Catholic Church on several political disputes, such as public funding of private (Catholic) schools, opposition to same-sex marriages, opposition to civil unions, and inclusion of a reference to the ‘Christian roots’ of Europe in the EU Constitution. More generally, the League uses religion (and therefore Roman Catholicism) instrumentally as a reference to tradition and as an ‘identity provider’ often in opposition to other ‘alien’ religious identities, primarily Islam. Not surprisingly the party, though defining itself as ‘traditionalist Catholic’, enjoys very good and close relationships with the ultra-traditionalist Brotherhood of Pius X founded by the schismatic bishop Marcel Lefebvre (*Repubblica*, 10/09/07).

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<sup>87</sup> Curiously enough the LN’s 2001 manifesto stated: “[c]reating the offence of clandestine immigration means, therefore, making expulsion more complicated” (*Lega Nord*, Ragionamenti per la campagna elettorale, 2001, p. 25).

<sup>88</sup> A very similar process occurred on the occasion of the first immigration law adopted by the centre-right coalition in 2002. After the introduction of tough measures a huge regularization was carried out (*Repubblica*, 05/07/02).

Given the maintenance of a populist rhetoric and the adoption of the above-mentioned positions on issues of immigration and law and order, it is not surprising that in recent studies the LN has been included, more or less fully, in the populist radical right party family (Mudde, 2007; Norris, 2005, Zaslove, 2008). This is in contrast to previous research conducted in the early/mid 1990s, which had concluded that party was an anti-statist populist but not a radical right one (Kitschelt, 1995). Indeed, the LN still maintains some peculiarities of the anti-statist parties. For instance, as far security is concerned most radical right parties rely on police (i.e. on the state), whereas the League has won a political battle to introduce the so called *ronde*, i.e. locally organized groups of vigilantes who, theoretically, co-operate with the police in patrolling the streets. Yet, leaving aside minor differences, in the last ten years the message of the party on identity, security, immigration and globalization has been very similar to those of the other radical right parties. Mudde argues, that the core concerns of these parties do not refer to the socio-economic domain but to the socio-cultural or spiritual one (Mudde, 2007, p. 119-37). In the case of the League, this has certainly not always been the case as far as actual concerns are considered: “Dear friends, Padania was born out of a real clash against Italy, and real means for the control over economy” (Bossi, speech at the *Congresso Federale*, 29/03/98). The right to cultural difference claimed by the party has often served the objective of maintaining economic growth and wealth of the north. Yet, at a rhetorical level, the party has always emphasised the spiritual dimension:

man is not like a beefsteak... to live, he needs to actualize his own affectivity, and therefore he needs a whole set of things that do not stay in the economic domain, but in the domain of ethics, culture and religion. To tell the truth, some simplistic little men think that a global government can prevent any conflict... Without the re-conquest of cultural and religious diversity, which is at the basis of men and peoples, it will not be possible to reach peace. (Bossi, 04/05/96, reported in Bossi, 1996, p. 142).

### **5.3 Party ideology and policy: The European integration dimension**

#### **5.3.1 From conditioned support to Europhilia (1980s-1997)**

The European dimension, as for many other regionalist parties, has been very important for the LN. The meeting between Bossi and Salvadori in 1979, which converted the future leader of the LN to the ideas of ‘integral federalism’, occurred during a tour that Salvadori was undertaking in order to unite regionalist movements into a common list for the European election of that year (Stevenin, 2008, p. 65-67).

Ten years later, it was the 1989 European election which gave momentum to the project, now led by Bossi, to unite and then federate the diverse regional leagues (Tarchi, 1998, p. 143-44).

During the 1980s the various Leagues' references to Europe were frequent and overall leaned towards a positive (i.e. supportive) attitude. In the original programme of the Lombard League, the party was in favour of “the construction of a Europe founded on autonomy, federalism, respect and direct solidarity amongst the peoples of the continent and, therefore, between the Lombards and any other people” (*Lega Lombarda*, 1983, in *La Lega Nord attraverso I manifesti*, 1996). Yet, as this spells out, support for European integration was conditioned on the construction of a particular kind of Europe. An electoral poster of the alliance between the Lombard and Venetian League for the 1984 European election was even more explicit: “A united Europe was pursued by Napoleon and Hitler too. An autonomist Europe, which respects the peoples and their needs, is pursued by the democratic people” (*Unione per L'Europa Federalista*, 1984, in *La Lega Nord attraverso I manifesti*, 1996). Electoral posters, the most important medium of communication of the party before the 1992 electoral breakthrough, kept sending the same ambiguous message during the 1989 European election. On the one hand, Europe and ‘being European’ was seen as a legitimization. One poster stated: “Lombardy has been European since the beginning of time” (*Lega Lombarda*, 1989, in *La Lega Nord attraverso I manifesti*, 1996). In addition, European integration was seen as a process that would weaken member-states and empower the regions. Moreover, it represented an alternative source of power and policies which better suited party's preferences (Piermattei, 2008). Another poster stated: “Further from Rome, closer to Europe” (*Alleanza Nord*, 1989 in *La Lega Nord attraverso I manifesti*, 1996). However, as in the previous European elections, the direction Europe should take was set out boldly, albeit ambiguously: “Europe of civilization. Not Europe of big business' lobbies, but Europe of small and medium enterprises and artisans. NO! to Europe of immigration, social disaggregation and drugs. YES! to Europe that moves capital and not workers” (*Lega Lombarda – Alleanza Nord*, 1989, in *La Lega Nord attraverso I manifesti*, 1996).

The turn to a more convinced pro-European integration stance occurred during the early 1990s, when the party tried to portray itself as a new centre-right party which would replace the old parties. In 1993 the LN voted for the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty and expressed its concerns that Italy should do its best to meet the criteria for

monetary union (Quaglia, 2003, p. 15). In the party's manifesto for the 1994 election, one can read that the League said "‘yes’ to the European union, both political and economic, which is being carried out following the Maastricht Treaty... This choice imposes on the country [Italy] a credible and consistent pro-European policy, inspired by liberalism and federalism and by the rigorous respect for European commitments" (Lega Nord, 1994a, General Election Manifesto, p. 19). The 1994 European election poster went as far as to state that "the League is the only party that wants Europe" (*Lega Nord*, 1994b, in *La Lega Nord attraverso I manifesti*, 1996). During the first participation in office, indeed, the League was the most pro-European party amongst the three major partners of the right-wing coalition and obtained the Ministry for EC Affairs (Quaglia, 2003, p. 15).

However, it was during the years of the secessionist turn that the League reached its pro-integration peak. In 1996 the LN even re-applied, though unsuccessfully, for membership of the European Free Alliance (EFA) group. In that period the League was strongly in favour of integration in agriculture, competition, trade, monetary policy and, more generally, the economy (Chari *et al.*, 2004, p. 427-28). It even saw in the EU a protection against a possible authoritarian intervention of the Italian state against the secessionist party: "I don't believe they can think of using authoritarianism because Europe would not allow that" (Bossi, reported in *Repubblica*, 13/09/97). From an *ex post* perspective, this nearly unconditional support can be interpreted as mainly instrumental. The EU was used as a framework to make the secessionist project more feasible and, therefore, more credible: "the Northern League considers Europe as the primary framework of our political action. The unitary state, self-proclaimed as 'national', constitutes an institution which belongs ever more to the past." (*Lega Nord*, Manifesto 1996, p. 31). For the following 1996 Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC), the party proposed to revise the Treaty introducing, amongst other provisions, the right to self-determination of all peoples, within and outside the EU; the principle of local autonomy; protection and promotion of all linguistic and cultural identities, starting from the least diffuse and most threatened; a new formulation of the principle of subsidiarity which explicitly addressed the local and regional levels; more powers to the Committee of the Regions; and acknowledgement of the economic and social role of businesses employing less than 20 people, as these suffer from their inclusion in the much wider category 'small and medium enterprises' (*Lega Nord*, 1996, General Election Manifesto, p. 31-32).

The League went even further than simply using the EU framework as a shell for its would-be new Padanian state; it tried to use the EMU process to justify the break-up of Italy into two states: north and south. This attempt was based on the anticipation that Italy as a whole would not qualify for EMU, while Padania, freed from the burden of the centralist state, would. With two years to go until the launch of the monetary union (EMU), that was a bold gamble.

This strategy was implicit in the 1996 manifesto. The paragraph entitled “Padania and Europe: the ‘paradox of Padania’” goes:

It is vital to avoid the exclusion of Padania from the institutionalization of a ‘solid nucleus’ to which she is intimately linked, and within which she could lead in terms of GDP per capita... The so called ‘Europe of variable geometry’ is in the nature and history of European integration, but it cannot be rigidly based on the member-states” (*Lega Nord*, Manifesto 1996, p. 31).

In September 1996, Bossi even wrote a letter to the European Commission enquiring whether it would be possible for Padania to join EMU (Quaglia, 2003, p. 16). As late as November 1997, the League was still very keen in having Padania within the EMU zone. Giancarlo Pagliarini, the party's then economic spokesman, said in an interview with *The Economist* that: “[s]plitting Italy into two countries would be good for the north and good for the south” (*Economist*, 06/11/97). He went on to claim: “Padania would comfortably qualify for membership of EMU, which is what its firms want. The rest of Italy – which can keep the name – could make itself more competitive by devaluing the lira” (ibid.).

### **5.3.2 The U-turn: from pro-integration to Euroscepticism (1998-2009)**

In spite of the pro-European and pro-EMU messages sent by prominent figures up the end of 1997, after March 1998 the party adopted a clear anti-European position:

...this is a Europe that we like less and less. The idea born in the aftermath of the war - to prevent further wars amongst European states – is now generating a monster which will produce neither democracy, nor stability, nor economic advantages for everyone. Padania is not interested in a Europe which will be full of instability and which destroys our small and medium enterprises that, differently from other countries, constitute the backbone of our economy. Therefore, if Europe does not recognise Padania, Padania cannot recognise itself in Europe. (Bossi, speech to the Congresso Federale, 28/03/98)



The reasons behind this U-turn are various. Chari *et al.* have argued that the main driver was the intention to get closer to FI's cool stance towards Europe, in the hope of recreating a new centre-right alliance for the forthcoming general election (Chari, *et al.*, 2004). Certainly, it is true that Berlusconi was very keen on denigrating EMU because it represented a success of the centre-left Italian government and of a centre-left led Europe (Quaglia, 2003, p. 20). In addition, he also had personal problems with integration in the field of justice and police investigations, in particular with the common arrest warrant: once back in office in 2001, the LN's Minister of Justice Roberto Castelli assumed the duty, rather costly in terms of popularity (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005), to protect the PM's (conflict of) interest on justice, which included strong opposition to the European common arrest warrant. Yet, the thesis proposed by Chari *et al.* leaves some questions unanswered, or unconvincingly answered. For instance, why did the League not limit itself to approaching FI's stance, rather than becoming *more* Eurosceptic than FI itself? The authors argue that, as a party inspired by the principle of 'make or break', the League, once it abandoned the pro-European stance, easily slipped towards a radical Eurosceptic position (*ibid*, p. 448). While this is a reasonable interpretation, the point is that they appear to have missed the most evident, though not necessarily single, explanation.

In early 1998 Italy qualified to join the EMU. This possible outcome had already been anticipated as a negative scenario for Padania by Bossi in 1996:

... the Padanian manufacturing system, although it is the most productive in Western Europe, needs the continuous devaluation of the lira in order to sell its products, because of the Roman burden... if devaluation of the currency is no longer possible, which would be the case with the entry into EMU, the Padanian production system would undergo a devastating crisis, as the costs of the nanny state [*assistenzialismo*] would lead to the failure of northern firms in favour of southern ones (Bossi, speech in Pontida, 02/06/96).

At the basis of the U-turn there was, therefore, the failure of a gambling strategy which had led the party to bet everything on the exclusion of Italy from EMU. Amongst the three scenarios envisaged by the party – Padania included and south excluded; Italy as a whole excluded; Italy as a whole included – it was the latter, deemed by the party to be the worst one, that materialized. The economic arguments reported above, which had remained very much under the surface until the end of 1997, became the dominant ones after March 1998, with criticism towards the EU focusing predominantly on the negative consequences of EMU and its convergence criteria (Bossi, speech at the

*Congresso Federale*, 28/03/98). In this respect, criticism of EMU and European trade policies came to be increasingly linked to globalization, especially in terms of growing ‘unfair’ competition by China and other emerging economies.

However, as Bossi admitted a few years later, the disappointment of the League with the fact the Italy managed to join the EMU also owed much to the realization that the project of extracting Padania from Italy became much more difficult (Bossi, speech at the *Congresso Federale*, 03/03/02). Already in 2000, the leader had spoken against a “Europe of subsidiarity”, as the latter concept was actually “a trick to maintain only one level of sovereignty: yesterday, the state; today, the state and Europe; tomorrow, only Europe” (Bossi, speech at Pontida, 04/06/00).

As noted by Albertazzi and McDonnell, the Eurosceptic turn also owed something to the populist nature of the League (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005). This was especially the case after the party returned to national office in 2001 and, as a result, it had to stop or limit its criticism of the ‘corrupted palaces’ of Roman politics. To be sure, the party did not stop its attacks on its more centralist and southern-oriented government partners (UDC and AN) completely. However, the EU, with its arcane, distant and bureaucratic government, represented the ideal substitute to keep expressing anti-establishment discourses. Using his typically colourful language, Bossi kept attacking Europe by referring to “European technocrats and paedophiles” (*Economist*, 12/05/01, cited in Quaglia, 2003, p. 17), and labelling the EU as “a Super-State without a face, the Soviet Union of the West” (Bossi, Speech at the *Congresso Federale*, 03/03/02), or “a nest of freemasons and Communist bankers” (*Financial Times*, 07/07/01, cited in Quaglia, 2003, p. 17).

The increasing Euroscepticism of the LN developed parallel to the party’s move towards radical right positions. The LN’s increasingly nativist, anti-immigrant and anti-Islam ideological orientation clashed blatantly with the EU’s emphasis on individual rights and liberal cosmopolitanism. Criticising the EU’s policies on immigration gives the party the opportunity to attack both the EU and immigration:

no power on immigration should be given to Europe because the keys of our house’s door have to remain in our own hands. The only useful thing Prodi [the then President of the European Commission] can do is to contribute paying the costs for sending immigrants back, thus giving us back some of the money that Europe has taken away from us (Bossi, speech in Pontida, 04/05/03)

The League's opposition to European integration has taken, as has often happened with this party, the shape of 'virtual' or 'symbolic' politics. Having called for a referendum for the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, which was not required by the Italian Constitution, having voted 'No' to Italian ratification both within the cabinet and in parliament (*Corriere della Sera*, 29/10/04), and in the wake of the failed ratifications of the European Constitution in France and Holland, the party launched the idea of an unlikely referendum on dropping the Euro and return to the Lira.

Given the traditional pro-European attitudes of Italian public opinion, the strategy of the party looks, at first sight, rather risky from an electoral point of view. However, as Table 5.8 shows, during the first years of the euro (1999-2004) the share of those who held negative views on Italian membership or thought that integration had gone too far doubled.

**Table 5.8 Opinions of Italian voters about EU membership (1999-2004)**

	1999	2004
Italian membership of the EU is:		
Good	65.5	54.8
Bad	4.2	8.1
Neither good nor bad	17.2	27.4
Don't know	13.1	9.7
European integration:		
Has gone too far	10.2	22.1
Should remain as it is	27.4	26.5
Should go further	39.6	36.2
Don't know	22.8	15.3
No. of interviewees	3,707	1,553

Source: Biorcio (2005, p. 11).

In contrast, the share of those who thought that Italian membership was a good thing decreased considerably. Changes in attitude towards integration have followed an interesting development in relationship to voters' position on the left-right dimension. As Table 5.9 shows, while in 1999 left and centre-left voters were less supportive than right and centre-right ones, in 2004 the situation had completely reversed: centre-right voters had become as sceptical about further integration as their centrist counterparts (the most eurosceptic group); right-wing voters were less sceptical but it was the left and centre-left voters that had become the most supportive.

**Table 5.9 Italian voters' self-placement on the left-right scale and opinions about European integration (1999-2004)**

	<i>European integration should go further</i>	
	<i>1999</i>	<i>2004</i>
<i>All</i>	39.6	36.2
<i>Left</i>	42.1	45.9
<i>Centre-left</i>	50.3	49.1
<i>Centre</i>	37.5	32.0
<i>Centre-right</i>	55.7	33.6
<i>Right</i>	60.9	39.7
<i>Don't know</i>	18.9	24.0

Source: Biorcio (2005, p. 15).

As the League has harvested its votes almost exclusively from centre, centre-right and right-wing voters since 2001 (see Table, 5.7), the party has either followed the preferences of most of its voters or, more likely, has dragged many of them towards its anti-European stance. In any case the U-turn does not look like it has been harmful from an electoral point of view. On the contrary, it has established the LN as the only explicitly anti-European party in the Italian party system, thus providing another (beside anti-immigration and law and order) competition-free hunting ground. Table 5.10 confirms this interpretation. The LN's voters are the least supportive of Italian membership of the EU, the least trustful of EU decisions and, by far, the least supportive of further integration.

#### **5.10 Voting intention and opinions on European integration, 2004**

<i>party</i>	Italian membership of the EU is good	European integration should go further	EU decisions are in Italy's interest
RC	68.8	39.8	48.8
Greens	62.0	50.5	49.5
DS	73.2	53.2	67.2
Mar	80.4	46.2	54.0
IdV	73.6	31.6	37.6
UDC	64.6	41.0	56.7
<b>LN</b>	<b>47.7</b>	<b>26.3</b>	<b>34.6</b>
FI	49.9	33.1	45.3
AN	55.9	36.5	31.8
<b>All</b>	<b>54.8</b>	<b>36.2</b>	<b>39.6</b>

Source: Biorcio (2005, p. 17).

Surprisingly, the LN voted in favour of the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in 2008. However, this episode does not indicate a new shift in the party's position. It should rather be interpreted as a case of 'Europragmatism' dictated by the requirements of governmental responsibility. Before returning to office in spring 2008 the party had been outspoken against the Treaty. Even after the election Calderoli kept calling for a referendum for the ratification of the Treaty (*Corriere della Sera*, 30/05/08). In addition, after the Irish 'No' in their own referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, Calderoli and Bossi showed their happiness at this outcome, and the party organized a celebration in Milan with Guinness and Irish flags (*Repubblica*, 15/06/08). It took an explicit 'order' by Bossi to make the LN MPs vote in favour of ratification just a few days later: "they vote as I tell them to vote; if I say vote yes, everyone votes yes!" (*Corriere della Sera*, 19/06/08). As expected, the LN campaign in the European elections of 2009 confirmed that the party position had not changed. Criticism of Europe reflects the party's unease with the restricted power left to the regions but, most prominently, it reflects faithfully the populist radical right position of the League:

In Europe there are sane forces, tenaciously committed to the defence of peoples' identity, of territory, of agricultural products of our land, of cultural and historical legacy, of our languages and dialects... Sane forces like the Northern League, always committed to the struggle against the rule-less extra-communitarian invasion, supported by those who would like a multi-ethnic society which would delete our history and our future. There is, however, a Europe, the one that the League fights against, which wants to transform the extra-communitarian into a citizen with the same rights but not with the same duties... The Europe we fight against and that we do not want is that which prefers mosques to cathedrals, which opens the door to Islam and takes away the crosses from the walls. (Lega Nord, leaflet for the European election, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

Due to the exceptional power of the unquestioned founder-leader Bossi, the LN has been able to adapt its ideology and policy positions often and quickly.

As far as the centre-periphery dimension is concerned, the individual leagues, and the Liga Veneta in particular, started as ethno-cultural movements calling for a special statute of autonomy. In the second half of the 1980s, Bossi's Lombard League started to propose a more economic-centred regionalism calling for a federalist reform based on the existing regions. With the formation of the LN in late 1989 the party seemed inclined to take a radical path. However, new opportunities opened up by the crisis of traditional parties convinced Bossi to stick with federalist demands. The new

proposal was to divide Italy in three macro-regions: north, centre and south. The final collapse of the traditional parties in 1993 even led the party to attempt to expand into southern Italy as the League of Federal Italy. With Berlusconi's entry into politics and the approval of a mainly majoritarian voting system, the context changed significantly. After a failed attempt to govern together with FI and AN in 1994, during which the LN had re-proposed a more acceptable federalist reform based on the regions, the League voted the government down and broke up the coalition. It then moved to a secessionist position which it maintained until 1998, when it began a rapprochement with Berlusconi and the centre-right. Since then the League has pursued a federalist reform based on the existing regions which pushed forward the reform passed by the centre-left in 2001. Since 2007 the strategy of the party has been to build on that reform in order to achieve 'fiscal federalism', postponing the achievement of 'institutional federalism' to a later stage, most likely by the end of the current parliamentary term. Yet, very recently Bossi has re-deployed an independentist and secessionist discourse. Whether this prefigures a new policy shift is hard to say at this stage.

In terms of left-right positioning, the League has emerged as a centre-right right party seeking to carry out a neo-Thatcherite revolution. Its approach to internal economic policies has hardly changed, although the party has moved from supporting free trade to protectionism in the international context. It has mainly absorbed votes from the DC's electorate of the 'deep north' who deemed their traditional party to be corrupt, inefficient and too oriented towards the protection of southern interests. The mainly majoritarian voting system adopted in 1993 pushed the LN to form a coalition with right-wing parties FI and MSI-AN in 1994. With the break-up of the coalition, the secessionist turn and the decision to run alone in the 1996 general election (thereby exposing itself to the majoritarian logic of the voting system) the League repositioned itself as the party of the centre in the bi-polarizing party system. However, the failure to exert any leverage on the process of government formation after the election and the enduring polarization between the two main blocs forced the LN to reconsider its strategy and, eventually, led it back to the centre-right coalition. Throughout its history the party has been characterized by its populist rhetoric, mainly directed against the established parties and economic and financial elites. Once back with the centre-right coalition, the League established ownership over issues of immigration and law and order. This led the LN to increasingly resemble other populist radical right parties which mobilize against immigrants, Islam, globalization and European integration.

As far as European integration is concerned, before the Eurosceptic turn in 1998, the party had held different positions. During the 1980s the message of the leagues had been rather ambiguous. The intellectual legacy of Salvadori produced an overall supportive stance. Yet, some arguments of anti-big business populism as well as anti-immigrant nativism were already present, albeit not dominant. To be sure, these arguments were never completely abandoned, in spite of the shift towards a more clearly pro-European integration stance which reached its peak in 1996-97, during the secessionist period. The inclusion of Italy in EMU, against which the party had bet, triggered the U-turn which has led the Northern League to a populist radical right critique of the European project and its current direction.

## Chapter 6

### Explaining regionalist parties' positioning in the ideological space

#### 6.1 Comparing the four case-studies and generating hypotheses

The in-depth analysis of the four cases has explored complex relationships between the following: the socio-structural environment; the institutional/political environment; the perception of these environmental conditions by parties' elites - including different perceptions and, therefore, intra-party divisions on their interpretations; strategy setting; and the impact on ideological re-positioning along the three dimensions considered, namely centre-periphery (or level of self-government); left-right; and European integration. The aim of this chapter is to provide some generalizations on regionalist parties' positioning in multi-dimensional ideological space. Evidently, such an objective necessitates some loss of complexity, especially as far as the intermediate level – party elites' perception, intra-party politics and strategy - is concerned. The first step, therefore, is to start with a comparison of the four case-studies and identify the links between external environments (both socio-structural and institutional/political) and ideological positioning.

##### 6.1.1 The centre-periphery dimension

As far as the centre-periphery dimension is concerned, three factors regarding the socio-structural environment appear to play a major role: first, the presence of an ethnic divide between the region and the rest of the state; secondly, the history of state formation, including the timing of the annexation of the region into the state and the historical/institutional legacy of the region; and thirdly, the economic relationship between the region and the state. The importance of the ethnic (linguistic) divide emerged clearly in the case of South Tyrol, where a majority of the regional population speaks a very different language from the official state's and where the initial secessionist stance of the SVP was moderated by the constraints of international relations. It also emerged in the case of the PC in Wales. The Welsh nationalists have consistently done better in Welsh Wales than in English-speaking Wales, and the geography of the referendum results, both in 1979 and in 1997, seems to confirm the relationship between ethnic distinctiveness and preferences for self-government. Yet, the case of Scotland appears to demonstrate that ethnic distinctiveness is not a necessary condition for radical centre-periphery positioning, since the SNP has been the most



consistently secessionist party amongst the four cases, in spite of the absence of substantive ethno-linguistic or ethno-religious differences. In contrast, the Scottish case illustrates the importance of the history and institutions. The institutional legacy of Scottish statehood was to some extent maintained within the UK, contributing to the survival of Scottish identity. Finally, all cases point to the importance of the economic factor. For the LN, this really seems to be most salient factor, as the superior economic status of Padania *vis a vis* Southern Italy has been the main reason for claims of self-government. Economics, however, has been an important factor for all cases. In early 1970s Scotland, the SNP tried to use the issue of North Sea oil to portray the region as (potentially) richer than the rest of the UK and, therefore, better off as an independent state. More often, however, Scotland, like Wales, has been considered as a poor region exploited by London. Yet, while the economic dependence of Scotland and Wales on (economic transfers from) London has worked against the cause of independence, unaccommodated grievances of economic exploitation by Rome reinforce the case for Padanian secession. The hypotheses that can be drawn from the four cases, therefore, are perfectly in line with most of the literature (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Rokkan and Urwin, 1982; 1983; Gourevitch, 1979).

H1: regionalist parties acting in regions with stronger ethnic distinctiveness will adopt more radical centre-periphery positions.

H2: regionalist parties acting in regions with a stronger historical/institutional distinctiveness will adopt more radical centre-periphery positions.

H3: regionalist parties acting in regions with a higher economic status will adopt more radical centre-periphery positions.

As discussed in chapter one, however, regionalist party positioning can also owe something to the institutional/political environment. In particular, following Newman (1997), regionalist parties competing under majoritarian and two party systems face an incentive to radicalize their centre-periphery position, while those competing under PR and multi-party systems can choose whether adopt a moderate or radical position. The analysis of the four cases appears to substantiate Newman's approach to a great extent.

The two British cases, which competed under FPTP and in a two-party system until 1999, have adopted radical positions, though the SNP's has been more explicitly radical than PC's. The LN's trajectory also seems to provide a confirmation. It radicalized its position in 1996, when it competed alone against the two blocs under a predominantly majoritarian system, thus exposing itself to the dynamics of the majoritarian logic. In the PR and multi-party system of post-1992 South Tyrol, in contrast, it is possible to find both secessionist (dF, UfS and S-TF) and autonomist (SVP) parties. The fourth hypothesis concerning centre-periphery positioning is therefore:

H4: in majoritarian and two-party systems we are more likely to find radical regionalist parties, whereas in PR and multi-party systems we are likely to find both radical and moderate regionalist parties.

### **6.1.2 The left-right dimension**

As far as the left-right dimension is concerned, the socio-economic environment appears to play a central role. The two Italian regions, South Tyrol and Padania, can be described as 'bourgeois', characterized by high diffusion of small and medium size enterprises. In some cases, especially in the presence of mass immigration and in periods of economic slowdown, regionalism in these contexts can assume the shape of the 'selfishness of the affluent' (Harvie, 1994). In contrast, the two British cases represent typical example of 'working class' regions, characterized by declining industrial sectors (with consequent high unemployment) and the presence of a (relatively) unionized working class. These socio-structural conditions tend to produce/enhance demands for high public expenditure on welfare policies, often funded by financial transfers from wealthier regions. Moreover, neo-Gramscian analysis, which identifies these regions as exploited 'peripheries' or 'internal colonies' (Salvi, 1973; Hechter, 1975) and which provides a defensible explanation for their relative material poverty and cultural assimilation, has been a powerful ideological tool for regionalist mobilization in these regions. Therefore, regionalist actors looking for electoral success in these socio-economic contexts face strong incentives to develop a leftist ideology and policy platform.

The case-studies, however, have shown how ideological adaptation to the socio-structural environment is not at all automatic: PC and the SNP have sometimes adopted

centrist and even right-leaning positions. Yet, since the 1970s, when they became more systematically focused on electoral politics, they have re-positioned themselves left of centre. The case of South Tyrol also deserves some attention, as until the 1970s its economic status was not higher than the Italian average. Indeed, from the 1940s to the end of the 1960s the region could be best classified as ‘scarcely industrialized’. The right of centre positioning of the SVP in that period owed much to the economic interests of the urban elites in Bozen but also to the traditionalist Catholic culture of the rural population, as well as to the ethnic, nativist and exclusivist nature of their regionalism. In this respect, some similarities with the early PC can be detected, when the Welsh nationalists limited their activity to rural Wales and the party’s right-leaning ideology was affected by Catholic conservatism and ethnic regionalism. ‘Scarcely industrialized’ regions, therefore, appear to be less univocally oriented in respect to the left-right dimension. On the one hand, the idea of exploited peripheries and/or ‘internal colonies’ applies to scarcely industrialized regions even better than to working class regions, as the former share more characteristics in common with (former) overseas colonies that struggled for their political, economic and cultural independence. In addition, relative poverty should generate widespread preferences for leftist (redistributive) socio-economic policies. On the other hand, the dominant traditionalist culture may generate (especially in Catholic regions) preferences for right-leaning socio-cultural policies. The first hypothesis is therefore generated inductively from the comparative analysis of the four cases and concerns the influence of the socio-structural environment:

H5: Regionalist parties in ‘bourgeois’ regions will position themselves to the right of centre, while those acting in ‘working class’ regions will position themselves to the left of centre. Regionalist parties in ‘scarcely industrialized’ regions will position themselves both to the left and to the right.

The case studies have also shown a significant variance in the importance of the economic factor in mobilizing regionalism. While for the LN’s economy was the driving element of mobilization (testified to by the stability - leaving aside adjustments due to coalition politics - of the party’s centre-right stance on socio-economic policies), it has always been a secondary element for the SVP, which has tried to de-politicize

socio-economic questions and to keep the ethnic issue up front. For the SNP and PC it was a rather secondary element until the 1970s, when they started their left of centre repositioning. The case studies have also highlighted how a region's economic status does not always (or exclusively) have a direct impact on regionalist parties' left-right positioning but can be, rather, mediated by a state's socio-economic policies. It was the Thatcherite 'neo-liberal revolution' which helped push the SNP and PC to the left during the 1980s, and it was the lack of a similar revolution in Italy which pushed the Lombard and then the Northern League to the socio-economic right in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Finally, the case studies point to the importance of left-right polarization at national level, even for parties like the SVP whose core level is definitely the regional one, thus also highlighting the relevance of multi-level politics. Many regionalist parties, indeed, tend to adopt a 'broad church' strategy, that is to maintain a left-right ideological position not far from the centre. This allows them to push the self-government issue onto the agenda and, in so doing, attract voters both from the left and the right (Tronconi, 2005). This strategy turns out to be relatively easy in periods of consensus and convergence (which often coincide with periods of economic growth) since left-right issues tend to be discussed at a technical/policy level rather than at an ideological level. In contrast, as shown by recent empirical research, in periods of strong social and political polarization, left and right stances become more salient for voters, who tend to identify more strongly with one or the other (van der Eijk, 2005). As a consequence 'broad church' regionalist parties face a hard choice. They can ignore the new polarization and maintain the previous consensus position, thus running the risk of remaining out of the debate currently attracting most attention and interest from voters. Or they can follow the tide of polarization choosing either the left or the right, thus risking the loss of those members and voters who have an opposite ideological orientation. In either case, 'broad church' regionalist parties find themselves in trouble in such circumstances and have to cope with rising internal factionalism. All four cases have clearly shown these strategic dilemmas: the two British cases during the 1980s, the two Italian cases during the Second Republic – in particular between 1994 and 1998 for the LN, between 2006 and 2008 for the SVP. However, while the SNP and PC, let alone the hegemonic SVP, have not abandoned the mainstream area, the LN has clearly drifted to the radical-right.

This difference in strategy leads us to discuss the last two interrelated points: electoral niches and the constraints of the voting systems and party systems in which regionalist parties act. Electoral niches can open up in the electoral market due to social change and political parties contribute decisively to that process by politicizing the new salient issues determined by such social change. Old and established parties tend to adapt to these changes trying to absorb new issues in their discourses and party programs, while new parties trying to establish themselves in the electoral arena tend to invest heavily in these new issues. The time of emergence of the different parties has therefore affected the extent to which they have been able to tap/create new electoral niches. The SVP emerged and established itself as the hegemonic party of South Tyrol in the 1940s, when Western European party systems were still ‘frozen’ and shaped by the traditional cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). PC and the SNP broke through in the early 1970s, during the ‘silent revolution’ which saw the rise of the ‘new left’: environmental protection, gender equality, self-actualization, sexual freedom, peace, solidarity with the third world, etc. (Inglehart, 1977). The two British parties studied did politicize some of these issues, especially environmental protection, peace and solidarity with the third world countries. In contrast, the LN emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, during the so called ‘silent counter-revolution’ which saw the emergence of the ‘new right’: nativism, anti-immigration, anti-multiculturalism, neo-traditionalism, respect for authority, etc. (Ignazi, 1992). The LN, but also the new regionalist competitors of the SVP in South Tyrol, politicized virtually all these issues.

The possibility of fully capitalizing on these new electoral niches, however, also depends on the dynamics of the institutional/political environment: i.e. the voting systems and party systems. Parties competing in two-party systems under FPTP, like PC and the SNP (before 1999), can try and absorb new issues as far as this does not bring them too far away from the centre-ground of political competition. In contrast, in multi-party system and under proportional voting systems, some parties can occupy electoral niches outside of the political mainstream. In the South Tyrolean party system, competitors of the SVP have created/occupied an environmental ‘new left’ niche (the Greens) and, most importantly, a populist radical right niche (dF and SfU). In Scotland, with the establishment of the Parliament elected with a reasonably proportional system, new challengers of the SNP have appeared to its left, tapping the electoral niches of the environmental ‘new left’ (the Greens) and, before disappearing in 2007, the populist radical left niche (SSP and Solidarity). In the Italian multi-party system, the LN was

able to occupy the populist radical-right niche thanks to the working of electoral alliances which *de facto* ‘proportionalised’ the predominantly majoritarian voting system. And it has maintained a radical right position after the introduction of the new, more proportional, electoral system in 2005. However, when it competed alone in 1996, exposing itself to the majoritarian logic of the then voting system, it adopted a more moderate, quasi centrist position. In the post-1999 Welsh party system, the predominantly majoritarian voting system for the NAW has prevented the emergence of regionalist (as well as non regionalist) new parties which could occupy electoral niches. A second hypothesis concerning the left-right positioning of regionalist parties can, therefore, be drawn. This is about the influence of the institutional/political environment and is drawn both from the comparative analysis of the case-studies and from previous research (eg. Newman, 1997):

H6: Regionalist parties competing in two-party systems under majoritarian systems will position themselves within the (left-right) mainstream, while those acting in multi-party systems and under PR will occupy both mainstream and radical positions.

### **6.1.3 The European integration dimension**

As far as European integration is concerned, the comparative analysis of the four cases provides useful insights, mainly supporting the established theses which aim to explain the positioning of political parties in general (i.e. not only regionalist parties). First, the anti-integration stances of the British cases until the early 1980s and, especially in the case of the SNP, in the current phase, as opposed to the pro-integration stance of the two Italian cases (consistent in the case of the SVP; ambiguous and limited to the pre-1998 period in the case of the LN) provides some support for the ‘geo-political’ model, which suggests that parties in Eurosceptic countries (or geo-political areas) lean towards Eurosceptic positions and parties in Europhile countries lean towards pro-integration stances. Yet, the evidence is patchy and contradictory in this respect: the two British cases turned pro-integration during the 1980s and the LN has turned anti-integration since 1998.

The ‘domestic’ model also receives some support from the case-studies. As far as the institutional roles of the parties are concerned, the case of the LN appears to be

most telling: in spite of a strong and (since 1998) prolonged anti-integration stance and just few days after having celebrated the ‘Irish No’, the party avoided embarrassing the government, of which the LN is a part, by voting for the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in 2008. The ‘institutional’ role as a government party was clearly the only reason why the LN voted in favor. Yet, PC and the SNP do not seem to have changed their respectively ambiguous and anti-integration stances after getting into office in Cardiff and Edinburgh. Clearly, being in office at regional level does not involve the same institutional pressure as being in office at national level. Remaining within the remit of the ‘domestic’ model, the analysis has clearly shown, in the cases of PC, SNP and LN, how the pursuit of political visibility may contribute to lead fringe (SNP and PC in the 1970s) and/or radical (LN) regionalist parties to adopt an anti-integration position, thus substantiating Taggart’s thesis. Indeed, a commonality between the SNP, PC and the LN is their almost continuous demand for referendums on Europe. Referendums, indeed, provide opportunities to distinguish themselves from other parties and may end up with geographically discordant results (e.g. the outcome in the whole UK differing from the outcome in Scotland), thus providing gun powder for the regionalist parties’ cannons.

As far as the ‘left-right’ ideology model is concerned, the evidence emerging from the regionalist four parties confirms the trajectory of the main party families. The SVP, like the other Christian-Democratic parties, has consistently adopted a pro-integration position. The SNP and PC have followed the trajectory of many mainstream-left parties, which became increasingly pro-European during the 1980s and 1990s. The LN, since 1998 has shifted at the same time towards radical-right and anti-integration positions.

From the analysis of the cases, two hypotheses can be put forward. The first concerns the ‘geo-political’ model:

H7: regionalist parties in traditionally Europhile countries will adopt pro-integration positions, while regionalist parties in Eurosceptic countries will adopt anti-integration positions.

The second hypothesis stems from the ‘domestic’ and the ‘left-right ideology’ models:

H8: mainstream regionalist parties will adopt pro-integration positions, while (left or right) radical parties will adopt anti-integration positions.

The last set of hypotheses is drawn from the analysis of the four cases in the light of explanatory thesis tailored to regionalist parties. These hypotheses, more than the others, need to take into account the changing nature of the process of European integration through time. On the basis of the relevant literature discussed in Chapter One, three distinct phases of European integration can be identified. The 1950s-1970s were characterized by a focus on economic integration, dominated by a free market ethos that aimed at the creation of the Common Market. The second phase (1980s-1990s) was characterized by the rise of social, regional and normative (liberal progressive) Europe. As discussed in Chapter One, during this phase the process of European integration and regionalization looked mutually reinforcing, at the expense of the state (Keating, 1995). The third phase (2000s), has been characterized by the persistence of normative (liberal progressive) ethos, the re-emergence of the neo-liberal model, the biggest single enlargement and, even more importantly, by the process of ‘constitutionalisation’ of the EU (i.e. EU Constitution and Lisbon Treaty), aiming at deeper political integration. Evidence from the four cases has shown how the free market ethos of the first period contributed to alienating PC and the SNP, two leftward moving parties representing working class, relatively poor and peripheral regions. In contrast, the centre-right SVP supported integration, in spite of some (short-term) negative effects of the CAP in the 1960s. During the second phase, PC and the SNP were lured by European social and structural funds, by the thrust towards the regionalization of member states coming from European institutions and by the liberal progressive (and increasingly pro-environment) ethos of Brussels. The persistence of the liberal progressive approach of the EU in the (current) third phase, especially as far as individual rights and immigration policy are concerned, has represented a source of concern for the traditionalist and nativist SVP, while it has driven the populist radical-right (post-1998) LN towards strongly anti-integration positions.

In addition, the constitutionalisation process has left all four parties disappointed by the latest treaties’ re-confirmation of the primacy of member states as the building blocs of the Union and by the amount of power claimed by the central institutions in Brussels. While the SVP has, nonetheless, supported the treaties and PC has taken a very ambiguous stance on them, the SNP and the LN have clearly opposed them. This



development appears to a great extent consistent with previous studies, already discussed in Chapter One, predicting that regionalist parties would be strongly in favor of economic integration, but only moderately in favor of political integration (Marks and Wilson, 2000, p. 439; Marks *et al.*, 2002, p. 587) and detecting a shift towards Eurosceptic positions in recent year (Elias, 2008). The opposition of the SNP (the most secessionist of the four cases) to the treaties, on the grounds that extracting Scotland from the UK in the context of a more politically integrated Europe would be more difficult, highlights a further point: the relationship between the self-government position of regionalist parties and their stance on European integration, especially in the context of the current constitutional phase. The importance of this relationship had already been pointed out by Lynch, as one of the factors affecting regionalist parties' positioning on Europe (Lynch, 1996). In addition, the centralization of more powers in Brussels can come at the expense not only of the member-states but also of those regions which, as a consequence of devolution or federal arrangements, have acquired many competences (Elias, 2008; Hepburn, 2008a). This outcome, arguably, would not be welcome by regionalist parties, whether they are secessionists or autonomists. Two more hypotheses can therefore be drawn. The first concerns the relationship between ideological positioning on centre-periphery dimension and on the European integration dimension:

H9: secessionist parties are expected to lean towards anti-European integration, while autonomist parties are expected to lean towards pro-integration positions.

The second hypothesis concerns the powers (i.e. the level of autonomy) of the regions:

H10: regionalist parties acting in more autonomous regions are expected to lean towards anti-European integration positions, while regionalist parties acting in less autonomous regions are expected to lean towards pro-integration positions.

It is worth specifying that these last two hypotheses refer particularly to the current phase, characterized by the pursuit of deeper political integration through the adoption of new treaties.

## 6.2 Classifying the regions and the parties' ideological positioning

The above hypotheses will be tested on a set of forty-three regionalist parties acting in twenty-six regions across seven Western European states, as reported in Table 6.1. All regionalist parties which have been (or were) active in the period from the end of WWII to today and achieved a minimum of electoral relevance were selected. As spelt out in Chapter One, the minimum electoral relevance was set as: a) electing representatives to the regional assembly on, at least, three consecutive occasions; b) in the case of new parties that have not contested three regional elections yet, the criterion is either electing representatives on two occasions or getting into office (at regional level) at the first election; c) in the cases where an elected regional assembly does not exist (or did not exist in the past), the criterion is electing representatives to the central parliament.

In this section several classifications of the regions – according to the salient characteristics singled out in the hypotheses (ethnic distinctiveness, economic status, etc.) – and of the regionalist parties' ideological positions will be provided, so as to make possible the testing of hypotheses through cross-tabulations. Starting with parties' positioning, Table 6.2 shows ideological stances along the centre-periphery dimension. For definition, regionalist parties are located in the periphery side of the divide. Therefore, they are classified according to their different positions within the periphery camp.

The most important distinction, both in political and analytical terms, is between autonomist and secessionist parties. These two categories are in turn divided into sub-classes. Assertive autonomist parties are those which seek extensive autonomy for their region and/or lead requests for federal (or even confederal) reforms, whereas moderate autonomists advance more moderate requests for autonomy or follow assertive parties in their struggle for federal reforms. Within secessionist parties, the classification of extremist/violent parties is straightforward: these parties have stable links with terrorist organizations, such as ETA and the IRA, and function *de facto* as their political wings. In contrast, the distinction between strongly committed and ambiguous secessionists is more subtle. The former keep their policy of independence and their claims to self-determination continuously upfront in their discourses and documents, even in periods when they negotiate solutions short of independence. The latter either use ambiguous formulas (as in the case of PC until 2003 and the PNV since 2002) or leave their explicit

objective of independence in the background for some time, as in the case of ERC and BNG during the 2000s.<sup>89</sup>

**Table 6.1 Western European Regions with Relevant Regionalist Parties**

<i>Regions</i>	<i>Parties</i>	<i>Abbrev.</i>
Andalusia	<i>Partido Andalucista</i> (1982-2008)	PA
Aosta Valley	<i>Union Valdôtaine</i> (since 1949) <i>Union Valdôtaine Progressiste</i> (1973-1983) <i>Fédération Autonomiste</i> (since 1998)	UV UVP FA
Aragon	<i>Partido Aragonés</i> (since 1983) <i>Chunta Aragonesista</i> (since 1995)	PAR CHA
Balearic Islands	<i>Unió Mallorquina</i> (since 1983)	UM
Basque Country	<i>Partido Nacionalista Vasco</i> (since 1977) <i>Euskadiko Ezkerra</i> (1977-1991) <i>Eusko Alkartasuna</i> (since 1986) <i>Aralar</i> (since 2005) <i>Herri Batasuna – Heuskal Herritarrok - Batasuna</i> (1980-2005)	PNV EE EA Ar HB-Ba
Bavaria	<i>Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern</i> (since 1949)	CSU
Brussels	<i>Front Démocratique des Francophones</i> (1970-1995)	FDF
Canary Islands	<i>Coalición Canaria</i> (since 1993)	CC
Cantabria	<i>Partido Regionalista de Cantabria</i> (since 1983)	PRC
Catalonia	<i>Convergència i Unió</i> (since 1979) <i>Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya</i> (since 1977)	CiU* ERC
Corsica	<i>Unione di u Populu Corsu</i> (1982-1998)	UPC
Eastern Germany	<i>Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus</i> (1990-2004)	PDS
Flanders	<i>Volkunie</i> (1954-2001) <i>Vlaams Blok - Belang</i> (since 1978) <i>Nieuw Vlaamse Alliantie</i> (since 2003)	VU VB N-VA
Galicia	<i>Bloque Nacionalista Gallego</i> (since 1985)	BNG
Navarre	<i>Unión del Pueblo Navarro</i> (since 1979) <i>Convergencia Democrática de Navarra</i> (since 1995) Basque regionalist parties (see Basque Country)	UPN CDN
Northern Ireland	<i>Sinn Féin</i> (since 1982) Democratic Unionist Party (since 1973) Social Democratic and Labour Party (since 1973) Ulster Unionist Party (1945-1979 and since 1995)	SF DUP SDLP UUP
Northern Italy	<i>Lega Nord</i> (since 1990)	LN
Rioja	<i>Partido Riojano</i> (since 1983)	PR
Sardinia	<i>Partito Sardo D'Azione</i> (since 1949)	PSdAz
Scotland	Scottish National Party (since 1970) Scottish Greens (since 1999)	SNP SG
Sicily	<i>Movimento per l'Autonomia</i> (since 2005)	MpA
South Tyrol	<i>Südtiroler Volkspartei</i> (since 1948) <i>Die Freiheitlichen</i> (since 1993) <i>Union für Südtirol</i> (since 1993)	SVP dF UfS
Ticino	<i>Lega dei Ticinesi</i> (since 1991)	LT
Valencian Comm.	<i>Unió Valenciana</i> (1987-1999)	UnV
Wales	<i>Plaid Cymru</i> (since 1974)	PC
Walloon region	<i>Rassemblement Wallon</i> (1968-1981)	RW

Source: compiled by author

\*CiU was an electoral alliance which developed in 2001 into a party federation, including *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC) and *Unió Democràtica de Catalunya* UDC (Barberá and Barrio, 2006).

<sup>89</sup> On the PNV, see Perez-Niveas (2006, p. 45-46). On ERC and the BNG see respectively Argelaguet (2006, p. 155) and Gomez-Reino (2006, p. 182).

**Table 6.2 Regionalist Parties' Distribution along the Centre-Periphery Dimension, (number of cases in brackets)**

Non-secessionist parties		Secessionist parties		
<i>Moderately autonomist</i>	<i>Assertive autonomist</i>	<i>Ambiguous</i>	<i>Strongly committed</i>	<i>Extremists (by violent means)</i>
(10) PA, PRC, PAR, UnV, PR, CC, UM, PSdAz, MpA, UPN	(18) FDF, VU, RW, LN, PDS, CiU, PNv, UV, UVP, FA, SVP, CSU, UUP, DUP, LT, CDN, CHA, UPC	(7) BNG(2000s), ERC(2000s), PSdA(1980s), VU(1990s), PNv(2000s) PC, SG	(14) EE, Ar, SNP, VB, LN(1996-98), BNG(1980s-90s), ERC(1980s-90s), EA, SF(2000s), PC(2000s), UfS, dF, SDLP, N-VA	(2) HB-Ba SF(1970s-90s)

Source: see Appendix.

Confirming established views, Table 6.2 shows how regionalist parties' stances along the centre-periphery dimension are widely spread.

Table 6.3 provides a classification of regionalist parties according to their ideological positioning on the left-right dimension. It distinguishes between radical-left, mainstream left, centre, mainstream right and radical right parties.

**Table 6.3 Regionalist parties' distribution along the left-right ideological spectrum, (number of cases in brackets).**

Radical-left	Mainstream left	Centre	Mainstream right	Radical-right
(7) EE, HB-Ba, Ar, SF, PDS, BNG(1980-90s) PSdAz(1980s)	(13) CHA, ERC, EA, PSdAz(1990-00s), PC, RW, PA, SDLP, SNP, SG, UVP, VU(1990s) BNG(2000s)	(12) UV, FA, FDF, CiU, CDN, UM, PR, PRC, MpA, VU(1970-80s), PSdAz(1950-70s), UPC	(11) CSU, N-VA, PAR, PNv, SVP, VU(1960s), CC, UPN, UnV, UUP, LN(1996-98)	(6) LN, VB, LT, dF, UfS, DUP

Source: see Appendix.

Radical-left: communists, anti-imperialists, parties with predominant or strong Marxist influences.

Mainstream left: socialists, social-democrats, left libertarians, greens.

Centre: social liberals or moderate Christian-democrats

Mainstream Right: conservatives (Catholic, Protestant or Liberal).

Radical Right: anti-immigrant, religious fundamentalist, welfare chauvinist, right-wing populists.

The table also shows major shifts in party positioning, such as the move of the PSdAz from the centre to the radical left in the early 1980s (Roux, 2006; Hepburn, 2009b). The only case of leapfrogging from the right to the left is represented by the VU, which moved from the centre-right in the 1960s to the centre in the 1970s-80s and then to the centre-left in the 1990s (De Winter, 1998b). As it can be seen from the table ideological dispersion along the left-right dimension is very high, ranging from the radical left to the radical right.

Table 6.4 shows regionalist parties' positioning on European integration, accounting for the three phases of integration discussed above.

**Table 6.4 Regionalist parties positioning on European integration, (number of cases in brackets)**

	<b>Pro-integration</b>	<b>No position, ambiguous or deeply divided</b>	<b>Against integration</b>
<b>First phase: economic and free- market Europe (1950-1970s)</b>	(8) CSU, UV, SVP, FDF, VU, RW, UVP, SDLP	-	(5) SNP, PC, SF, UUP, DUP
<b>Second phase: social, progressive and regional Europe (1980s-1990s)</b>	(27) SNP, SDLP, CSU, ERC, EA, PC, RW, UVP, CHA, PA, CiU, FDF, UM, CDN, UV, PRC, PR, VU, PNV, SVP, CC, UPN, UnV, LN(1990-98), PAR, PSdAz, UPC(1990s)	(2) BNG(1990s) UPC(1980s)	(12) HB-Ba, EE, SF, PDS, BNG(1980s), VB, dF, UfS, DUP, LT, LN(since 1998), UUP
<b>Third phase: constitutional, progressive and neo-liberal Europe (2000s)</b>	(14) SDLP, PA, UM, CDN, UV, FA, PRC, PR, CC, SVP, UPN, PAR, N-VA, MpA	(5) PC, CSU, PNV, CiU, LN(2008)	(15) HB-Ba, SF, BNG, VB, dF, UfS, DUP, LT, LN, UUP, ERC, EA, SNP, Ar, CHA.

Source: see Appendix.

From the table it emerges very clearly that, while the majority of regionalist parties supported integration during the first and second phase, they have become evenly divided between support and opposition in the third (current) phase. During the second phase, the pro-integration majority was overwhelming (about two thirds). This evidence

confirms previous qualitative studies which pointed to the largely pro-integration orientation of regionalist parties (De Winter and Gomez-Reino, 2002).

**Table 6.5 Structural characteristics of the regions**

<i>Regions</i>	<i>Ethnic divide*</i>	<i>Former political/institutional status</i>	<i>Economic status</i>
Andalusia	no	Never independent	Scarcely industrialized
Aosta Valley	medium	Part of a different polity until 1859	Bourgeois
Aragon	weak	Independent in the middle ages	Bourgeois
Balearic Islands	medium	Never independent	Bourgeois
Basque Country	strong	Never independent (tradition of autonomy)	Bourgeois
Bavaria	no	Independent until 1870	Bourgeois
Brussels	strong	Not applicable	Bourgeois
Canary Islands	weak	Never independent	Scarcely industrialized
Cantabria	no	Never independent	Scarcely industrialized
Catalonia	medium	Part of a different polity (middle ages) (tradition of autonomy)	Bourgeois
Corsica	medium	Never independent (part of a different state)	Scarcely industrialized
Eastern Germany	no	Partitioned (1945-1990)	Working Class
Flanders	strong	Not applicable	Bourgeois
Galicia	medium	Never independent	Scarcely industrialized
Navarre	medium	Independent in the middle ages	Bourgeois
Northern Ireland	strong (relig.)	Part of a different polity in the middle ages	Working Class
Northern Italy	no	Independent in the middle ages (fragmented) (Veneto independent until 1797)	Bourgeois
Rioja	no	Never independent	Bourgeois
Sardinia	medium	Never independent	Scarcely industrialized
Scotland	no	Independent until 1707	Working Class
Sicily	no	Never independent	Scarcely industrialized
South Tyrol	strong	Part of a different polity until 1919	Bourgeois
Ticino	strong	Never independent	Bourgeois**
Valencian Comm.	weak	Independent in the middle ages	Scarcely industrialized
Wales	medium	Independent in the middle ages	Working Class
Walloon region	strong	Not applicable	Working Class

Source: compiled by author. The classification draws on OECD Regional Statistics (available at: [www1.oecd.org/scripts/cde/members/cde\\_territorial.asp](http://www1.oecd.org/scripts/cde/members/cde_territorial.asp)) and on Pertrella (1980, p. 20, Tab. 2.4).

\*The classes of ethnic divide ('no', 'weak', 'medium' and 'strong') are obtained combining the level of ethnic difference ('weak' or 'strong') with the size of the ethnically different group within the region ('negligible', 'minority', 'nearly half or more'). The class 'no' results from 'negligible' size, even in the case of 'strong' ethnic difference. The class 'weak' results from the combination of 'minority' size with 'weak' difference. The class 'medium' results from the combinations of 'minority' size with 'strong' difference or from 'nearly half or more' size with 'weak' difference. The class 'strong' results from the combination of 'half or more' size with 'strong' difference.

\*\*Ticino is an extremely wealthy region within Western Europe, even compared to the rich Northern Italian regions onto which it borders. However, within the Swiss Confederation it represents one of the poorest cantons. This makes its economic status rather ambiguous.

However, the presence of eleven anti-integration parties partially contradicts recent quantitative studies' conclusions which point to a homogeneously Europhile regionalist party family (Jolly, 2007).<sup>90</sup> Table 6.4 also shows how the third phase of European integration has witnessed a dramatic reduction of pro-integration parties and a substantive increase of anti-integration parties, so that the regionalist party family is evenly divided. This confirms recent reconsiderations about the general attitudes of the regionalist party family towards European integration (Elias, 2008b). In addition, several anti-integration regionalist parties are amongst the most successful ones and amongst the best represented in the European Parliament. Even more importantly, parties that had supported European integration out of conviction in the past have either openly opposed further integration (ERC, EA and SNP)<sup>91</sup> or have shown ambiguities and/or deep internal divisions (CSU, PNV, CiU and PC).

Table 6.5 provides a classification of the regions in respect to their ethnic distinctiveness, institutional history and economic status. As discussed above these characteristics of the regions are expected to influence regionalist parties' positioning on the centre-periphery and on the left-right dimension.

**Table 6.6 Classification of states in respect to their traditional attitudes towards European integration**

<i>Traditionally pro-European integration geo-political areas</i>	<i>Ambiguous geo-political areas</i>	<i>Traditionally Eurosceptic geo-political areas</i>
Belgium Germany Italy Spain	France	UK Switzerland

Source: compiled by author

Finally, Tables 6.6, 6.7 and 6.8 provide respectively a classification of the states to which the regions belong in respect to their traditional attitudes towards European integration, a classification of the voting systems adopted at both regional and national level in the states and the regions, and the level of autonomy across regions. These will

<sup>90</sup> Jolly's study covers the period 1984-2002, which coincides to a large extent with what I have identified as the 'second phase' period. Beyond the use of different data and methodology, the diverging conclusion reached by Jolly's research can be explained by the case selection. Seven out of the eleven anti-integration parties presented in Table 6.4 were not included in Jolly's analysis.

<sup>91</sup> ERC, EA and the SNP have opposed the ratification of both the Constitutional and Lisbon Treaty (Aparicio-Romero, 2006; Madorran, 2005; Acha, 2006)

be used to test hypotheses concerning parties' positioning on European integration (the first and the third), and on the centre-periphery and left-right dimensions (the second).

**Table 6.7 Voting systems in regional and national arenas**

<i>Mainly majoritarian voting systems</i>	<i>Mainly proportional voting systems</i>
Italy (1996)* Northern Ireland (before 1998) Scotland (before 1999) Wales	Belgium and Belgian regions Spain and Spanish regions Italy and Italian regions** Germany and German regions Northern Ireland (since 1998) Scotland (since 1999) Switzerland and Ticino

Source: compiled by author

\* The voting system in Italy in 1996 is considered primarily as majoritarian because the Northern League went alone, thus exposing itself to the majoritarian logic of the system.

\*\* Some Italian regions with regionalist parties, such as Sicily and Aosta Valley, have adopted a mixed system, where the election of the First Minister is majoritarian and the election of the regional assembly is proportional with a majority bonus.

**Table 6.8 Level of regional autonomy**

<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Medium/High</i>	<i>High</i>
Corsica Northern Ireland Wales	Northern Italy (regions), Catalonia, Galicia, Andalucia, Aragon, Valencian Community, Rioja, Balearic Islands, Canary Islands, Cantabria	Walloon region, Brussels, South Tyrol Aosta Valley, Sicily, Sardinia, Scotland, Basque Country, Navarre	Bavaria Eastern Germany (Länder) Flanders Ticino

Source: compiled by author on the basis of the Regional Authority Index (RAI) (Hooghe *at al.*, 2008). The RAI is a quantitative index, resulting from a synthesis of several indexes that measure individual dimensions of regional authority. The classes used in the table correspond to values below 12 (low); between 12 and 15 (medium); between 15 and 18 (medium/high), over 18 (high). The maximum value in Western Europe is 21 (German Länder).

### 6.3 Testing the hypotheses

In this section the hypotheses spelt out above will be tested and discussed using cross-tabulations which aim to highlight the relationship between one of the factors singled out above and regionalist parties' positioning along one of the three ideological dimensions considered. In discussing the positions of the individual parties within the cross-tabulations, I will avoid focusing on the four cases analysed in depth in the previous chapter, unless these are particularly telling in some respect.



### 6.3.1 The centre-periphery dimension

The first three hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3) concern the influence of the structural environment on the centre-periphery positioning of the regionalist parties. Table 6.9 shows the putative influence of the ethnic divide (H1).

**Table 6.9 Strength of the ethnic divide and regionalist parties' positioning on the centre-periphery cleavage (number of cases in brackets)\***

	<i>No</i>	<i>Weak</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Strong</i>
<i>Secessionist Violent</i>	-	-	-	(2) HB-Ba, SF
<i>Secessionist Committed</i>	(2) <b>SNP</b> , <b>LN(1996-98)</b>	-	(3) ERC, <b>BNG</b> , <b>PC(2000s)</b>	(9) EE, Ar, EA, <b>VB</b> , N-VA, <b>SF(2000s)</b> , <b>SDLP</b> , DF, UfS
<i>Secessionist Ambiguous</i>	(1) SG	-	(4) <b>PC</b> , ERC(2000s), <b>BNG(2000s)</b> , <b>PSdAz(1980s)</b>	(2) <b>PNV(2000s)</b> , VU(1990s)
<i>Assertive Autonomist</i>	(3) <b>CSU</b> , <b>LN</b> , <b>PDS</b>	(1) CHA	(6) <b>CiU</b> , <b>UV</b> , <b>UVP</b> , <b>FA</b> , <b>CDN</b> , <b>UPC</b>	(8) <b>VU(1960s-80s)</b> , <b>SVP</b> , <b>FDF</b> , <b>RW</b> , <b>LT</b> , <b>PNV</b> , DUP(2000s), UUP(1945-1972)
<i>Moderate Autonomist</i>	(4) <b>PA</b> , <b>PRC</b> , <b>PR</b> , <b>MpA</b>	(3) <b>PAR</b> , UnV, CC	(3) <b>UM</b> , <b>PSdAz</b> , UPN	-

Source: compiled by author

\* Parties in bold are the biggest (non-unionist) in their respective region.

The most extreme examples of secessionist parties – HB and SF (1980-90s) - are found in the Basque Country and Northern Ireland, two regions characterized by strong ethnic divisions - ethno-linguistic in the Spanish region and ethno-religious in the British one. In these two regions, some regionalist parties committed to non-violent struggle, such as EE, EA, Ar, SDLP and SF (2000s), have adopted secessionist positions. Strong ethno-linguistic divisions are also at the basis of secessionist claims by UfS in South Tyrol and

by VU (1990s), VB and N-VA in Flanders. Although the ethno-linguistic divide in some regions, such as Catalonia and Galicia, is weaker (Catalan and Galician are closer to Castilian Spanish than Dutch is to French, or German to Italian, or Basque to Spanish) or the size of the minority ethno-linguistic group is smaller, as in Wales, the secessionism of ERC, BNG and PC also displays an ethnic component. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the most moderate autonomist parties are found in regions where the ethnic divide is either absent, such as in Cantabria, Rioja, Andalucía or Sicily, or weak, as in the Canary Islands, Valencian Community and Aragon. In the case of Sardinia, a region with a widespread regional idiom, the PSdAz has remained rather moderate in demanding self-government, except in the early 1980s when it deployed for the first time an ethno-linguistic type of regionalism elaborated by the *neo-sardismo* movement, which immediately led the PSdAz to endorse an (ambiguously) independentist stance (Hepburn, 2009b). In the case of Corsica, a region with a medium ethno-linguistic divide, the only regionalist party that has managed to gain some stable electoral relevance was the autonomist UPC (Schrijver, 2006, p. 199). However, secessionist parties have also been present and have, at some regional elections, been moderately successful. Most of these secessionist parties have links with armed groups, much in the same way as HB and SF (1970s-90s).

Overall the table appears to show a positive relationship between ethnic distinctiveness and radicalism in centre-periphery positioning. Indeed, no moderate autonomist parties are found in regions with strong ethnic divisions and no extremist/violent parties are found regions with weak (or even medium) ethnic distinctiveness. If the line is drawn between secessionist and non-secessionist parties, regions with no or weak ethnic distinctiveness contain eleven non-secessionist *vis a vis* only three secessionist cases, while regions with medium or strong ethnic distinctiveness contain twenty secessionist *vis a vis* seventeen non-secessionist cases. If unionist parties, such as FDF, UUP, DUP, UPN and maybe CDN, are removed from the count, then the non secessionist cases go down to thirteen/twelve. If the line is drawn between moderate autonomist and all the other self-government positions, then the count goes seven vs. seven within the regions with no or only a weak ethnic divide. There are just three (two excluding the unionist UPN) moderate cases vs. thirty-four (thirty-one or thirty excluding the unionists) assertive and secessionist cases within regions with a medium or strong ethnic divide. However, ethnic distinctiveness does not explain the assertive autonomism of the CSU in Bavaria, of the LN in Padania (which

between 1996 and 1998 turned to secessionism) and, even less, the secessionism of the SNP (and SG) in Scotland. The analysis of the following cross-tabulation helps explaining these cases.

Table 6.10 aims to show the putative influence of the institutional history of the regions and, therefore, a test for the second hypothesis.

**Table 6.10 Institutional history or the regions and regionalist parties' centre-periphery positioning (number of cases in brackets)\***

	<i>Never Independent</i>	<i>Indep. in the middle ages</i>	<i>Part of different polity</i>	<i>Part of different polity &amp; tradition of autonomy</i>	<i>Indep. in the modern age</i>
<i>Secessionist Violent</i>	-	-	(1) SF	(1) HB-Ba	-
<i>Secessionist Committed</i>	(1) <b>BNG</b>	(1) <b>PC(2000s)</b>	(2) SF(2000s), SDLP	(7) DF, UfS, Ar, EE, EA, ERC, <b>LN(1996-98)</b>	(1) <b>SNP</b>
<i>Secessionist Ambiguous</i>	(2) <b>PSdAz(1980s)</b> <b>BNG(2000s)</b>	(1) <b>PC</b>	-	(2) <b>PNV(2000s),</b> ERC(2000s)	(1) SG
<i>Assertive Autonomist</i>	(1) <b>LT</b>	(2) CHA, CDN	(5) UV, UVP, FA, UUP(1945-72), DUP(2000s)	(4) <b>SVP, CiU,</b> <b>PNV, LN</b>	(2) <b>CSU, PDS</b>
<i>Moderate Autonomist</i>	(7) <b>CC, PSdAz ,</b> <b>PA, PRC, PR,</b> <b>UM, MpA</b>	(3) <b>PAR, UPN,</b> UnV	-	-	-

Source: compiled by author

\*Parties in bold are the (non unionist) biggest ones in their respective regions.

In order to facilitate the reading of the table I have drawn a line between regions which were absorbed into the state in the middle ages and regions which were part of a different polity and were annexed by the state in the modern age or even more recently. As far as the positions of parties are concerned, if the line is drawn between secessionist and non-secessionist parties, the first group of regions count five secessionist vs. thirteen (eleven excluding the unionists) non secessionist cases, while the second group of regions count eleven (nine excluding the unionists) non secessionist vs. fifteen secessionist cases. If the line is drawn between the moderate autonomist and all the

other positions, then the first group of regions count eight assertive autonomist and secessionist vs. ten (eight excluding UPN and UnV) moderate autonomist cases. This balance between assertive/secessionists and moderate autonomists goes against the hypothesis. However, in the second group of regions all twenty-four cases fall within the assertive and secessionist class, strongly supporting the hypothesis. In addition, considering the combinatory effect of the two factors (ethnic distinctiveness and institutional history), it can be observed that, out of the eight cases which display a more radical position than the institutional history of the their regions would suggest, six can be explained by the medium or strong ethnic distinctiveness of their regions - LT, BNG, BNG (2000s), PC, PC (2000s) and PSdAz (1980s). *Vice versa*, the cases that stood out from the explanatory capacity of ethnic distinctiveness (LN, CSU and SNP) were better explained by looking at the institutional history of the regions.

Table 6.11 shows the putative influence of the economic status of the regions (H3). As far as the regions are concerned, I have drawn the line between poor regions (scarcely industrialized and working class) and rich regions (bourgeois). The evidence appears to be much less clear than in the previous two cross-tabulations. If the line is drawn between secessionist and non-secessionist positions, then the poor regions count eleven non secessionist vs. nine secessionist cases (amongst which SF, a case of violent secessionism), while rich regions count seventeen non-secessionist vs. only thirteen secessionist cases. In addition, several of these cases – HB-Ba, EE, Ar, EA and ERC – give no or very little emphasis to economic issues in their demands for secession. However, economic interests can arguably be better accommodated than identity issues within the framework of the state, e.g. by fiscal federalism or regional financial autonomy. Therefore, as far as this cross-tabulation is concerned it makes particular sense to draw the line between moderate autonomists and all other positions, as assertive autonomists in many cases seek financial autonomy too. Yet, drawing the line in this way provides support for the hypothesis only as far as the rich regions are concerned: twenty-six assertive and secessionist vs. only four moderate autonomist cases. Within the poor regions, only six cases are moderate autonomists vs. eleven assertive and secessionist cases, which appears to go against the hypothesis but does not disprove it completely. Indeed, while the number of assertive and secessionist cases in poor regions is less than twice the number of moderate autonomist cases, in rich regions it is six and a half times that number. Therefore, although the influence of economic

status is more ambiguous than that of ethnic distinctiveness, the hypothesis finds partial confirmation.

**Table 6.11 Economic status of the regions and regionalist parties' positions on the centre-periphery dimension (number of cases in brackets)\***

	<i>Scarcely industrialized</i>	<i>Working class</i>	<i>Bourgeois</i>
<i>Secessionists violent</i>	-	(1) SF	(1) HB-Ba
<i>Secessionists strongly committed</i>	(1) <b>BNG</b>	(4) <b>SNP, PC(2003), SDLP, SF(2000s)</b>	(9) <b>VB, V-NA, EE, Ar, EA, LN(1996-98), ERC, dF, UfS</b>
<i>Secessionists ambiguous</i>	(2) <b>BNG(2000s), PSdAz(1980s)</b>	(2) PC, SG	(3) ERC(2000s), <b>PNV(2000s), VU(1990s),</b>
<i>Assertive autonomists</i>	(1) <b>UPC</b>	(4) <b>RW, PDS, UUP, DUP</b>	(13) <b>VU, PNV, LN, CSU, CiU, SVP, FDF, UV, UVP, FA, LT, CDN, CHA</b>
<i>Moderate autonomists</i>	(6) <b>MpA, PSdAz, CC, PRC, PA, UnV</b>	-	(4) <b>UM, PR, UPN, PAR</b>

Source: compiled by author.

\*Parties in bold are the (non unionist) biggest ones in their respective regions.

The fourth hypothesis concerns the influence of the electoral systems under which regionalist parties compete (H4). As Table 6.12 shows, under majoritarian systems we find six secessionist cases vs. only two non-secessionist (both being unionist parties). In contrast, under PR we find twenty-eight non-secessionist cases vs. nineteen secessionist ones. The evidence, therefore, seems to substantiate the hypothesis that majoritarian systems produce an incentive for regionalist parties to radicalize, while PR systems allow regionalist parties to occupy both moderate and radical positions.

**Table 6.12 Voting systems and regionalist parties' positioning on the centre-periphery dimension (number of cases in brackets)**

	<i>Moderate autonomists</i>	<i>Assertive autonomists</i>	<i>Secessionists ambiguous</i>	<i>Secessionists committed</i>	<i>Secessionists violent</i>
<i>Maj.</i>	-	(2) UUP, DUP	(1) <b>PC</b>	(4) <b>SNP, SDLP, PC(2000s), LN(1996-98)</b>	(1) SF
<i>PR</i>	(10) <b>MpA, PSdAz, CC, PRC, PA, UnV, UM, PR, UPN, PAR</b>	(18) <b>RW, FDF, VU, PDS, CSU, LN, SVP, UV, UVP, FA, CiU, PNV, CDN, CHA, LT, UPC, UUP(2000s), DUP(2000s)</b>	(6) <b>BNG(2000s), PSdAz(1980s), ERC(2000s), VU(1990s), PNV(2000s), SG</b>	(12) <b>VB, V-NA, EE, Ar, EA, ERC, BNG, dF, UfS, SF(2000s), SDLP(2000s), SNP(2000s)</b>	(1) HB-Ba

Source: compiled by author.

\*Parties in bold are the (non unionist) biggest ones in their respective regions.

From the table also emerges that, as noticed by Newman (1997), in PR systems the biggest regionalist parties in each region tend to occupy non radical positions. Indeed, if we consider only the biggest parties in their respective regions (in bold in the table) with the exclusion of unionist parties, we find nineteen non secessionist vs. only seven secessionist cases.

Summarizing the results concerning hypotheses on centre-periphery positioning, it can be said that radical (secessionist) parties tend to emerge in regions with a medium/strong ethnic distinctiveness and/or in regions which have been independent in the modern age or have been annexed by the state relatively recently. However, in these regions, if parties compete under predominantly proportional systems, non-secessionist but still very assertive parties can be found. Indeed, in most cases, these non-secessionist parties are the biggest in the region. In a few cases, the radical parties have displaced the assertive secessionists. Usually this happens in ethnically divided regions, such as in Northern Ireland, where SF has become more successful than the SDLP, or in Navarre, where HB-Ba has been the most successful party representing the Basque minority. It can also happen if assertive autonomist parties which have been accommodated in their request for self-government fail to credibly radicalize their

demands, as in the case of VU in Flanders (Breuning, 1997; Deschouwer, 2004, p 196). In contrast, if parties compete under predominantly majoritarian systems, non-radical parties tend not to emerge. As far as the economic status of the regions is concerned, its influence on centre-periphery positioning is more ambiguous, though its explanatory capacity appears to increase if a distinction is drawn between moderate autonomists, on one side, and assertive autonomists and secessionists, on the other side.

### 6.3.2 The left-right dimension

The fifth and sixth hypotheses concern the effects of, respectively, the socio-structural and institutional/political environment factors on left-right positioning. Table 6.13 shows the relationship between the economic status of the regions and the left-right positioning of the most successful regionalist party in each region. The inclusion of the biggest parties only makes the relationship more evident.

**Table 6.13 Economic status and left-right positioning of major regionalist parties, (number of cases in brackets)**

	<i>Radical Left</i>	<i>Mainstream left</i>	<i>Centre</i>	<i>Mainstream right</i>	<i>Radical Right</i>
<i>Bourgeois regions</i>	-	-	(6) <b>UV, UM, CiU, VU(1970-80s), FDF, PR</b>	(7) <b>CSU, PNV, SVP, UPN, PAR, LN(1996-98), VU(1960s)</b>	(3) <b>VB(1990-00s), LN, LT</b>
<i>Scarcely industrialized regions</i>	(2) <b>BNG(1980-90s)</b> <b>PsdAz(1980s)</b>	(3) <b>PA, PsdAz(1990s)</b> <b>BNG(2000s)</b>	(4) <b>PRC, MpA, UPC, PsdAz(1950s-70s)</b>	(2) <b>CC, UnV</b>	-
<i>Working-class regions</i>	(1) <b>PDS SF(2000s)</b>	(4) <b>PC, RW, SNP SDLP(1980-90s)</b>	-	(1) <b>UUP(1940-70s)</b>	(1) <b>DUP(2000s)</b>

Source: compiled by author.

\*All parties are in bold, except the unionists.

In line with the expectations of H5, none of the major regionalist parties representing a 'bourgeois region' is found to the left of the centre. The ideological span

covered by the most representative regionalist parties of these regions goes, therefore, from centrist liberal-progressive or moderate (FDF, CiU, VU[1970s-80s], UM and UV) to conservative (CSU, PNV, UPN, SVP, VU[1960s], and PAR) to anti-immigrant and populist radical right (LN, VB and LT).<sup>92</sup>

In contrast, the most representative regionalist parties emerged in working class regions tend to position themselves left of the centre, thus providing further confirmation to H5. Northern Ireland appears to be, at least as first sight, an exception to the rule, since the centre-right UUP was the most representative regionalist party in this working class region in the first four decades after WWII until it was overtaken by the radical right DUP in recent years. However, two things have to be taken into consideration. First, both the UUP and the DUP are unionist parties, i.e. they represent a reactive type of regionalism. As discussed above, this type of regionalism develops historically from within the most anti-regionalist state-wide party, which in the case of the UK was the right-wing Conservative (and Unionist) party. If the non-Unionist regionalist parties are taken instead – the SDLP and SF – the Northern Irish exception disappears. Second, even within the reactive (unionist) camp, the recent growth of the DUP at the expense of the UUP can be interpreted as the willingness of the Protestant working-class to reward the leftist socio-economic policies of the former (Evans and Duffy, 1997). Indeed, although the DUP's populism and ethno-religious fundamentalism justifies its classification as a radical right party, its economic policies are definitely more sensitive to working class interests. As stated by one of the co-founders, the DUP is "right wing in the sense of being strong on the Constitution, but to the left on social policies" (W. D. Flacks, 1983, quoted in Murphy, 1990, p. 55).

In scarcely industrialized (and relatively poor) regions, the positioning of regionalist parties appears, as expected, to be less patterned. If the unionist UnV is excluded from the count, the cases are evenly divided (four vs. four) between radical and mainstream left, on one side, and centre and mainstream right on the other. What emerges clearly from the table is that regionalist parties on these regions do not develop anti-immigrant, radical right ideologies, possibly due to the fact that many immigrants may pass through these territories but tend to settle in economically more developed regions.

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<sup>92</sup> For the last category of regionalist parties, see De Winter *et al.* (2006a) and Mazzoleni (2005).



Table 6.14 shows regionalist parties' positioning in respect to the voting systems under which they compete (H6). The evidence is, at best, ambiguous, as the distribution of parties under PR is exactly the same as under majoritarian systems: the ratio of mainstream parties under PR is 29/41 (0.71), while under majoritarian systems it is 5/7 (0.71).

**Table 6.14 Voting systems and left-right positioning**

	<i>Rad. Left</i>	<i>Mainstr. Left</i>	<i>Centre</i>	<i>Mainstr. Right</i>	<i>Rad. Right</i>
<i>Maj.</i>	(1) SF	(3) <b>SNP, PC, SDLP</b>	(1) <b>LN(1996)</b>	(1) <b>UUP</b>	(1) DUP
<i>PR</i>	(7) HB-Ba, EE, Ar, SF(2000s), <b>BNG(1980-90s),</b> <b>PSdAz(1980),</b> <b>PDS</b>	(11) <b>SNP(since 1999)</b> SG, EA, ERC, <b>BNG(2000s),</b> <b>RW, UVP,</b> CHA, PA, <b>PSdA(1990-00s)</b> VU(1990s)	(12) <b>CiU, MpA,</b> <b>FDF, UV, FA,</b> <b>VU(1970-80s),</b> <b>UM, PRC,</b> CDN, PR, UPC, <b>Psda(1950-70s)</b>	(6) <b>LN(1990-1994)</b> <b>SVP, PNV,</b> <b>CSU,</b> <b>VU(1960s),</b> <b>PAR</b>	(5) <b>LN(since1999),</b> <b>VB, dF, UfS,</b> <b>DUP(2000s)</b>

Source: Compiled by author

\*Parties in bold are the biggest in their respective regions.

The problem arises with the two Northern Irish cases positioned to the radical wings, SF and the DUP. Indeed, the Northern Irish case is a deviant one, as the hypothesis assumed that regionalist parties acting under majoritarian systems would compete as third parties against two state-wide parties or blocs, like the LN (1996-1998) in Italy, the SNP and PC for Westminster elections in Scotland and Wales prior to devolution. These cases do support H6 or, in the formal language of hypothesis testing, do not falsify it. In Northern Ireland, however, the party system is completely regionalized as the largely overlapping ethno-religious and centre-periphery divides represent the main dimension of competition and, as a result, state-wide parties had, until this year's announcement of renewed cooperation between the Conservative Party and the UUP, disappeared from the scene. In such a regionalized party system, space has open up for both (left or right) moderate and (left or right) radical parties (Newman, 1997).

Summarizing the results concerning the hypotheses on left-right positioning, it can be said that the socio-economic environment plays a crucial role in orienting the choices of the main (usually the first to emerge) regionalist party of the region, which usually occupies and maintains the best position. Under majoritarian voting systems, the first regionalist party to emerge is more likely to remain the only one, thus having more room and more time to identify and occupy such position. Under PR systems, it is more likely that regionalist competitors will manage to emerge. The latter have to distinguish their ideology and policy proposals by adopting a different position on the left-right - or, as discussed above, by proposing a different position on the centre-periphery dimension, or by making both moves. As far as the left-right differentiation strategy is concerned, if the region is homogeneous at the structural level, it is very likely that any new arrival will go in the same direction as, but further than, the pioneer. This is the case of Flanders, where the VB and the N-VA positioned themselves to right of the VU (De Winter, 2006; Deschouwer, 2004). The same can be said, to a great extent, for the case of South Tyrol, where the radical right dF and UfS positioned themselves to the right of the SVP. The same process has happened in Scotland since 1999, where the Scottish Greens (SG) and the (short-lived) Scottish Socialists positioned themselves to the left of the centre-left SNP. However, if the region is more heterogeneous, then the regionalist party which arrives second on the scene can try to target the share of the regionalist electorate which cannot identify with the left-right ideology of the other regionalist party or parties. This is the case in the Basque Country, where the centre-left EA emerged as splinter of the PNV. EA, besides adopting a more radical stance on the centre-periphery dimension, has targeted the regionalist electorate distributed between the centre-right PNV and the radical/extreme left EE and HB-Ba (Acha, 2006). Similarly, although they emerged simultaneously in the post-Franco era, the two main Catalan parties, CiU and ERC, compete for the Catalan regionalist voters from a centre(-right) and a centre-left position respectively, with the latter also occupying a more radical position on the centre-periphery dimension (Marcet and Argelaguet, 1998).

### **6.3.3 The European integration dimension**

The first hypothesis concerning positioning on European integration (H7) is inspired by the 'geo-political' model. Table 6.15 shows the distributions of regionalist parties on positions towards European integration across traditionally Europhile,

ambiguous and Eurosceptic ‘geo-political’ areas, using the classification provided in Table 6.6.

**Table 6.15 Regionalist parties’ positioning towards European integration in different ‘geo-political’ areas**

	<i>Pro-integration</i>	<i>No position, ambiguous, deeply divided</i>	<i>Anti-integration</i>
<i>Traditionally Eurosceptic ‘geo- political areas’</i>	(3) SNP(1980s-90s), PC(1980s-90s), SDLP	(1) PC(2000s)	(7) SNP(1960s-70s), SNP(2000s), PC(1960s-70s), UUP, DUP, SF, LT
<i>Traditionally ambiguous ‘geo- political area’</i>	(1) UPC(1990s)	(1) UPC(1980s)	-
<i>Traditionally Europhile ‘geo-political areas’</i>	(26) FDF, RW, VU, N-VA, CSU, SVP, UV, UVP, FA, CiU, PNV, ERC, EA, PA, PAR, CHA, UM, CC, UPN, CDN, PRC, PR, UnV, PSdAz, MpA, LN(1990-98)	(5) CSU(2000s), PNV(2000s), CiU(2000s), LN(2008), BNG(1990s)	(13) BNG(1980s), BNG(2000s), LN(since 1998), VB, dF, UfS, HB-Ba, EE, Ar, EA(2000s), ERC(2000s), PDC, CHA(2000s)

Source: compiled by author.

While there are cases of pro-integration parties in Eurosceptic areas, as well as cases of anti-integration parties in Europhile areas, the influence of the traditional attitudes of the states in which regionalist parties compete emerges very clearly: pro-integration cases are two times anti-integration ones in Europhile areas, while they are less than half in Eurosceptic areas.

The second hypothesis (H8) concerns the influence of left-right ideology. Tables 6.16 and 6.17 show the relationship between left-right and European integration positioning during the periods 1980s-90s and 2000s respectively. The expectations of H8 are almost entirely met as far as the first period is concerned (Table 6.16): all mainstream parties, except the UUP, supported European integration, while all radical parties (both left and right) opposed it.

**Table 6.16 Regionalist parties positioning on the left-right dimension and on European integration (1980s-1990s), (number of cases in brackets).**

	<i>Radical Left</i>	<i>Mainstream left</i>	<i>Centre</i>	<i>Mainstream right</i>	<i>Radical Right</i>
<i>Against further integration</i>	(4) HB-Ba, SF, PDS, BNG(1980s)	-	-	(1) UUP	(6) VB, dF, UfS, DUP, LT, LN
<i>No position, ambiguous or deeply divided</i>	-	(2) BNG(1990s), SG	(1) UPC(1980s)	-	-
<i>In favour of further integration</i>	-	(11) SNP, SDLP, ERC, EA, PC, VU(1990s), RW, UVP, CHA, PA, PSdAz	(9) CiU, FDF, UM, CDN, UV, VU(1980s) UPC(1990s) PRC, PR	(8) CSU, PNV, SVP, CC, UPN, LN(1996-98) PAR, UnV	-

Source: compiled by author.

**Table 6.17 Regionalist parties positioning on left-right dimension and on European integration (2000s), (number of cases in brackets).**

	<i>Radical Left</i>	<i>Mainstream left</i>	<i>Centre</i>	<i>Mainstream right</i>	<i>Radical Right</i>
<i>Against further integration</i>	(4) HB-Ba, SF, PDS, Ar	(5) SNP, ERC, EA, BNG, CHA	-	(1) UUP	(6) VB, dF, UfS, DUP, LT, LN
<i>No position, ambiguous or deeply divided</i>	-	(2) PC, SG	(1) CiU	(2) CSU, PNV	LN(2008)
<i>In favour of further integration</i>	-	(3) SDLP, PSdAz, PA	(6) UM, CDN, UV, PRC, PR, MpA	(4) SVP, CC, UPN, PAR	-

Source: compiled by author.

This evidence confirms the thesis of a consensus amongst mainstream parties, challenged by radical/fringe parties (Taggart, 1998; Hooghe *et al.*, 2002). In contrast, in the third phase (as represented in Table 6.17) the general consensus amongst mainstream regionalist parties seems to have been partially lost. In particular the majority of mainstream-left regionalist parties have turned to anti-EU integration positions, while the majority of centre and mainstream-right ones are still supportive of European integration. This seems to confirm the thesis that the neo-liberal character (or image) of the EU, which has gained prominence in the last decade, has increased Eurosceptic attitudes amongst the left, including parts of the mainstream left.

The increased number of anti-integration regionalist parties might also owe something to the compatibility of self-government objectives with deeper political European integration (H9). As Table 6.18 shows, a certain correlation between centre-periphery and European integration positions appears evident.

**Table 6.18 Regionalist parties positioning on the centre-periphery and European integration dimensions (2000s), (number of cases in brackets).**

	<i>Autonomist (moderate)</i>	<i>Autonomist (assertive)</i>	<i>Secessionist (ambiguous)</i>	<i>Secessionist (committed)</i>	<i>Secessionist (violent)</i>
<i>Against further integration</i>	-	(6) PDS, LN, DUP, UUP, LT, CHA	(2) BNG, ERC	(7) SNP, EA, VB, SF, dF, UfS, Ar	(1) HB-Ba
<i>No position, ambiguous or deeply divided</i>	-	(3) LN(2008), CSU, CiU	(2) PNV, SG	(1) PC	-
<i>In favour of further integration</i>	(9) PSdAz, PA, PAR, PRC, PR, MpA, UM, CC, UPN	(4) UV, FA, CDN, SVP	-	(2) SDLP, N-VA	-

Source: compiled by author.

All moderate autonomist parties are or have remained in favour of more integration. In contrast, amongst secessionist parties, only the SDLP and N-VA are or have remained in favour of further European integration. In the intermediate class (assertive autonomist), cases are spread, with a numerical majority in favour of anti-integration

positions, although the CSU and CiU still lean towards pro-European integration stances.

Finally, Table 6.19 shows the putative relationship between the level of regional autonomy and positioning towards European integration. The expectation of H10 was that regionalist parties acting in more autonomous regions would lean towards anti-integration stances, as deeper political integration could clash with the powers of the regions and transfer them to the EU institutions in Brussels.

**Table 6.19**  
**Level of regional autonomy and regionalist parties' positions towards European integration, 2000s (number of cases in brackets)**

	Low	Medium	Medium/High	High
Anti-integration	(3) SF, UUP, DUP	(3) LN, CHA, ERC	(6) dF, UfS, SNP, EA, Ar, HB-Ba	(3) LT, VB, PDS
Ambiguous	(1) PC	(2) CiU, LN(2008)	(1) PNV	(1) CSU
Pro-integration	(1) SDLP	(6) PA, PAR, UM, CC, PR, PRC	(8) UV, UVP, FA, SVP, MpA, CDN, PSdAz, UPN	(1) N-VA

Source: compiled by author.

However, the evidence which emerges from the cross-tabulation does not appear to support the hypothesis. The distribution of cases in regions with minimum and maximum autonomy is exactly the same. Even grouping the regions in low and medium vs. medium/high and high autonomy, the distribution of cases is about the same: 7/9 and 9/11, drawing the line between pro-integration and the other two categories.

Summarizing the results concerning the hypotheses covering positioning on European integration, it can be said that the traditional attitudes towards European integration of the states in which regionalist parties act do play a role in orientating parties, thus substantiating the 'geo-political' model. However, in recent years the number of anti-integration regionalist parties has considerably increased even in traditionally Europhile states.

Party positioning on the left-right dimension was nearly a perfect predictor of positioning on European integration in the 1980s-90s period, with all mainstream parties but one supporting integration and all (left and right) radical parties opposing it, thus substantiating the 'left-right ideology' model. To be sure the model also holds in the current phase, in spite of a growing number of mainstream left parties shifting towards anti-integration positions. This process may owe much to the perceived neo-liberal ethos of the EU in the last phase of integration, which alienated parts of the European mainstream left.

However, the increase in the number of anti-integration regionalist parties may also owe something to the constitutionalization of the EU, which is perceived by secessionist parties as further obstacle towards their final goal. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of secessionist parties now adopt anti-integration or ambiguous positions. Even some big regionalist parties that have traditionally been assertive autonomist and pro-European integration out of conviction in the past (such as the CSU, CiU and the PNV) have been characterized by considerable divisions and/or reservations about supporting the constitutional process. In December 2004 the PNV's Annual Conference passed a resolution in favour of the European Constitution. However, about a third of the delegates voted against (Perez-Nievas, 2006, p. 53). *Convergència de Catalunya*, one of the two components of the CiU, had to hold an internal referendum before taking a position on the ratification of the EU Constitution (Madorran, 2005). In the Spanish referendum for the ratification of the EU Constitution, both the PNV and CiU participated in the campaign within the 'yes' camp, but their engagement was late and light (Aparicio-Romero, 2006, p. 70). Even more controversially, in Germany prominent CSU figures tried to hinder the ratification process by proposing a referendum (*Financial Times*, by Bertrand Benoit, 31/08/04) and questioning the compatibility of both constitutional treaties with the German constitution (*Spiegel Online*, 22/04/05; *Conservativehome.com*, 24/06/08).<sup>93</sup> These reservations and ambiguities from traditionally governmental parties in extensively autonomous regions suggest that some regionalist parties could fear that centralization of power in Brussels may come at the expense of regional governments too. However, there seems to be no general relationship between the level of regional autonomy and regionalist parties' positioning towards European integration.

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<sup>93</sup> The CSU has also criticized the EU for its sanctions against Austria over Haider. See Statham and Koopmans (2009, p. 456-57).

#### 6.4 Cross-dimensional patterns

Some of the tables presented above showed the relationship between regionalist parties' positioning on the left-right dimension and on European integration (tables 6.16 and 6.17) and the relationship between regionalist parties' positioning on the centre-periphery dimension and European integration (table 6.18). The last relationship to be investigated in order to analyse patterns of positioning across the three dimensions is, therefore, the one between left-right and centre-periphery. Table 6.20 shows the relationship between these two ideological dimensions. There is no hypothesis to test in this case as, to my knowledge, this relationship has not been investigated in general terms. As recalled in Chapter One, the only reference to this issue is De Winter's observation that: "parties situated to the left... also tend to be the most independentist. The right or centre-right parties are less independentist" (De Winter, 1998a, p. 211). The analysis here is, therefore, purely inductive.

**Table 6.20 Regionalist parties' ideological positions on the left-right and centre-periphery dimensions, (number of cases in brackets)**

	<i>Radical Left</i>	<i>Mainstream left</i>	<i>Centre</i>	<i>Mainstream right</i>	<i>Radical Right</i>
<i>Secessionist (Extremist/Violent)</i>	(2) HB-Ba, SF	-	-	-	-
<i>Secessionist (Very committed)</i>	(4) BNG (1980-90s), Ar, EE, SF(2000s)	(5) SNP, SDLP, EA, ERC(1980-90s), PC(2000s)	-	(2) N-VA, LN(1996-1998)	(3) VB, dF, UfS
<i>Secessionist (ambiguous)</i>	(1) PSdAz(1980s)	(5) ERC, PC, SG, VU(1990s), BNG(2000s)	-	(1) PNV(2000s)	-
<i>Autonomist (assertive)</i>	(1) PDS	(3) RW, UVP, CHA	(7) CiU, FDF, UPC, CDN, UV, FA VU(1970-80s)	(6) CSU, PNV, SVP, CC, UUP, VU(1960)	(3) LN, LT, DUP
<i>Autonomist (moderate)</i>	-	(1) PA	(5) PSdAz(1950-70s), MpA, UM, PRC, PR	(3) PAR, UPN, UnV	-

Source: compiled by author.



De Winter's statement seems to hold to a great extent. First, only radical-left parties, such as Basque HB and Northern Irish SF, have pushed their secessionism to the point of flanking or fully endorsing an armed struggle. Secondly, counting all secessionist cases (ambiguous, strongly committed and extremist/violent), we find seventeen of them situated to the left (mainstream and radical), while only six are situated to the right (mainstream and radical). However, the presence of those six right-wing secessionist parties, as well as other patterns emerging from the table call for a re-consideration of the relationship between the two ideological dimensions. The empty boxes of the radical-left and radical-right in the bottom row of the table seem to suggest that radical parties, whether left or right, tend to eschew very moderate positions on the centre-periphery dimension. The idea of a relationship between left-right radicalism and centre-periphery radicalism seems to be partially strengthened by the fact that all radical left parties, (with the exception of the PDS) and half of radical-right parties are secessionists – indeed, more than half if unionist DUP is excluded.

As far as the left-right mainstream area is concerned, centre-left parties are divided between secessionist and non-secessionist, with a strong majority of them falling within the former class. In contrast, all centre and most centre-right parties are not secessionist. It is worth noting that these parties are either social liberal – FDF, VU (1970s-80s), CDC, CDN and UV - or moderate Christian-democrats – UM and UDC - or (mainly Catholic) conservative - CSU, PNV, SVP and VU (1960s) - while the two exceptions, N-VA and, even more, the LN (1996-98) are more detached both from Christian democracy, as well as from social liberalism.

A tentative conclusion points towards the crucial intersection of the two ideological dimensions in respect to several issues. The first of these is related to attitudes towards social and political change, whereby the difference between devolution and secession can arguably reflect the difference between gradual and radical political change. As Freeden argues, the common root of all the possible variations of conservative ideology is a special concern for social and political change which, unless pursued slowly and incrementally, is generally perceived as a threat (Freeden, 1996, p. 332-33). From Table 6.20 it emerges that many regionalist parties adopt a moderate/conservative and a non-secessionist stance. In contrast, secessionist positions tend to go better with ideologies, such as social-democracy, Marxism and right-wing populism, which perceive social and political change more as an opportunity than as a threat.

The second issue is the commitment of the Catholic social doctrine to the principle of subsidiarity, which recognizes the legitimacy of territorial claims as far as they can be solved by devolution of power within the wider polity. Indeed, from two of the case studies presented in this work, PC and the SVP, it has emerged that the political doctrine of the Catholic Church has had a moderating influence. The endorsement of the Catholic political philosophy by Plaid leader Saunders Lewis in the 1920s was strictly linked to the party's rejection of the ideology of 'independence', which remained one of its constant features until recently. Similarly, the Christian-democratic tradition within the SVP has had moderating effects on their centre-periphery ideology.<sup>94</sup> Arguably, however, the moderating effect of the Catholic tradition (and of the Catholic Church) is stronger if the region belongs to a predominantly Catholic state.

The third issue concerns whether regional (or ethno-regional) communities can be assigned specific rights and whether such rights should get priority over individual rights. In the absence of violent repression and/or strong limitation of cultural freedom by the state, contemporary liberal thought tends to reject the right to unilateral secession by regional communities (Buchanan, 1998; Baubock, 2005). This could, at least partially, explain why amongst regionalist parties liberal positions go with non-secessionist ones, while less liberal stances can go with secessionist ones.

All three issues point to a certain incompatibility between major centre and centre-right ideologies (liberal, Christian-democratic and conservative) and secessionist stances, thus reinforcing the idea that the pattern can be explained in terms of internal ideological consistency.

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has pursued two aims. First it has discussed the four case-studies in a comparative perspective, trying to retain a great deal of their complexity and, at the same time, point out generalizable patterns or trends. Some of the more complex relationships, such as the interplay of socio-economic regional environments and state's socio-economic policies, or the interplay between the political/electoral environment and internal party politics, or the effects of changing levels of socio/political polarization, or the implications of multi-level politics, or strategic decision making on the priority between votes, office and policy, were discussed and analysed. The focus

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<sup>94</sup> Evidence from the case of the PNV also appears to support this interpretation (Ugarte and Perez-Nievas, 1998, p. 91).

then shifted towards empirical testing of general hypotheses, as generalization about simpler causal relationships was the second aim the chapter. The hypotheses were drawn both from the extant literature and from the comparative analysis of the four case-studies.

As usual in social sciences, the hypothesis-testing aimed to uncover general tendencies, rather than exception-free laws. The cross-tabulations supported all the hypotheses to a great extent, with the exception of the putative positive relationship between higher levels of regional autonomy and a leaning towards anti-European integration positions. In some cases, as for the effect of ethnic distinctiveness and institutional history of the regions on regionalist parties' positioning along the centre-periphery dimension, exceptions to mono-factor explanations could be accounted for considering the combinatory effect of these factors.

The main results of the comparative analysis of the 43 parties are:

- 1- all structural factors considered (ethnic distinctiveness, institutional history and economic status) play an important role on the centre-periphery positioning of regionalist parties but none of them, in its own, can explain all the cases.
- 2- The electoral systems under which regionalist parties compete offer a solid explanation for the likelihood of finding only one or more regionalist parties acting in the same region and for their adoption of moderate/mainstream as opposed to radical positions both on the centre-periphery and left-right dimension.
- 3- The economic status of the regions appears to be a very strong explanatory factor for the left-right positioning of the main regionalist party in each region.
- 4- Regionalist parties' positioning towards European integration has considerably changed across time. Support for integration reached its peak amongst regionalist parties in the period 1980s-90s, while several parties have turned to anti-integration or ambiguous stances during the current period (2000s).
- 5- Left-right positioning had an extremely strong effect of positioning towards European integration during the 1980s-90s, with virtually all (left or right) mainstream parties supporting integration and literally all (left or radical) radical parties opposing it. While opposition to integration amongst radical parties has continued during the current phase, support amongst mainstream parties has become significantly less homogeneous.
- 6- All moderate autonomist parties support European integration in the current phase, while the majority of assertive autonomist and secessionist parties have adopted

ambiguous or anti-integration stances, thus providing some confirmation of the hypothesis that assertive autonomism and, even more, secessionism clash with the current process of centralization of power in Brussels.

## Conclusions

The general objective of this work was to push forward our understanding of regionalist parties' ideological positioning in multi-dimensional space. Its very approach, characterised by a focus on party strategy and ideology, rather than directly on party success, constitutes an original element of this study. Four research questions were addressed concerning respectively the three ideological dimensions taken into consideration - centre-periphery, left-right and European integration – and the relationships between them.

The first and most extensive part of the research consisted of in-depth study of four regionalist parties, the Scottish National Party in Scotland, *Plaid Cymru* – The Party of Wales - in Wales, the South Tyrolean People's Party in South Tyrol and the Northern League in Northern Italy (Padania). Their analysis has taken into consideration many aspects of the structural and political environment, of the historical context and historical sequence of events, of the internal working of political parties, and of the relationship between strategic choices and party ideology. A comparison of the four cases has highlighted the influence of several factors, often interacting, that impact on regionalist parties' strategy and ideology.

Internal party organization and the role of key figures help explain party responsiveness and adaptation to the social, institutional/political and electoral environments in respect of positioning on all three dimensions. Ideological and policy change has often been extremely rapid in the case of the Northern League, the most centralized and leader-centred party of the four. This has not avoided internal struggles and even the calling into question of Bossi's leadership, especially when strategic or tactical decisions led to the loss of votes and/or office. Yet, Bossi has always managed to impose sudden shifts of priorities between office, policy and vote-winning goals, with consequences for ideological repositioning. In contrast, in the other three cases, changes of strategy and ideological repositioning needed to pass through a phase of maturation, often characterised by prolonged and sometimes uncertain internal struggles which, on many occasions, resulted in real change only when the outcome of those struggles was a change in the leadership. Even in the case of the SVP, a rather centralised party which was led for forty-five years by the same leader, ideological/policy shifts were often preceded either by changes in the dominant faction around Magnago or by changes in the balance of power between the different

sections/factions. In the more internally democratic and decentralised SNP and PC, struggles between factions (or tendencies) have been extremely evident any time substantive ideological/policy change was at stake. The process of change has therefore been slower, sometimes driven by long procedures – e.g. the PC's internal Commission of Inquiry in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Yet, in the long run the electoral driver has steered strategic repositioning in most cases – i.e. the internal faction which proved to be more in tune with electoral demands has often managed to impose its view, even without seizing the leadership, as in the case of the left-wing faction of the SNP in the 1980s.

Another important factor affecting both ideological positioning and internal party politics - in this case limited to the left-right dimension - is the level of social and political polarization. While parties positioned on the radical left or right, such as the Northern League from the late 1990s onwards, do not suffer from high political polarization in the political system, and can even capitalize on it, parties of the centre-left or centre-right, like the SVP and 1960s-1970s SNP and PC, run the risk of being torn apart. Leaving aside the polarization of the 1920s and 1930s, when the SNP and PC were still more like pressure groups than proper political parties, the analysis has shown how the polarization of the British society and politics in the 1980s strongly augmented (if not created) internal factionalism and, eventually, determined a clear drift to the left of the two 'British' cases. Similarly, in Italy, the parallel process of bipolarization - i.e. the passage from a three-bloc party system in the First Republic to a two-bloc one in the Second Republic – and increased polarization (in this case more political than social) increased factionalism within the SVP and, between 1995 and 1998, within the Northern League. In this respect, governmental policies play a great role in creating or responding to emerging polarization. In the UK, the neo-liberal reforms of the Conservative governments during the 1980s definitely helped push the SNP and PC to the left. In Italy, while the fiscal policies of the centre-left governments created problems for both the SVP and LN, pushing the former to distance itself from the government and the latter to move to the right, polarization has mostly (leaving aside the controversial figure of Silvio Berlusconi himself) stemmed from policies pertaining to the socio-cultural sub-dimension, especially on issues related to immigration, multiculturalism, education and family.

A further important feature which has emerged from the comparative analysis of the four cases is the link between left-right and centre-periphery orientations of the

state-wide (i.e. national) parties, which carries implications for coalition (and multi-level) politics. In the UK, the British left has traditionally been more sensitive (or at least less insensitive) towards regionalist claims than the British right. Before the rise of the Labour party, the gap between the Liberal and Conservative parties on the Irish, and in turn the Scottish and Welsh, question was very evident. With the rise of Labour, especially after 1945, the gap was considerably reduced and rested more on the intransigent anti-regionalism of the Tories than on the willingness of Labour to listen to regionalist claims. It can also be argued that Labour's devolution proposals in the 1970s and 1990s were driven more by electoral competition with the SNP and PC than by a genuine ideological recognition of territorial grievances. Yet, the fact remains that the reference actors of the two regionalist parties in Westminster for constitutional reform were Labour and the Liberal Democrats, while the Conservatives remained until the early 2000s the implacable enemies. This created, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, a sort of submergence of two dimensions, centre-periphery and left-right, into an encompassing single dimension: left/periphery vs. right/centre. Obviously, these alignments can change and there are clear signs that the leadership of the Conservative party, both in London and Edinburgh (less so in Cardiff), is now closing the gap.

While these relationships between left-right and centre-periphery orientations of state-wide parties are interesting *per se* in the UK, they have more serious consequences in Italy for three reasons. First, the regional level has existed right across Italy since 1970 - in South Tyrol (and other special status regions) since 1948. Secondly, coalition politics has been more salient in Italy both at national and regional level. Third, while the tendency of left-wing state-wide parties to be more sensitive (or less insensitive) to regionalist claims than right-wing state-wide parties applies to Italy too, the two Italian regionalist parties have been positioned right, not left, of centre. Coalition politics for them, therefore, poses a serious dilemma: allying themselves with (or supporting) the national left is more likely to be rewarding in terms of centre-periphery constitutional policy but is also likely to imply the swallowing of leftist socio-economic and/or socio-cultural policies. As a corollary, allying with (or supporting) the national right is likely to bring about welcome right-wing policies in these domains but may prove counterproductive or detrimental to ambitions of self-government. During the First Republic, this dilemma was mitigated by the three-bloc party system, with the centre-bloc (primarily the DC) representing an often, though not always, acceptable compromise for the SVP. However, in the Second Republic, the dilemma has

manifested itself fully. The LN, in spite of its rhetoric, has *de facto* preferred to prioritize socio-economic and socio-cultural policy achievements over constitutional reforms and, indeed, it has achieved more on the former dimension than on the latter. In contrast, the SVP has given priority to achieving more self-government than to left-right policies at the central level, although this strategy appears increasingly troublesome for the party.

The SVP's case is particularly interesting because it shows how right of centre regionalist parties can strongly affect national politics (in this case, but in theory regional politics too) by diverting votes from the right to the left. For instance, while a majority of the SVP's votes come from right of centre voters, in 2006 they were decisive to the victory of the centre-left coalition in Rome. Given that the tendency of left-wing national parties to be more open towards regionalist claims than right-wing national parties applies to other states too – primarily to Spain but, since the 1960s, to France too – the diversion of votes from the right to the left through regionalist parties' coalition politics may represent an important issue for the national and regional politics of these states.

The long-term historical perspective adopted in this study also allowed us to highlight the importance of historical ideological swings within Western European electorates produced by social change and by the politicization of new issues. These ideological swings have often resulted in electoral de-alignment and re-alignment, generating opportunities for new political actors willing to tap new electoral niches. While the SVP attempted to adapt its ideology and policy to the new issues that became salient, the SNP and PC were able to fully exploit 'new left' issues brought about by the 'silent revolution' in the 1970s, while the LN tapped the 'new right' electoral niche created by the 'silent counter-revolution'.

However, the influence on parties' ideological positioning of the complex interactions between internal party politics, levels of socio-political polarization, state's policies, multi-level coalition politics and historical ideological swings manifests itself under the constraints of the socio-structural and institutional/political environments in which regionalist parties act. The second part of the research, reported in Chapter 6, aimed at bringing out general tendencies in regionalist parties' ideological positioning. The findings of this second part of the research can be best summarized taking into consideration one ideological dimension at time. This also allows us to answer the questions posed at the outset precisely.



Explaining ideological positioning on the centre-periphery dimension on the basis of socio-structural environments proved particularly difficult. This is partially due to the fact that, by definition, all regionalist parties occupy the periphery side of this dimension. Therefore, what needs to be explained is actually why regionalist parties adopt different levels of radicalism in their claims for self-government. As the analysis of the left-right dimension demonstrates (see below), socio-structural environments appear to be more suitable for explaining parties' placement on one side or the other of the cleavage, rather than explaining different positions within the same side. Indeed, none of the three factors analysed – ethnic distinctiveness, institutional history and economic status – can, on its own, account for all cases, even if just the most successful party in each region is taken into consideration. Yet, their combined effect appears to explain a great deal of ideological differentiation amongst the cases.

Confirming to a great extent previous research (Newman, 1997), the influence of voting systems and party systems on the adoption of moderate or radical positions on self-government appears to be a very strong explanatory factor. Regionalist (non-unionist) parties acting under majoritarian systems and in two party systems do tend to adopt a radical position, while under PR and multi-party systems we find both moderate and radical parties. Usually, moderate ones are more successful than radical ones, though the balance can change in favour of the radicals with the increasing achievement of self-government for the region.

As far as the left-right dimension is concerned, socio-structural conditions and, in particular, the economic status of the region go a long way towards explaining the position of, at least the most successful regionalist party of the region either side of the divide – particularly if the line is drawn between mainstream left and radical left, on one side, and centre, mainstream right and radical right, on the other. This is particularly the case for 'bourgeois' regions, where all major regionalist parties are positioned to the centre or right of centre, and for 'working class' regions, where all major regionalist parties (with the exception of unionist UUP and DUP) are positioned left of centre. While this finding is definitely intuitive, no previous comparative work has addressed this point systematically. Evidence is, however, much more patchy for 'scarcely industrialized' regions, where the major regionalist parties are spread between the radical left and the mainstream right.

Voting systems and party systems appear to be good explanatory factors to account for mainstream vs. radical positioning along the left-right dimension too.

Regionalist parties acting under predominantly majoritarian voting systems and in two-party (or two-bloc) systems, such as the SNP, PC and the LN (1996), tend to position themselves close to the centre, while in PR and multi-party systems we find both mainstream and radical parties.

As far as European integration is concerned, the analysis has confirmed that the proportion between pro-integration and anti-integration parties is much higher within traditionally Europhile states than within traditionally Eurosceptic ones. Generally speaking, the analysis has also confirmed that support for integration amongst regionalist parties grew and reached its peak during the 1980s and 1990s. In this period, only left-right radical parties opposed integration. In contrast, in the period since 2000, support has significantly decreased, especially amongst mainstream left parties and amongst parties which are particularly assertive or radical (i.e. secessionist) on their self-government claims. These findings represent another original contribution to the literature on regionalist parties. Although recent works have started to detect a certain shift away from overwhelming support for European integration amongst regionalist parties in recent years, the links between this shift and left-right and centre-periphery positioning have largely gone unnoticed and systematic analysis has not yet been undertaken.

As far as patterns of cross-dimension positioning are concerned, it has already been mentioned how left-right and centre-periphery positioning appear to influence parties' stances on European integration. A pattern seems to emerge from the analysis of parties' positioning across the left-right and centre-periphery dimensions too. Secessionist stances are very rare amongst centre and centre-right parties, while they are more common (about half and half) among radical-right parties. However, it is amongst left of centre parties that we find most secessionist cases. They represent a strong majority amongst the mainstream left and an overwhelming majority amongst the radical left. A tentative explanation based on internal ideological consistency has been proposed, pointing to a certain incompatibility between moderate/conservative ideologies (especially Christian democracy) and the pursuit of dramatic (and potentially traumatic) social and political change, and incompatibility between contemporary liberal thought and the putative right to secession – in the absence of violent repression and/or violation of human rights by the state.

This summary of findings highlights how the present study has pushed forward our understanding of regionalist parties' positioning in multi-dimensional ideological space, also pointing to consequences for the politics of the regions and states in which regionalist parties are important actors. As usual in social science, this research has pointed out tendencies, rather than stated deterministic laws. Yet, the awareness of these tendencies may even translate into some predictive capacity. If just a few features of a regional socio-structural environment (with regionalist mobilization potential) and of the relative institutional/political environment are known, informed speculation on the ideological complexion of any regionalist party (or parties) which might emerge there in the future becomes possible. Many French regions, for instance, have some regionalist mobilization potential but have not witnessed the (electoral) emergence of regionalist parties. These regions could represent laboratory-like contexts in which the predictive validity of these generalizations can be tested.

As an exercise in theory-building, this study represents a synthesis of previous research and a starting point for future research. Indeed, future studies could build on this thesis in several ways. The most straightforward one would be to reproduce a similar analysis focusing on other democratic contexts, starting from Central and Eastern Europe (which would allow European integration to be one of the three salient dimensions). Future studies could also aim to improve this research by providing a more systematic analysis of the combined effects of the diverse causal factors taken into consideration. Another important way to complement this study would be to gather the diffuse data (such as opinion polls on social and political attitudes and election studies) available at regional level in order to fill the gap between the socio-structural level and voters' orientations and preferences. This would allow an evaluation of whether the assumptions on which this thesis is based (which were drawn from the tradition of comparative historical sociology) still hold and would also provide a more rigorous account of the social and electoral environments in which parties act. Finally, future case-studies (or 'small n' comparative analysis) could draw from this work and adopt a more focused approach, in theoretical, analytical and thematic terms. They could help shed light on several aspects highlighted in this work: the effect of national (left-right) polarization on internal party politics and ideological positioning, the diversion of votes from the right to the left through coalition (and multi-level) politics, the deep causes of recent repositioning on European integration, and patterns of cross-dimension positioning.

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## Appendix

**Sources used to code party positions along the three ideological dimensions considered (centre-periphery, left-right, European integration)\***

<i>Parties</i>	<i>Abbrev.</i>	<i>Sources</i>
<i>Aralar</i>	<i>Ar</i>	Aparicio-Romero (2006); Party website (in Spanish): <a href="http://www.aralar.net/portada-es?set_language=es">http://www.aralar.net/portada-es?set_language=es</a>
<i>Bloque Nacionalista Gallego</i>	BNG	Aparicio-Romero (2006); Gomez-Reino (2006); Elias (2009).
<i>Chunta Aragonesista</i>	CHA	Aparicio-Romero (2006); Party website: <a href="http://chunta.com/">http://chunta.com/</a>
<i>Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern</i>	CSU	Hepburn (2008b); Wagemann (2005)
<i>Coalición Canaria</i>	CC	Aparicio-Romero (2006); Party website: <a href="http://www.coalicioncanaria.org/">http://www.coalicioncanaria.org/</a>
<i>Convergencia Democrática de Navarra</i>	CDN	Aparicio-Romero (2006); Party website: <a href="http://www.cdn.es/">http://www.cdn.es/</a>
<i>Convergència i Unió</i>	CiU	Aparicio-Romero (2006); Barbera and Barrio (2006); Madorran (2005); Marcet and Argelaguet (1998); De Winter (1998a)
Democratic Unionist Party	DUP	Murphy (1990); Evans and Duffy (1997); party website: <a href="http://www.dup.org.uk/">http://www.dup.org.uk/</a>
<i>Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya</i>	ERC	Aparicio-Romero (2006); Argelaguet (2006); Madorran (2005); Marcet and Argelaguet (1998); De Winter (1998a)
<i>Eusko Alkartasuna</i>	EA	Aparicio-Romero (2006); Acha (2006); Acha-Ugarte and Perez-Nievas (1998)
<i>Euskadiko Ezkerra</i>	EE	Acha-Ugarte and Perez-Nievas (1998)
<i>Fédération Autonomiste</i>	FA	Party website: <a href="http://www.federationautonomiste.org/">http://www.federationautonomiste.org/</a>
<i>Die Freiheitlichen</i>	dF	Pallaver (2007); party website: <a href="http://die-freiheitlichen.com/">http://die-freiheitlichen.com/</a>
<i>Front Démocratique des Francophones</i>	FDF	Deschouwer (2009); Buelens and Van Dyck (1998); De Winter (1998a)
<i>Herri Batasuna – Heuskal Herritarrok - Batasuna</i>	HB-Ba	Aparicio-Romero (2006); De Winter (1998a); Acha-Ugarte and Perez-Nievas (1998)
<i>Lega dei Ticinesi</i>	LT	Mazzoleni (2005); Albertazzi (2006); party website: <a href="http://www.legaticinesi.ch/">http://www.legaticinesi.ch/</a>
<i>Movimento per l'Autonomia</i>	MpA	Party website: <a href="http://www.mpa-italia.it/portal/">http://www.mpa-italia.it/portal/</a>
<i>Nieuw Vlaamse Alliantie</i>	N-VA	Deschouwer, K. (2009); party website: <a href="http://www.n-va.be/">http://www.n-va.be/</a>

<i>Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus</i>	PDS	Hough (2001); Hough and Koss (2009)
<i>Partido Andalucista</i>	PA	Aparicio-Romero (2006); Montabes et al. (2006); party website: <a href="http://www.partidoandalucista.org/">http://www.partidoandalucista.org/</a>
<i>Partido Aragonés</i>	PAR	Aparicio-Romero (2006); Party website: <a href="http://www.partidoaragones.es/">http://www.partidoaragones.es/</a>
<i>Partido Nacionalista Vasco</i>	PNV	Aparicio-Romero (2006); Perez-Nievas (2006); De Winter (1998a); Acha-Ugarte and Perez-Nievas (1998)
<i>Partido Regionalista de Cantabria</i>	PRC	Party website: <a href="http://www.prc.es/">http://www.prc.es/</a>
<i>Partido Riojano</i>	PR	Party website: <a href="http://www.partidoriojano.es/">http://www.partidoriojano.es/</a>
<i>Partito Sardo D'Azione</i>	PSdAz	Roux (2006); Hepburn (2009b)
<i>Rassemblement Wallon</i>	RW	Deschouwer (2009); Buelens and Van Dyck (1998); De Winter (1998a)
<i>Sinn Fein</i>	SF	Ruane and Todd (1992); Evans, G. and Duffy, M. (1997); party websites: <a href="http://www.sinnfein.org/">http://www.sinnfein.org/</a> and <a href="http://www.sinnfein.ie/">http://www.sinnfein.ie/</a>
Social Democratic and Labour Party	SDLP	Ruane and Todd (1992); Evans, G. and Duffy, M. (1997); party website: <a href="http://www.sdlp.ie/">http://www.sdlp.ie/</a>
Scottish Greens	SG	Masseti (2009b); Bennie (2002); party website: <a href="http://www.scottishgreens.org.uk/">http://www.scottishgreens.org.uk/</a>
Ulster Unionist Party	UUP	Murphy, S. (1990); Evans, G. and Duffy, M. (1997); party website: <a href="http://www.uup.org/">http://www.uup.org/</a>
<i>Unió Mallorquina</i>	UM	Party website: <a href="http://www.unio-mallorquina.com/">http://www.unio-mallorquina.com/</a>
<i>Unió Valenciana</i>	UnV	Party website: <a href="http://uniovalenciana.org/">http://uniovalenciana.org/</a>
<i>Unión del Pueblo Navarro</i>	UPN	Party website: <a href="http://upn.org/">http://upn.org/</a>
<i>Unione di u Populu Corsu</i>	UPC	De Winter (1998a); Olivesi (1998); Cheney (2007); Elias (2009)
<i>Union für Südtirol</i>	UfS	Pallaver (2007); party website: <a href="http://www.unionfs.com/">http://www.unionfs.com/</a>
<i>Union Valdôtaine</i>	UV	Martial (1996); Boiardi and Di Capua, (1994); party website: <a href="http://www.unionvaldotaine.org/uv/index.php">http://www.unionvaldotaine.org/uv/index.php</a>
<i>Union Valdôtaine Progressiste</i>	UVP	Martial (1996); Boiardi and Di Capua (1994)
<i>Vlaams Blok - Belang</i>	VB	Breuning (1997); De Winter et al. (2006a); Deschouwer (2009)
<i>Volksunie</i>	VU	Breuning (1997); De Winter (1998b); De Winter (1998a), De Winter (2006)

\*The appendix does not include the four case-studies dealt with in this thesis (PC, SNP, SVP and LN), as the sources for desuming their ideological positioning are presented in the relative chapters.