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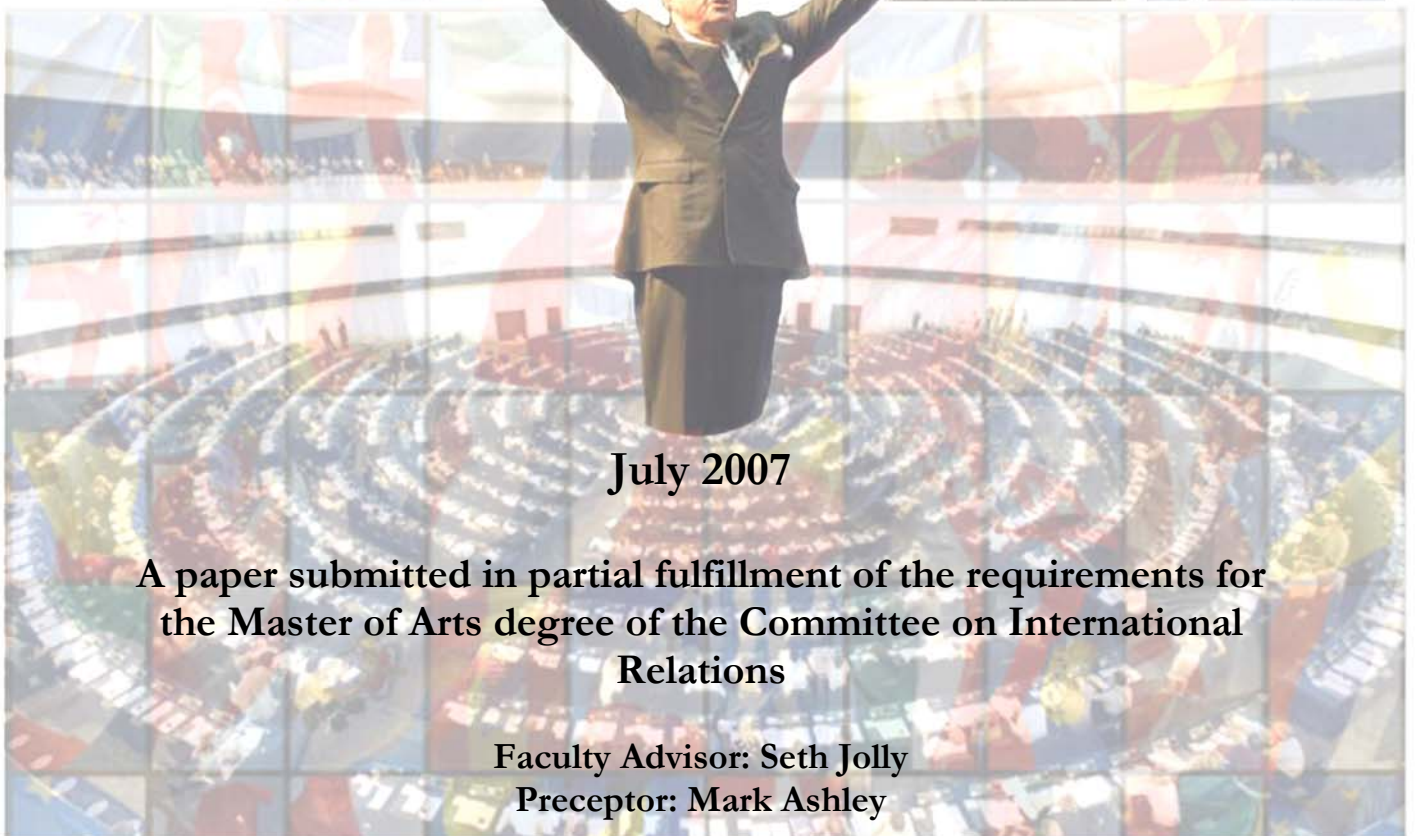
Committee on International Relations

Strange Bedfellows:

Instrumental Opportunism in the Far-Right “Identity,
Tradition and Sovereignty” European Parliament Group

By

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*Cover art- the author: Personalities from left to right: Volen Siderov (Ataka), Alessandra Mussolini Azione Sociale con Alessandra Mussolini), Filip Dewinter (Vlaams Belang), Jean-Marie Le Pen (Front National), Jörg Haider (ex-Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs) and Luca Romagnoli (Fiamma Tricolore)
Translations from French, Bulgarian, Italian, Romanian, Dutch and German- the author*

ABSTRACT:

In early 2007 a formation of Far-Right political parties, the Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty group came into being in the European Parliament. This unusual formation of parties, some with separatist or irredentist claims and all with some xenophobic tendencies, has stirred media fears, disapproval among Europe’s immigrant population and politically liberal public. What made the formation of the ITS group possible? This research adopts a rational, interest-based analysis of coalition building and it presents three hypotheses for the group’s formation. Firstly, EP funding, access to more floor time and other institutional benefits may be the driving incentives for coalescing. Secondly, the formation may be a response to the parties’ desired boost of domestic credibility and prestige. Thirdly, the possible sharing of a cohesive ideology may have been a reason for coalescence. Evidence from the group’s and the parties’ own documentation, from speeches in plenary, from media reports and the relevant literature points to the lack of a cohesive ideology and to the instrumental purposes for the formation of the ITS group. Most of all, the ITS is the fruit of the political opportunism of the leaders of the parties involved, whose domestic electoral performance has suffered in recent years.

PART I

1. INTRODUCTION:

a) The Puzzle of a Union of Far-Right Parties:

With the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union on January 1, 2007, a long-awaited goal for several nationalist representatives in the European Parliament (EP) became a reality. The number of like-minded parliamentarians moved barely over the minimum required for the formation of a party group. 21 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) announced their intention to form a political bloc. A bewildering entity, this now 23-member political coalition was formally recognized on January 9th, 2007, thus gaining recourse to EP funds and official identification as a parliamentary group. The Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty group (ITS) consists of the French Front National, FN (National Front), the Romanian Partidul România Mare, PRM (Greater Romania Party), the Belgian Vlaams Belang, VB (Flemish Interest), the Italian Azione Sociale con Alessandra Mussolini, ASAM (Social Action with Alessandra Mussolini) and Fiamma Tricolore, FT (Tricolor Flame), the Austrian Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ (Austrian Freedom Party), the Bulgarian Ataka, A (Attack), as well as one British (former UKIP¹) and one Romanian independent MEPs. These parties, a

¹ UKIP- United Kingdom Independent Party <http://www.ukip.org/> Last consulted July 12, 2007

nationalistic, often xenophobic, secessionist and irredentist cabal cannot have been expected to agglomerate in a single political bloc. Some of them have even expressed territorial claims to the governments of other parties in the group (The Partidul România Mare has claims to territory in North-Eastern Bulgaria, as well as in Eastern Hungary).

The group's creation is a puzzle for a variety of reasons. Firstly, nationalism is a non-cooperative, exclusionary ethos which is based on the affirmation of the nation against anyone else who is viewed as an outsider. In this context it does not make sense to have a coalition of competing nationalisms within a setting such as the European Parliament which is designed to foster cross-national cooperation and supranational policy-making. To unite against an international super-project in order to retain the right to be hateful of one another is fairly bizarre. Secondly, precisely because of the exclusivity of nationalism, the possibility that these parties are uniting on the basis of a shared ideology is unconvincing because xenophobia works against everyone. Admittedly, there are certain types of foreigners that are disliked more than others and in the case of the Far-Right parties in Europe, there have been non-European citizens, particularly Muslims. Thirdly, another paradox is that Western European Far-Right parties and their constituencies are obstinately opposed to migrants from Eastern Europe. The second largest party in the group and 40% of the overall membership come from the two Eastern European parties. This does not speak well of the consistency of the beliefs of the Western European parties. From the other side, nationalistic parties in Eastern Europe frequently decry being sold out to the West economically and to the EU and other international organizations politically. This also makes their alliance with Far-Right parties from the West strange and unprincipled.

Yet, the creation of this formation is now a fact and it represents an important cross-cutting cleavage, where "old" and "new" European Far-Right parties unite in the pursuit of common objectives. This development is a result of the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to

the Union. “Ironically, given the hostility of the West European Far-Right to expansion, to immigration, and to Eastern Europe, it is Romania's entry that has made the caucus possible.”² The perceived benefits for these parties must have been large enough that they would be willing to forego their own programmatic distaste of internationalism and aversion to one another’s national and political goals which are divergent. The European process has been theoretically designed and institutionally arranged to reduce the probability of emergence of such radical political mobilization. Therefore it is additionally surprising that the relative rise of nationalism and Far-Right parties has intensified as the process of integration has deepened and gathered momentum. It is even more puzzling that what enables the creation of the ITS group is the very supranational EU structure they object to the most.

The formation of the ITS group has increased suspicions that the Far- Right is on the rise in Europe. According to Corinne Deloy and Dominique Reynié, however, the “eurocritical”³ vote in European Parliament elections since 1979 “appears contained, even in regression.”⁴ In 1979 it accounted for 17.53%; in 1984- 19.5%; in 1989- 16.79%; in 1994- 16.06%; in 1999- 14.49% and in 2004- 16.06%. However, the authors remark that the lower the voter turn-out, the more numerous the “eurocritical” votes which points to a potential link between voter apathy and abstentionism on the one hand and a putative rise of Far-Right parties on the other. The contradictory estimates of the increase of visibility and influence of Far-Right parties and the inconsistency and relative regression of per capita support for such parties in European elections is a subject of great importance for the study of extremism in the European Union. Does misguided journalism overestimate the rise of a populist Far-Right? The appearance of a Far-Right party group in the European Parliament in 2007 addresses directly the preoccupation with the probable rise of populist extremism. It may, however, be indicative of a

² <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/eu/story/0,,1984948,00.html?gusrc=rss&feed=19> Last consulted July 12, 2007

³ eurocritical vote- “from the extreme right to the extreme left passing by the populists”, Deloy, Corinne et Reynié Dominique, “Les élections européennes de juin 2004”pg.5

⁴ Deloy, Corinne et Reynié Dominique, “Les élections européennes de juin 2004” pg 11

relative stagnation of such political “ideologies”- that leads to a desperate formation of a united Far-Right bloc.

The parties may have set three main objectives for the ITS group, which form the basis for the hypotheses presented in this research. One is to receive the institutional benefits of agglomerating in a group within the European Parliament- which grants higher subsidies, increased floor time and access to committee chair- and vice-chairpersonships. Another is to gain domestic credibility for the parties that form the group. A third one is forming an alliance on a shared ideological basis. As a correlate to the main research question I will examine the likelihood of this formation to retain its status and its resilience to internal dissension and external pressures to disband. The evidence points to the instrumental purposes of the creation of the ITS group where the parties involved seek to capitalize on the additional funding, boosted secretarial support, increased access to time in plenary and heightened visibility in the media, which may further these parties’ domestic prestige as well. These three hypotheses are developed in the second section of the current research, followed by a thorough discussion of the structure, institutional history, functions and procedures of the European Parliament and an examination of the individual party platforms and that of the ITS group.

b) The Aim of the Research:

The main question this research addresses is why the Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty group of Nationalistic and Far-Right parties formed in the European Parliament. This formation is rather surprising as a fact in itself. Parties with cooperative ideologies, such as Socialist, or Liberal ones are readily expected to form international alliances. However, nationalistic unions are bizarre at the very least. It was only with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania that the new ITS group could be formed as these two countries contributed first 6 and then 8 MEPs (in the summer 2007 Bulgarian and Romanian by-elections) to pass the required minimum.

This study seeks to discover what motivated and enabled the creation of the ITS group in the European Parliament. The examination of statements of members of the coalition, the documents of the formation and the rules of procedure of the European Parliament point directly to a lack of a shared ideology but merely convenient overlapping points of consensus on particular issues, such as immigration, supranationalization and some nebulous commitment to a common European ideal of the nation-state. In themselves these are not ideological commitments. The examination of the three preceding Far-Right groups, the Group of the European Right (GER), the Technical Group of the European Right (TGER) and the Technical Group of Independent Members- Mixed Group (TDI), also points to the instrumental and opportunistic aims of the ITS.

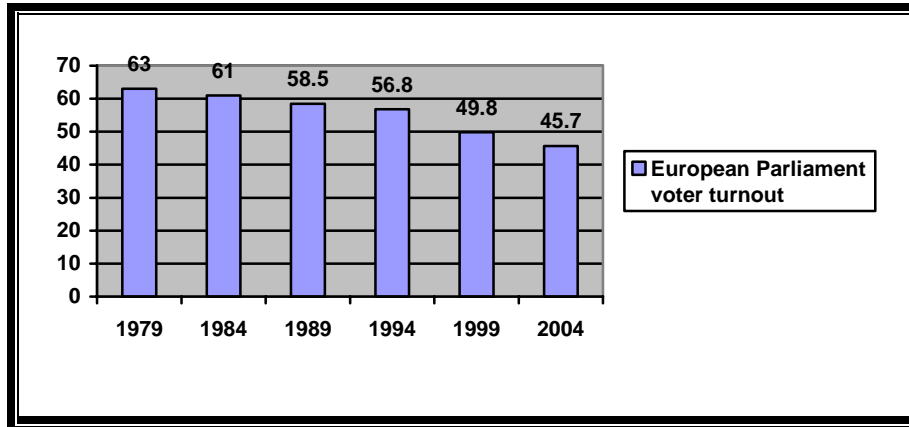
c) The Significance of the Subject Matter:

The creation of the ITS group is significant for the study and the functioning of the European Parliament for three reasons. Firstly, the EP is both a supranational and an international institution unlike any other. With the growing significance of the European Parliament as an institution of the EU, it is important to understand such an apparently anomalous grouping of parties. The European Parliament is currently composed of 785 MEPs and it is the largest transnational body of its kind. The MEPs are presently elected “once every five years by voters right across the 27 Member States of the European Union on behalf of its 492 million citizens.”⁵ Besides the democratic accountability function that the Parliament has possessed since it became popularly elected in 1979, its prerogatives will be further enhanced by the new proposed constitutional project where virtually all policy areas will come under the co-decision principle and the Parliament will have control over the entirety of the EU budget. Secondly, the relative role of the Parliament vis-à-vis the other two branches of the EU, the European Commission and the Council of Ministers, has been steadily, though slowly, growing

⁵ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/public.do?language=en> Last consulted July 13, 2007

for the past 50 years and the creation of a Far-Right party group may have significant impact on the democratic policy-making within the Union in the future. Thirdly, though the Parliament is the only European institution to be universally elected by the Union's citizens, popular participation in elections has progressively declined in the 6 elections since 1979 (Figure 1). With the continual recession of popular voting in EP elections and the observation that with more apathy the relative share of Far-Right parties' representation grows in many countries, research into the subject gains yet more significance.

FIGURE 1



Information compiled from:⁶

Furthermore, the case is of consequence to political science and international relations for three reasons. First of all, it is important to find the underlying motivations for the ITS group's creation in a rational model because of the often perceived threat of escalation of nationalism and extremism in Europe. A rational, interest-based analysis of the subject may displace the popular assumption that this group is based entirely on chauvinism and hatred for their own sake- a non-falsifiable proposition which may accurately describe the beliefs of the members of these parties but cannot explain the decision to form an institutional coalition. Secondly, there is virtually no literature on the matter as the group is only seven months old. Systematic study of the coalition process or ideological platforms of these groups or their

⁶ Deloy, Corinne et Reynié Dominique, "Les élections européennes de juin 2004", pg. 40

component parties appears almost non-existent. Thirdly, the study of the counter-integration movement in the EU has not seen nearly as much attention as that of the integration process itself and it is pressing that there be a more structured study of this important phenomenon, given that the parties to the ITS group have recorded some rather impressive and disturbing electoral feats.

2. METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW:

The literature of particular relevance to the subject is that on political party agglomeration and that tailored to European integration issues. I consult theoretical and statistical works on party formation, transnational party cooperation and the Far-Right in Europe, particularly after the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979. A key element of the current research is the thorough study of European Parliament structure, voting procedures and regulations because the party groups are structured by, operate in and derive their preferences from the EP’s makeup. I also survey the parties’ individual and collective preferences by examining their platforms, their political memoranda, public statements and electoral campaign materials. Specifically, public pronouncements about the reasons for the constitution of the ITS group are of importance. These originate both from the members of the group itself and from MEPs and political figures opposed to its formation and existence.

The framework of analysis of the three hypotheses for this case is based on the logic developed by John Aldrich in his book “Why Parties” which examines the preconditions, rationale and development of the American political system and of the party as such. Though designed for the understanding of political parties within the US, the model employed is a rational choice one which focuses on the incentives to form coalitions. This rational framework can be successfully applied to the formation of party groups in the European Parliament, because it circumvents the potential claim that it is a “sui generis” institution. The assertion of the uniqueness of the EP has complicated the application of established political theories to the

study of the Parliament. This model poses three questions to the formation of a political coalition:

1. Is there an incentive to ally?
2. Is it feasible to ally?
3. Is there no superior solution?

The three hypotheses that I propose will be examined in this coalitional framework. The driving force of party behavior in Aldrich's analysis, pertinent to this study, is the desire to win public office. Besides regulating access to elected office, parties determine public policy agenda and "implement what they enact."⁷ Lastly, the author points out, the "political party has long been the solution"⁸ to the collective action problems associated with persuading the public to support a particular political platform.

The parties forming the ITS group have already gained public office and future election of individual members does not depend on the existence of the ITS though it may be aided by it. The individual MEPs do not increase the weight of their votes by forming the coalition either. The capabilities of coalitions to resolve collective action problems may be applicable to the ITS case, however. There are institutional incentives for group formation in the European Parliament. Importantly, the potential that "individually rational decisions lead to Pareto inferior outcomes"⁹ is a big incentive to form coalitions and in the case of the EP groups get access to more club goods- such as funding and more floor time.

Further, Aldrich considers Arrow's theorem of general possibility which reveals that even if individual preferences are rational and well-defined, that does not mean that they can be aggregated and to be rational and optimal. Thus forming a coalition may provide a solution by assigning agreement to vote together on sets of issues. In this view, coalitions choose a median position or an "ideal point" around which consensus can be built. Joseph Schlesinger' Political

⁷ Aldrich, John, "Why Parties?" pg.23

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. pg.32

Ambition theory proposes that an ambitious politician has to associate with a party almost by necessity as access to the political arena is largely controlled by parties. In the European Parliament, this individual logic is supplemented by the institutional benefits provided to party groups on which individual MEPs are shortchanged. This theoretical angle can shed light on the rationale of the 2 non-allied MEPs to join the ITS group. Significantly, Aldrich points out that “A coalition... may be only a temporary, convenient grouping of those with common interests.”¹⁰ This proposition speaks directly to the first hypothesis for the instrumental, opportunistic creation of the ITS to obtain institutional benefits from the EP.

Geoffrey and Pippa Pridham examine the rise of party-political integration in Europe since the 1970s and particularly after the European Parliament became a popularly-elected body and the European Community itself became a more overtly political entity. According to these authors, the increased relevance of political parties on the national and European level fostered party cooperation which translated into unprecedented dynamism in the European Parliament. This has led to the establishment and the demise of multiple party groups since 1979.

Elisabeth Carter conducts a thorough study of the Extreme Right in Western Europe with the objective to discover the reasons for the varying electoral success over time and across countries of different parties of that family. Using her definitions is useful to surmise the differences in the objectives the seven parties pursue through the formation of the ITS group. The author contends that the prevalent and largely insufficient literature on the subject focuses on demand-side explanations such as “socio-demographic characteristics and attitudes of right-wing extremist voters and the effects that socio-economic change has had on this section of the electorate.”¹¹ Instead Carter proposes that it is as important to scrutinize the provision of Far-Right political alternatives which seek the electorate disgruntled by these socio-demographic changes and organize and guide their preferences. She proposes four sets of political supply-side

¹⁰ Aldrich, John, “Why Parties?” pg.283-284

¹¹ Carter, Elisabeth, “The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?” pg.3

explanations for the disparity in the electoral fortunes of the parties of the Far-Right: party ideology, party organization and leadership, party competition and the institutional environment. Carter offers a typology of Far-Right parties based on three divisions: the importance of the issue of immigration, the nature of the racist attitudes and the attitudes toward democracy, parliamentarism and pluralism. The parties examined in the present research are plugged into Carter’s template in figure 2 below. Based on the thorough study of the platforms of Ataka and Partidul România Mare I have assigned the two parties to Carter’s categories italicized and in bold type.

FIGURE 2

IMPORTANCE OF IMMIGRATION TO PARTIES’ PLATFORM						
Central	FPÖ		VB			REPUBLIKANER
Not central	MSI		<i>A</i>			<i>PRM</i>
TYPES OF PARTIES’ RACIST ATTITUDES						
Classical Racism						
Culturism ¹²	FPÖ	VB	<i>A</i>	<i>PRM</i>	FN	REPUBLIKANER
Not Racist						
ATTITUDES TOWARD DEMOCRACY, PARLIAMENTARISM AND PLURALISM						
Reject System	FT	MSI	<i>A</i>			
<Democracy, >State	FPÖ	VB		<i>PRM</i>	FN	REPUBLIKANER
>Democracy, <State						

Information compiled from:¹³

Based on the findings of the different party attitudes toward these three divisions, Carter proposes a typology of Far-Right parties in 5 groups: Neo-Fascist, Neo-Nazi, Authoritarian Xenophobic, Neo-Liberal Xenophobic and Neo-Liberal Populist. The ITS group parties fit in two of these categories (Figure 3)

FIGURE 3

Neo-Fascist	FT	MSI				
Authoritarian Xenophobic	FPÖ	VB	FN	<i>A</i>	<i>PRM</i>	Republikaner

Information compiled from:¹⁴

¹² Culturism, a category of racist attitudes, states that a majority culture has to protect itself against demands from minority subgroups. It has a dimension of moral superiority- the majority culture has the responsibility and the entitlement to direct and impose the values of the mainstream society.

¹³ Carter, Elisabeth, “The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?” pg.30, pg.36, pg.42

The survey of the electoral success of Far-Right parties shows that Authoritarian Xenophobic parties have been most successful and they include six of the seven parties in the current research. Carter’s data reveals that “certain types of ideology are indeed linked with greater electoral success”¹⁵. This research benefits from the data because it suggests the Authoritarian Xenophobic designation is common to at least five of the seven parties which could be important for the third hypothesis I examine. Further, these findings show a connection between the type of Far-Right party and its electoral success in the European Parliament.

Carter’s inquiry into the relevance of party organization and leadership to the variations of electoral success for the parties discussed shows, unsurprisingly, that “the well-organized, well-led right-wing extremist parties in Western Europe have tended to record electoral scores that are significantly higher”.¹⁶ Ataka’s leadership may be weaker than its recent first-round Presidential scores would suggest as it is new and its staying power is uncertain. Partidul România Mare has existed for more than a decade, and has partnered in a governing coalition in the 1990s. Even though its long-time leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor stepped down from the top post in March 2005 in favour of Corneliu Ciuntu “a primary objective of the move was to provide the appearance of a shift toward the political center and to attempt to align PRM with the European People's Party (EPP) bloc”¹⁷ in the European Parliament. Half a year later Ciuntu seceded to form the Christian Democratic Partidul Popular, PP (People’s Party) which was engulfed in August 2006¹⁸ by what the US Department of State calls the “extreme nationalist New Generation Party”¹⁹

¹⁴ Carter, Elisabeth, “The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?” pg.50-51

¹⁵ Carter, Elisabeth, “The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?” pg.60

¹⁶ Carter, Elisabeth, “The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?” pg.99

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Partidul_Rom%C3%A2nia_Mare Last consulted July 29, 2007

¹⁸ <http://www.cronicaromana.ro/index.php?editie=1113&art=55887> Last consulted July 28, 2007

¹⁹ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71402.htm>

FIGURE 4

Weakly-organized, poorly-led, divided	Republikaner					
Weakly-organized, poorly-led, united			A			
Strongly-organized, well-led, factionalized	FPÖ	VB		FN	PRM	MSI

Information compiled from:²⁰

Examining the positioning of the Far-Right parties within the space available on the Extreme Right of the political spectrum, Carter concludes that in general Far-Right parties “perform better at the polls when their mainstream opponents are more moderate”.²¹ She also challenges the “conventional wisdom’...that proportional representation encourages political extremism.”²² Concluding her study, Carter proposes that treating Far-Right parties as “normal’ parties may lead to them moderating their ideologies.”²³ Erecting a cordon sanitaire that institutionalizes the pariah status of such parties, “as...in Belgium..., appears to do little to stop their advance.”²⁴

The period most relevant to the present study, after 1979, is marked by a transformation of the political spectrum, the organization of politics and thorough demographic shifts, as well as an unprecedented drive for European political and economic integration. As Peter Mair points out since the 1970s the West European party systems have entered an “age in which cleavages are no longer frozen, traditional social divisions are no longer relevant to politics, and the parties themselves are in decay.”²⁵ The period which traces the increased salience of Far-Right parties in Europe and in the European Parliament is characterized by the re-conceptualization of the political space that Mair observes. The appearance of Far-Right party groups in the European Parliament, once it became a democratically elected body in 1979 is part of this transformation.

²⁰ Carter, Elisabeth, “The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?” pg.67, pg.77, pg.80

²¹ Carter, Elisabeth, “The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?” pg.141

²² Carter, Elisabeth, “The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?” pg.196

²³ Carter, Elisabeth, “The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?” pg.214

²⁴ Carter, Elisabeth, “The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?” pg.214

²⁵ Mair, Peter- editor, “The West European Party System”, pg.11

PART II

3. HYPOTHESES FOR THE FORMATION OF THE ITS GROUP

I proceed to analyze this case through three hypotheses, underscored by a general rational-choice logic of interests and bargaining. Because of the nature of the dependent variable, a highly technical political move to party agglomeration, this research does not focus on extra-rational motivations such as ideological fervor, by subsuming those to the interest-driven calculus of rational realism. Further, both statements of key figures in the ITS group and the documentation of this coalition’s predecessors, the GER, the TGER and the TDI speak directly to the lack of a shared ideology or even significant policy coordination. At best, there exist several points of policy convergence between the parties, such as the dislike of foreigners and the centralization of the European project. A political ideology is a coherent system of ideas about the goals of a party or a nation and the means by which these goals can be achieved. Though the above-mentioned issues are shared by the parties in the ITS group, there are substantial differences between several of them- the FN wants to keep foreigners out of France, to close the country’s borders and to withdraw from the Euro. The PRM, however, aims at uniting all of “Greater Romania” including all territories with Romanian minorities. The Vlaams Belang wishes to create an independent Flanders out of Belgium. These are such divergent policy objectives that regardless of the common goals, they cannot form a unified meta-ideology of the European Far-Right. The first hypothesis is based on the institutional benefits to be acquired in case of forming a coalition, the second hypothesis focuses on the perception that the constituent parties will derive domestic political benefits from allying in the European Parliament and the third examines the possibility of a Pan-European Far-Right ideology.

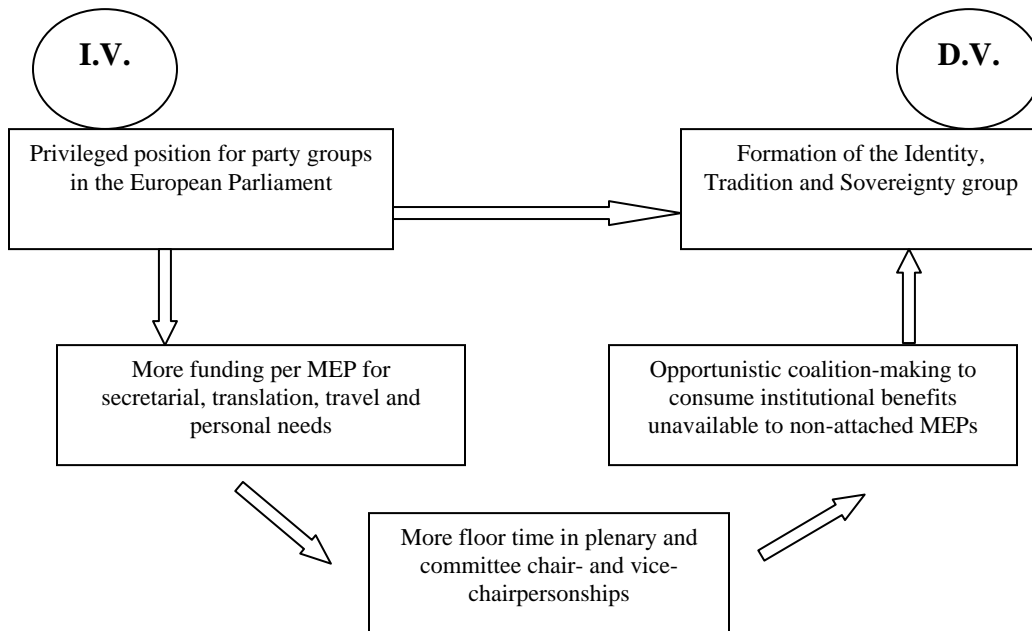
a) Hypothesis 1- A Quest for Institutional Benefits:

Party groups in the EP are designed to be the vehicle of the parliamentary process.

There are clear incentives to organize in like-minded party groups because that means larger finances for everyone involved for secretarial staff, travel, translation services and the like. It also gives a greater chance of occupying significant positions in committees which may lead to somewhat bigger influence over policy-making by means of agenda-setting. It thus makes sense for any party or individual MEP to join a group. In order to access these benefits non-attached MEPs have to meet the minimum requirements of 20 members from 6 states and they have to present a coherent group platform which details the political allegiances of the persons in question.

This hypothesis can be shown as preponderant if there are statements of coalition members confirming the alliance is meant to acquire the institutional benefits of group-formation. This can be further bolstered if there also is negation that other factors played a role. Also if it is shown that there is no real political affinity between the parties expressed in public statements and voting patterns, this would speak to the instrumental character of the formation. The hypothesis can be disproved if it can be shown that neither improved access to floor time and committee leadership, nor the increased budget are of significance to the group. I expect to confirm that this hypothesis describes accurately the motivation of the ITS group's formation. This hypothesis is shown graphically in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5



b) Hypothesis 2- A Boost to Domestic Credibility:

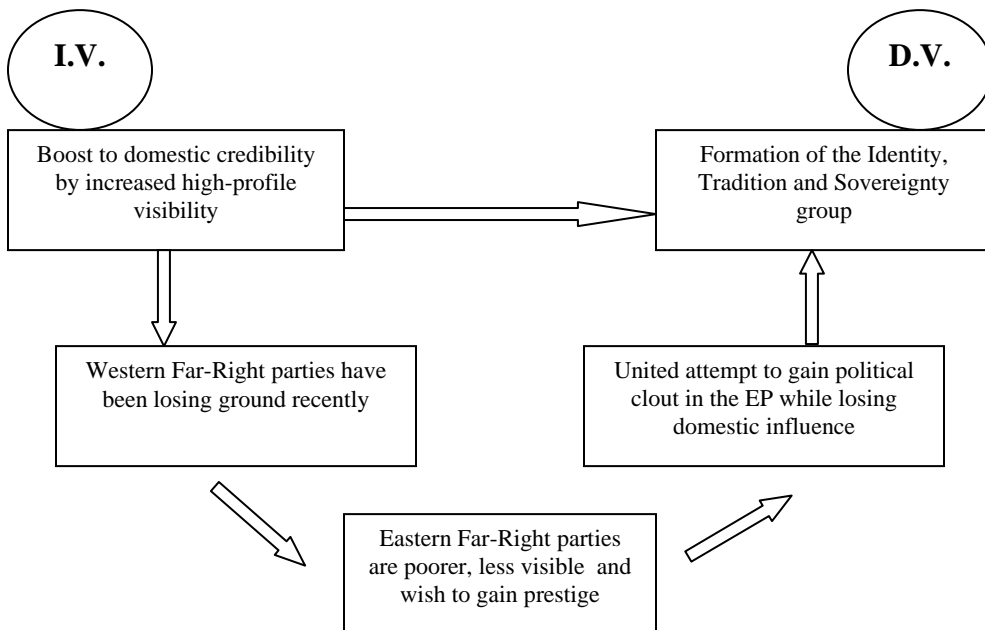
The second hypothesis for the ITS group formation lies in assumptions less proximate to the institution of the European Parliament itself, but it is reasoned on the individual parties’ electoral bases- the national voters. Since the electors of the EP are nationals voting for national parties, it is important for these parties to have the greatest credibility with their electorates and important visibility via media exposure or participation in significant international bodies.

Western European Far-Right parties have experienced significant losses in recent years, most notably the FN has failed to gain entry to the National Assembly in France and the presidential elections saw Mr. Le Pen’s score at it’s lowest for the past two decades. The Italian parties have also failed to enter Parliament at home and the Austrian one has lost a big part of its own membership to secession and a portion of its electoral votes. The two Eastern European parties have a lot less resources and though the Bulgarian one has performed well in the past 2 years, it lacks prestige and has been ostracized by a large portion of the electorate due to its outright xenophobia. The Romanian party has also actively attempted to tone down its xenophobic rhetoric in order to boost its popularity. An internationalist move, such as forming the ITS

coalition may assuage some fears at home. Therefore, the bulk of the Western parties and the two Eastern parties may stand to benefit domestically from increased exposure in the EP via the formation of a coalition. However, it may also alienate their most die-hard adherents which could bring an undesirable hit to electoral support.

To confirm the validity of this hypothesis, it is necessary to observe an improvement of the results of the parties in domestic elections. Even if that happened, however, it could be a result of correlation and not of causation. However, because it is possible that heightened visibility of the personalities and the agendas of the seven parties may be achieved, this is sufficient for them to choose coalition-making as a solution. The EP benefits of coalescence are assured and there is the possibility to win electoral ground at home in the future, so there will be a desire to form a group based on some certain and on some potential benefits. Figure 6 details the argument of this hypothesis.

FIGURE 6



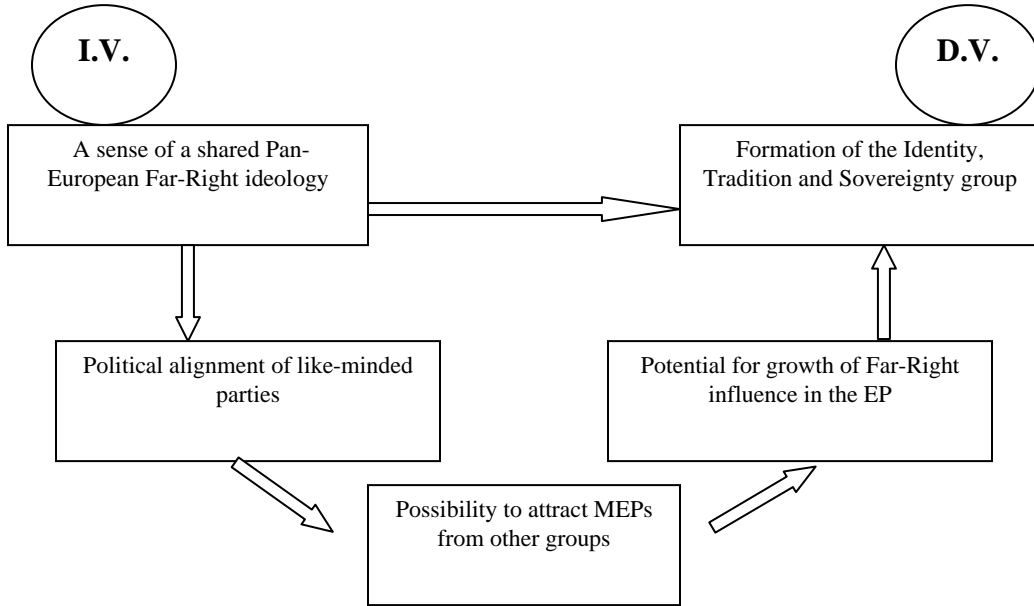
c) Hypothesis 3- A Pan-European Far-Right Ideology:

The third hypothesis bases its assumption on the principled formation of the ITS group, largely in opposition of the first hypothesis which assumes no true ideological allegiance between

the parties. At the foundation of this hypothesis is the assumption (or as some may say, the fear) that it is possible to have a meta-nationalist, xenophobic ideology that can unite various nationalisms from all over Europe. This assumption will have to confront the divergence of national nationalisms, the core disapproval of internationalism by nationalist and xenophobic groups and the divergent goals of the seven parties- some nationalistic, others irredentist or secessionist. The argument of this hypothesis will proceed as follows: if there is some sense of ideological alignment then one should see political alignment within the EP itself with the goal to attract more MEPs to the cause which would lead to the potential for growth of the common nationalistic cause.

I anticipate this hypothesis to be unlikely to hold true for the creation of the ITS group. For one thing the variation of goals of the individual parties makes it hard to imagine true political cooperation to the extent where it can become a coherent ideology. Additionally, as previous Far-Right groups in the parliament have shown, voting has not been coordinated within the group, which points to the lack of political coordination and reduces the likelihood that a common ideology is on the march. Many of the persons and several of the parties in the ITS group were members of the previous groups so it is possible they would display similar political behavior.

FIGURE 7



The three hypotheses are developed in the last part of the research after a thorough observation of the European Parliament’s structure, history and procedures; of the platform of the ITS group and the three historical groups that precede it and of the platforms of each individual party.

4. THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT- THE EU’S DEMOCRACY LAB

a) The European Parliament’s History, Structure and Procedures:

A history overview of the European Parliament provides the contours of the institutional setting within which the party groups function and by which their capabilities and preferences have been shaped, particularly after the 1979 popular elections. The EP has adapted to new roles first in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), then in the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Community (EC). It has also actively pressed for new delegated and expanded powers. Amie Kreppel divides the history of the EP in 4 periods²⁶. For the needs of this research I expand her time-line and reduce the periods to three: the EP’s preceding institutions (the Common Assembly and the European Parliamentary Assembly, 1950-

²⁶ Kreppel, Amie, “The European Parliament and Supranational Party System: A Study in Institutional Development”, pg-pg 60-91

1958), the EP up to the Single European Act of 1986 and from then to the present day. As the institution grew in importance it also brought more intense political competition allowing the creation of Far-Right party groups over the past three decades.

Jean Monnet’s Robert Schuman’s and Konrad Adenauer’s ambitious plan to unite the German and the French coal and steel industries produced the ECSC in 1951 also including Italy, Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg. It was governed by a truly supranational High Authority, a nationally-bound Council of Ministers, an “additional bulwark against supranational tyranny”²⁷ - the High Court and the Common Assembly. Even though the CA was appointed by national parliaments, it was unique as it organized itself according to “ideological affinity as opposed to national identity”²⁸. With the establishment of the EEC in 1957 it was transformed into the European Parliamentary Assembly with enlarged membership from 78 to 142 members. The EPA was cursorily included in the legislative process via the consultation procedure for certain policy areas.

The 1958 Treaty of Rome was pivotal for the EU and the renamed EPA but it took many years before it would be fully implemented. The Assembly designed and proposed electoral mechanisms in 1961, 1963 and 1969 but the Council failed to act upon them. Despite the general “Eurosclerosis”, the Assembly achieved limited “ability to increase or decrease the overall budget within certain restricted margins.”²⁹ The EPA rose from a membership of 142 to 198 with the accession of the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark in 1973. The concept of European Political Cooperation (EPC) extended the ambitions of the EEC into the political sphere paving the way for a greater role for the political parties in the Parliament.

²⁷ Kreppel, Amie “The European Parliament and Supranational Party System: A Study in Institutional Development”, pg. 54

²⁸ Kreppel, Amie “The European Parliament and Supranational Party System: A Study in Institutional Development”, pg. 55

²⁹ Kreppel, Amie “The European Parliament and Supranational Party System: A Study in Institutional Development”, pg. 66

After a massive press campaign the first European Parliament elections became a fact in June 1979 with an average voter turnout of 63%³⁰ and the number of MEPs doubled to 410. The EP was finally given an authority unique among the European institutions- it was popularly elected and democratically responsible to the voters at large. The Parliament's political landscape broadened allowing the entry of parties of all colors, including Far-Right and nationalist ones. Now that the Far-Right was represented in the Parliament, it could openly contest the trends of centralization of decision-making and the reduction of some national powers in that domain.

The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 established the European Union and propelled the integration and enlargement processes powerfully. The new cooperation procedure added a second reading to the earlier consultation procedure giving the EP direct impact on legislation. The subsequent co-decision procedure gave the Parliament absolute veto powers in some legislative areas. The number of MEPs rose to 626 with the 1995 accession of Sweden, Austria and Finland further challenging the Parliament's inner works.

In 2004 and in 2007 the European Union added 12 more states (Czech, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania). The most important development to come at the Intergovernmental Conference in Lisbon starting on July 23, 2007 would be the deliberations of a new, substantially abridged and simplified version of the Constitutional treaty which did not pass in 2005. The Parliament will have virtual equality with the Council via the envisaged "ordinary legislative procedure". Additionally, MEPs will "not exceed seven hundred and fifty in number."³¹

b) Current Configuration and Actors in the EP:

The European Parliament comprises 785 MEPs organized in 9 groups and its

³⁰ Kreppel, Amie "The European Parliament and Supranational Party System: A Study in Institutional Development", pg. 71

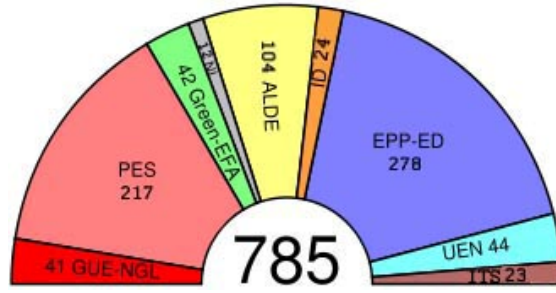
³¹ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2004/c_310/c_31020041216en00110040.pdf Last consulted July 13, 2007

Presidency is headed by the German conservative Hans-Gert Pöttering. At present the EP budget funds the running of an institution with 785 Members and 23 official working languages. “Parliament’s budget is part of the General Budget of the EU, of which it makes up about 1% – or one fifth of the total administrative costs of all EU institutions. The 2006 EP budget is €1.32 billion, of which 44% is for staff expenses, mainly salaries for the 5,800 employees working in the administration and, to a lesser extent, in the Political Groups. In 2005 over one million pages of documents were translated. About 21% of the budget is for MEPs' expenses, including costs for travel, offices and the pay of personal assistants.”³²

The Right-Centrist EPP-ED and the Socialist PES groups in the Parliament hold the majority of seats and, naturally, have the greatest input on the legislative process. They have been the leading political formations for as long as the EP has been directly elected. The smaller groups, because of their significant ideological differences, typically do not have enough leverage to pose strong opposition to the big two. However, they have important impact on the legislative process as they are represented by more than a third of all MEPs.

³² <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/public/staticDisplay.do?language=EN&id=153> Last consulted July 10, 2007

FIGURE 8



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT GROUP	# OF MEPs
European People’s Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats EPP-ED	278
Socialist Group in the European Parliament PES	217
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe ALDE	104
Union of Europe of the Nations UEN	44
Greens/ European Free Alliance Green-EFA	42
Confederal Group of the European United Left- Nordic Green Left GUE-NGL	41
Independence/ Democracy Group ID	24
Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty Group ITS	23
Non Inscrits (unallied) NI	12
TOTAL	785

Breakdown of political groups in the European Parliament³³

5. THE ITS GROUP AND THE 7 PARTIES

a) The Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty Group:

The ITS group is only a few months old, but through the examination of the EP since the mid 1980s there appears to be continuity in the core membership of the present Far-Right group and the previous incarnations of the unusual idea of a coalition of Far-Right parties in the EP. The Group of the European Right and the Technical Group of the European Right were both initiated by Jean-Marie Le Pen’s Front National and largely depended on the FN leadership, relative weight and reputation with the electorate of the Far-Right. The Vlaams Belang was also part of the TGER and the two current Italian parties were part of the Neo-fascist MSI which was a partner in the GER. The German Republikaner party did not retain its

³³ Modified from original chart [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:European_Parliament_6th_term_\(2007\).svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:European_Parliament_6th_term_(2007).svg) Last consulted July 10, 2007

electoral success for long after its spectacular performance in the German elections in 1989 and the meeting between Le Pen and Schönhuber that produced the TGER. The Republikaner party lost out after the reunification of Germany. As Michael Minkenberg remarks in Germany “the new radical right-wing parties play a (limited) role only at the subnational level and frequently compete with each other.”³⁴ Among the members of the new ITS group are MEPs from a larger number of states as the EU has grown greatly since the demise of the TGER.

The mission statement of the ITS group points to the following as the core values and shared objectives:

1. Recognition of national interests, sovereignties, identities and differences
2. Commitment to Christian values, heritage, culture and the traditions of European civilisation
3. Commitment to the traditional family as the natural unit within society
4. Commitment to the freedoms and rights inherited by all
5. Commitment to the rule of law
6. Opposition to a unitary, bureaucratic, European superstructure
7. Commitment to direct accountability of governments to the people and the transparent management of public funds³⁵

The first objective, the recognition of national interests, sovereignties, identities and differences, is one where the seven parties have the most in common- they are avidly Eurosceptic and nation-centric. On June the 6th 2007 Bruno Gollnisch delivered a poignant speech in plenary condemning the process of further European integration where he summarized all the developmental stages the Union has gone through and concluded with “You are engaged in a process whose objective is to create a European Superstate. This is contrary to the genius of Europe itself, the place that created liberty and national independence. This is why we are resolutely opposed to this process.”³⁶ The second objective, concerning the commitment to Christian values, heritage, culture and the traditions of European civilization, is primarily

³⁴ Schain, M., Zolberg, A., Hossay, P., “Shadows Over Europe: The Development and Impact of the Extreme Right in Western Europe” Palgrave Macmillan pg.225-226

³⁵ <http://www.its-pe.eu/> Last consulted July 12th, 2007 Last accessed July 12, 2007, translation- the author

³⁶ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20070606+ITEM-012+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN&query=INTERV&detail=3-035> Last consulted July 12, 2007

designed to give legitimacy to the claim of the long-standing common European legacy. Such evocations go well with the supporters of the Far-Right as they provide a general sense of belonging to a large group which can be seen as a contrast to outsiders' allegiances. The broader the cultural content, the more lines of exclusion are available for nationalist discourse. Notably, the Front National and the Vlaams Belang are outspokenly secular. In a speech 9 days later Gollnisch said the ITS group is in favour of "non-confessional reference to Christian values and human rights."³⁷ A closely related electoral objective is expressed in the third principle espoused by the ITS- a commitment to the familial structure of society. As in the US, in Europe religiosity is associated with an accent on family stability- albeit mostly rhetorically.

The fourth objective, a commitment to freedoms and rights "inherited by all", is a democratic value espoused on paper by all but since all the members of the group are adamantly opposed to immigration, especially of people from non-European origin this objective rings especially hollow and hypocritical. The fifth, commitment to the rule of law, is another legitimating statement that can, and indeed should, be observed by all participants in the political space. However, just like the previous objective it does not have the quality of an ideology or even of a common political platform. The sixth objective, opposing a unitary, bureaucratic, European superstructure, is a revision of the first and it speaks to, perhaps, the major issue of agreement between the parties forming the ITS- the dislike of supranational Europe and the expansion of the roles of the European institutions. The seventh objective, demanding direct accountability of governments to the people and transparency in managing public funds, speaks directly to the Far-Right electoral attraction to populist statements. The main reasons for the success of the nationalist and Far-Right parties in Bulgaria and Romania, for example, is the perception of the immeasurable corruption of the political leaders of the mainstream parties in

³⁷ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20070115+ITEM-008+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN&query=INTERV&detail=1-016> Monday, 15 January 2007 – Strasbourg Last consulted July 10, 2007

these countries. A key agenda issue for these parties, therefore, is to draw the section of the electorate that is disillusioned with the mainstream alternatives and are thus attracted to the extreme which boasts to be able to expose the wrong-doings of the major political parties. In a significant way, the above shows the populist character of these two parties who tend to draw supporters both from the ranks of the former Communist party and from the chauvinistic supporters of the Far-Right.

The current precedents of cross-border nationalist alliances in Europe involve fringe groups of no significance which are not embedded in any institutional body. Such are the European National Front³⁸, an alliance of 6 parties from 6 countries which has never managed to send a representative to the European Parliament and the more significant Euronat³⁹ comprising some salient nationalist parties from Western Europe, two of which are represented in the ITS group, via the Front National and Fiamma Tricolore. The manifesto of this international union of nationalist parties boasts logical inconsistencies such as “the respect of our heritage, the Western civilisation and its identity,... Freedom of speech, Self-determination, Social justice, No Third world immigration...”⁴⁰

Nominally three historical precedents of Far-Right groups within the European Parliament existed for 10 years but in reality neither was influential. From 1984 to 1989 the Front National was joined by the Italian Movimento Sociale Italiano, MSI (Italian Social Movement)- of which Fiamma Tricolore and Alternativa Sociale are heirs⁴¹, and the Greek Ethniki Politiki Enosis, EPEN (National Political Union)- the party of the junta leader Georgios Papadopoulos. They formed the Group of the European Right (GER). In 1989 the German Republikaner, R (Republican) party, under the leadership of former Waffen- SS commander Franz Schönhuber won several seats in the European Parliament and joined the Front National

³⁸ <http://www.europeannationalfront.org> Last consulted July 13, 2007

³⁹ <http://www.euronat.org> Last consulted July 10, 2007

⁴⁰ <http://www.euronat.org> Last consulted July 10, 2007

⁴¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Social_Movement-National_Right Last consulted July 20, 2007

in the Technical Group of the European Right (TGER), as the Italian party withdrew when it fell apart and this brought an end to the GER.⁴² The Belgian Vlaams Blok, VB (Flemish Bloc) also gained a seat and joined. The dearth of information on the subject is indicative of the relative inconsequence of these groups. There was no cohesive ideology binding the parties and their influence on the decision-making of the Parliament was meager. In fact, the data only shows when the party groups were formed as a result of the 1984 and 1989 elections. However, soon after the latter, the German party fell on hard times internally and the plurality of the term of the TGER passed under plenty of uncertainty. Further, neither group managed to attract new members in the period between elections. There is little indication that the parties had any effect on legislation and they also did not often vote en bloc.

This is also the case with the least successful attempt to form a group with the participation of Far-Right parties- the Technical Group of Independent Members- Mixed Group (TDI), created by 29 MEPs „with highly differentiated political backgrounds“⁴³ on July 19, 1999 in Strasbourg. The EP’s Committee on Constitutional Affairs determined that the group is in breach of Rule 29(1) which requires political affinities between the members of a group and disbanded the TDI on September 14, 1999. By that time the group had already been abandoned by 11 of its members. Two representatives of the Front National appealed and got a reinstatement of the coalition on November 25, 1999. The group was finally brought to an end on October 2, 2001 „after losing an action in the Court of First Instance“⁴⁴ with joint cases T222/99; T327/99 and T329/99⁴⁵. The TDI’s constitution asserted the parties’ „total political

⁴² George A Kourvetaris, Andreas Moschonas *The Impact of European Integration: Political, Sociological, and Economic Changes*, Pg. 221 from <http://books.google.com/books?id=8JXZzr5TJn4C&pg=PA221&ots=mZcJ6Fk2qh&dq=Technical+Group+of+the+European+Right&sig=nujTQwXlFJ2phgigCvGd8pAUVnc> Last consulted July 18, 2007

⁴³ Settembri, Pierpaolo “When is a Group not a Political Group? The Dissolution of the TDI Group in the European Parliament” pg. 160

⁴⁴ Bainbridge, Timothy, “The Penguin Companion to European Union”, pg 421

⁴⁵ <http://curia.europa.eu/en/actu/communiqués/cp01/aff/cp0146en.htm> Last consulted July 23, 2007

independence of one another⁴⁶ which was finally confirmed as against the EP’s Rules of Procedure in respect to group formation. The formative documents of the TDI explicitly stated the main objective of the group’s existence is to avoid the discriminatory treatment of non-attached MEPs.

One result of the existence of these successive party groups was that the European Parliament raised the hurdle for the creation of a party group to 20 MEPs from 6 states. Due to the weakened ties (which were not strong to begin with) between the parties in the TGER and the higher barrier to the formation of a group, the Far-Right was pulverized in the 1994 elections. The TDI’s life span was too short and uncertain to have had any import on the decision-making in the EP. It had, however, a significant indirect impact on the structure of the EP and the rules for group formation which hardened in response to the group’s creation. Figure 9 details the percentage of the national votes for the European elections that the constituent parties of the GER and the TGER received and the number of seats in the EP they obtained.

FIGURE 9

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS 1984 Group of the European Right			
EPEN	Greece	2.3% vote	1 seats
Front National	France	10.95% vote	10 seats
MSI	Italy	6.5% vote	5 seats
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS 1989 Technical Group of the European Right			
Front National	France	11.73% vote	10 seats
Republikaner	Germany	7.1% vote	6 seats
Vlaams Blok	Belgium	4.09% vote	1 seats

Information compiled from⁴⁷

c) The Individual Platforms of the ITS group parties:

To understand the similarities and differences between the constituent elements of the ITS group, a thorough examination of their individual party platforms and political preferences

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ <http://elections.online.fr/parlement-europeen.htm>, Last consulted July 12, 2007 and Deloy, Corinne and Reynié, Dominique “Les Elections Européennes de juin 2004” Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2005

is necessary. Examining these will shed light on the validity of the hypotheses for the creation of the Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty group. I first present the Front National, by far the most successful and long-standing Far-Right party in Europe, then I move to the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs which had major victories in Austria, including participation in a governing coalition. Next I discuss Azione Sociale con Alessandra Mussolini and Fiamma Tricolore which issued out of the preceding Movimento Sociale Italiano and had joined forces on another occasion. The last of the Western European parties is the Vlaams Belang which has been very successful but is quite different from the rest because of its particular set of secessionist goals. Lastly I present Ataka and Partidul România Mare, the two Eastern European brands of xenophobic populism. The individual MEPs are assumed to conform to the “ambitious politician” category and it is not feasible to discuss their precise political visions. Figure 10 shows the number of ITS group’s MEPs by party and member-state.

FIGURE 10

NATIONAL POLITICAL PARTY	MEMBER STATE	# OF MEPs
Front National	France	7
Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs	Austria	1
Azione Sociale con Alessandra Mussolini	Italy	1
Fiamma Tricolore	Italy	1
Vlaams Belang	Belgium	3
Ataka	Bulgaria	3
Partidul România Mare	Romania	5
Independent	United Kingdom	1
Independent	Romania	1
TOTAL		23

The French **Front National** has been the most durable and successful Far-Right party in Europe since the 1970s. Its perennial leader Jean-Marie Le Pen has successfully exploited the social cleavages in France to pull the electorate significantly rightward. In fact, his well-organized party and his charismatic oratorical style largely opened up the political space in the country for the ideas of the conservative Far-Right and for the populist nationalism that he espouses. Le Pen’s run for the top job has produced a steady upward trajectory, culminating in

2002 with his qualification for the run-off against the incumbent Jacques Chirac, undoubtedly the Front National’s proudest moment to date. A significant number of votes for Mr. Le Pen and the FN were actually protest votes against the mainstream political parties.

The program of the Front National is the most detailed and sophisticated of all the parties in the ITS group and this is not surprising, considering that the party has been the motor for the creation of the three historical Far-Right groups in the European Parliament, as well as the current one. This party deserves special attention. The very first statement of the first chapter of the party’s program states that “at the heart of the majority of ills which hurt our country is the immigration policy that successive governments have maintained for more than thirty years, which has always been denounced by the Front National...”⁴⁸ The measures proposed- detailed policies of dissuasion, of border control, of repatriation, of co-development and of assimilation- even include estimated financial gains totalling €30,5 to €32,5 billion.⁴⁹ Importantly, in the presentation of the immigrant issues which are the Front National’s sore thumb- there is not simply a French perspective but a pan-European perspective detailed in the (supposed) numbers of illegal immigrants and the crimes and abuses of the welfare system attributed to them. Clearly, the Front has positioned itself as the voice and the “conscience” of the Far-Right within Europe and it has been the uncontested leader of that movement for three decades. The other programmatic spheres developed in the party’s platform are, unsurprisingly, a thorough reform of the justice and security systems, the social security, healthcare, family policies, defence, culture, retirement, employment, research, environment, energy, transportation, off-shore territories, sport, youth and former combatants.

The sweeping scope and proposed remedies for the envisaged problems present the broadest party platform of all the members of the ITS group. Notably the heading on the European Union begins with the bombastic “The Europe of Brussels, a Hydra with many

⁴⁸ <http://www.frontnational.com/programmeimmigration.php> Last consulted July 27, 2007

⁴⁹ Ibid.

tentacles grants itself, with the complicity of the European governments, competences of ownership in practically all spheres of political, economic, social, cultural and scientific life.”⁵⁰ Brussels, seen through Mr. Le Pen’s massive spectacles, is the root of all that is to be detested: it is the cause of an undesired unification of fiscal regimes, a traitor of the values and territorial boundaries of the continent, an ineffective bulwark to the vices of Globalization which reduce the living standards of the French and other European nationals, and as an irresponsible entity without internal border controls.

As poignant as the Front National’s program may be, in the most recent presidential elections of 2007 its score was slashed almost in half. Figure 11 details Jean-Marie Le Pen’s electoral trajectory since 1974 when he first presented himself as a Presidential candidate. In an appealing video on the party’s web-site Le Pen announces that many voters were put off by the “cynicism of our concepts and vocabulary with a goal that was solely electoral”⁵¹. Le Pen continues to admit that the “legislative elections which followed (the presidential) were a veritable disaster for us...from two points of view- political and financial”⁵². The video concludes with an appeal to the supporters of the party to provide contributions for the reimbursement of the candidate parliamentarians who, due to the extremely weak showing of the party, have become heavily indebted. The party received 4.29% and 0.08%⁵³ of the votes in the first and second rounds, respectively, which granted them the uncontested zero seats in the National Assembly.

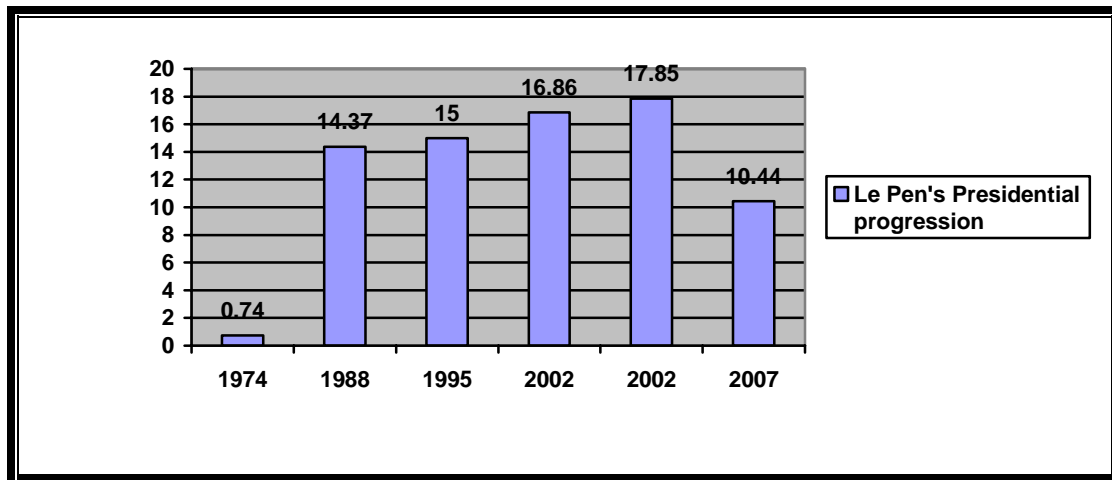
⁵⁰ <http://www.frontnational.com/programmeeurope.php> Last consulted July 27, 2007

⁵¹ <http://www.frontnational.com/> Last consulted July 29, 2007

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_legislative_election%2C_2007 Last consulted July 24, 2007

FIGURE 11



Information compiled from⁵⁴

Skipping North-Eastward to Austria, where the **Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs** has recorded impressive gains in elections since the early 1980s, the issues remain very similar, chauvinistic and populist. The party strongly believes in imposing harsh restriction on immigration as well as active search and deportation of illegal immigrants, particularly if they have a criminal record. In respect to European integration, the party derides the tendency of centralizing political and economic power within the Union and it strongly dislikes the openness of borders which prevents the Austrian state to keep migration in check. Additionally, there is a stress on the value of the family as a social unit and reducing taxation for single income families. “The FPÖ is against large, centralized power and wishes to keep government bureaucracy minimal.”⁵⁵ A formidable power by the end of the 1990s, the party won 27% of the vote⁵⁶ in national elections and formed a government coalition with the Right Christian-Democratic Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP (Austrian People's Party). By 2002 the party was headed for the doldrums and with its charismatic leader Jörg Haider leaving in 2005 to create the more

⁵⁴ Le Figaro November 24, 2006 « La progression constante du candidat Le Pen » from

[http://www.lefigaro.fr/election-presidentielle-](http://www.lefigaro.fr/election-presidentielle-2007/20061124.WWW00000473_la_progression_constante_du_candidat_le_pen.html)

[2007/20061124.WWW00000473_la_progression_constante_du_candidat_le_pen.html](http://www.lefigaro.fr/election-presidentielle-2007/20061124.WWW00000473_la_progression_constante_du_candidat_le_pen.html) and

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_presidential_election%2C_2007 Last consulted July 26, 2007

⁵⁵ <http://www.providence.edu/polisci/students/fpo/platform1.html> Last consulted July 27, 2007

⁵⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austria_legislative_election%2C_1999 Last consulted July 25, 2007

nationalistic Bündnis Zukunft Österreich, BZÖ (Alliance for the future of Austria) the FPÖ has been weakened significantly in the past few years.

Alessandra Mussolini, the sole representative of the party containing her own name, **Azione Sociale con Alessandra Mussolini**, attempts to galvanize the Far-Right public in Italy with a similar mixture of populism and jingoism, adapted to the demands of the local electorate, of course. The party's "Decalogue of Values" assigns prominent place to the "defence of the sacredness of life and the family...the full defence of national identity with respect to local traditions"⁵⁷, the inscription of Christian values in a constitution for the European Union, the removal of hurdles to political participation of women, the protection of the handicapped and a clear opposition to Communism and Liberal Capitalism which are "the cause of the current economic and social crisis"⁵⁸. In the realm of the economy the party demands policies which protect the citizens from the "cost of credit and usury"⁵⁹ and the attainment of purchasing power of salaries against the Euro via the protection of Italian products. In purer nationalistic spirit, Mussolini offers "order and security to defend Italians from illegal immigration"⁶⁰ and the blockade to EU enlargement to "countries which do not share the traditions of the European peoples".⁶¹

The other Italian party- **Fiamma Tricolore** offers a platform in three broad categories. Under Identity, the party proposes that the Italian nation can only be preserved and furthered through a "safeguarding and a boost to the Italian language, culture and identity."⁶² The above can be accomplished only through a support of the natural family which would lead to a consolidation of the national community, according to the party's program. In the properly political chapter of the platform, the accent falls on the sovereignty of the country in Europe

⁵⁷ http://www.azionesociale.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1&Itemid=2 Last consulted July 28, 2007

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² <http://www.fiammatricolore.net/pdf/programma.pdf> Last consulted July 27, 2007

and in the world. Interestingly there is a call for a militarily strengthened Europe in the person of the European Union, though Italy is said to need independence of political action in its own interests. The next call is for a Europe of the nations where the Treaty of Maastricht is refuted and where the “European Constitution, such as designed by the assembly presided over by Giscard d’Estaing is dead”.⁶³ A large portion of this subheading is devoted to the defence of national identity and restrictive immigration policies. Specifically, Fiamma Tricolore intends to impede extra-communitarian immigration which speaks to intolerance to foreigners of non-European cultural background. Further, economic sovereignty and independence of the Italian banking system are conceived as important for the resuscitation of the Italian economy. The third category of prerogatives is a catch-all group ranging from the fight against crime, the support for culture and education, a boost to healthcare and an increased role of the state in labour relations.

Belgium, the hub of the European Union and its institutions, has long been a terrain for conflict between the Francophone South and the Flemish North. The **Vlaams Belang** came into being in 2004 after its predecessor, the Vlaams Blok, was tried and pronounced illegal on account of “repeated incitement to discrimination.”⁶⁴ The manifesto of the Vlaams Belang lists as its first objective the “secession of Flanders from the artificial Belgian state”⁶⁵. It further expresses “restrained and critical attitude towards the European Union”⁶⁶ and adds that the “territory of the European Union should not extend beyond the boundaries of Europe”⁶⁷, a clear criticism of the potential accession of Turkey to the EU. One informative sentence of this platform manages to combine the mandate for respect of democracy and free speech, with a demand that immigrants adapt to all facets of life of presumably pan-European character:

⁶³ <http://www.fiammaticolore.net/pdf/programma.pdf> Last consulted July 27, 2007

⁶⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vlaams_Belang Last consulted July 26, 2007

⁶⁵ <http://www.flemishrepublic.org/manifesto.htm> Last consulted July 27, 2007

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

*“Aliens and immigrants are expected to comply with our laws, and also to adapt to our values and morality, to our habits and to important traditional principles of European civilization, such as the separation of church and state, democracy, freedom of speech and the equal status of men and women.”*⁶⁸

Further, like many of the parties previously discussed, the Vlaams Belang promises the lowest possible taxation to the citizens of its putative independent Flanders. Additionally, there are references to social solidarity, the protection of the “traditional family (which) is at the heart of a humane society”⁶⁹, subsidiarity in decision-making, a commitment to law and order and a reversal of the “erroneous multicultural policies”⁷⁰.

The Bulgarian Far-Right formation offers the electorate its “20 points of Attack” which range from the improbable to the chauvinistic. Among its political weaponry, **Ataka** lists that “Bulgaria is a uni-national, monolithic state, which is not liable to division on any of the following principles: religious, ethnic, cultural.”⁷¹ It further requires the affirmation of Eastern Orthodox Christianity as a state religion and the forbiddance of media in minority languages and it demands “harsh sanctions”⁷² against “insults to Bulgarian national patrimony”⁷³. In the economic sphere, the party supports Bulgarian ownership of “manufacture, trade and banking”⁷⁴, preferential treatment to Bulgarian business until the standard of living reaches that of the Central European countries, the establishment of a minimum “hourly price of labour in line with the Central European”⁷⁵ and a re-examination of the privatization deals that have been the cause of contention for the 17 years after the collapse of Communism in the country. The rest of the objectives form a motley collection of demands to withdraw from NATO, Iraq and the IMF; not to sell any agricultural land to non-Bulgarians; to confiscate “illegally acquired

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ http://www.ataka.bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=29 Last consulted July 24, 2007

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

property and the creation of a fund for free medical care with the confiscated”⁷⁶; to review all the EU accession clauses and to renegotiate the mandated closure of the major units of the Kozlodui nuclear power plant.

The second Eastern European party in the Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty group, **Partidul România Mare** is numerically second only to the Front National with 5 MEPs. Also, one of the two vice-chairs of the group is a member of the party. The PRM was in government in Romania in a coalition from 1993 till 1995 and has kept a steady presence in the country’s politics ever since. Its leader Corneliu Tudor got as far as the second round of the 2000 presidential elections when all other parties united to support Ion Iliescu in a move that has been likened to the situation in the French Presidential elections of 2002 featuring Jean-Marie Le Pen and Jacques Chirac. The party’s platform is overtly xenophobic and irredentist, as well as socially and economically populist to the maximum possible degree. A campaign poster from 2004 presents “Food, Heating, Medicine, Justice”⁷⁷ as the main goals of the party. Anti-corruption rhetoric, anti-Roma, anti-Hungarian and, until recently, anti-Semitic slogans mark the party platform.

The **independent MEPs**, one from Romania and one from the United Kingdom do not seem to express even a semblance of ideology and they can be examined in the “ambitious politician” category proposed by Joseph Schlesinger.

Overall, the promenade across the seven parties that form the ITS group delivers the conviction that there are several focal points that serve as the backbone of some consensus. To call them ideal points for coalition formation is an overstatement but looking for the semblance of a common ideology would be even more mistaken. With the definition of ideology adopted by this paper, xenophobia cannot be a uniting ideology because potentially all of the members of the group can act exclusionarily to one another’s nationals. For example, there is a wave of

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Afis.jpg> Last consulted July 27, 2007

relocation of French businesses in Romania, which the FN protests as it outsources jobs from France. Simultaneously, the FN wishes to stop the entry of foreigners into France. Shared populism also does not constitute a shared ideology because it is a tool for amassing support and not an ethos in its own right. All of the parties offer populist promises of government intervention to protect economically underprivileged regions or sections of society via minimum wages or reduced taxation. Next is the provision of health care to all: bizarrely, Ataka proposes the confiscation of purportedly illegally acquired property to fund that; unnecessarily, the Front National offers a boost to one of Europe's most comprehensive medical care systems. The accent on some national sovereignty over the economy, the tax system as well as foreign policy is shared by all and is seen as a counterpoint to the centralization and supranationalization of policy in Brussels. Lastly, the xenophobic commitment to keeping immigrants, particularly of non-European origin, out and minorities down is a key element of the platforms of all the parties but it is also subject to the qualification made above.

PART III

6. TESTING THE HYPOTHESES:

The three hypotheses that I present here reflect three different sets of interests that are relevant to politics in the European Parliament. The first hypothesis focuses on the incentives for group creation within the Parliament and it explores the effects of money, access to secretarial staff and plenary floor time on the decision to form coalitions. The second examines the crucial link between domestic and supranational level politics which is significant as EP elections are, in fact, nationally held elections. The third seeks the reasons for coalition-formation in the putative formation of a broad Far-Right ideology that may unite various nationalisms. On the basis of the thorough study of the Institutional structure of the EP, the significance of the body within EU politics, the ways in which EU level politics interact with domestic politics, the history of previous Far-Right formations in the parliament, as well as the

political platforms of the parties involved and the literature on transnational party cooperation and coalition formation the findings presented in the paper are tested according to the three questions posed to coalition formation: Are there incentives to ally?; Is it feasible to ally?; Is there no superior solution. The findings of this research are presented below. Needless, to say, further research and particularly empirical observation of the voting and other political behavior of the MEPs from the Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty group will reveal clues that can corroborate my findings or put the accent elsewhere.

a) Hypothesis 1-A Quest for Institutional Benefits:

As previously discussed, party groups in the EP are designed to be the vehicle of the parliamentary process. The incentives to organize in party groups are larger finances, a greater chance of occupying significant positions in committees and a presumed bigger influence over policy-making. It thus makes sense for any party or individual MEP to join a group. In fact, it makes sense to join as big a group as possible. For example the PRM attempted to join the EPP-ED group- the most numerous in the Parliament- and to that end the party’s leadership tried to transform its image in order to become a more likely candidate. This involved the party chair, Mr. Tudor stepping down and hiring an Israeli Public Relations specialist “Eyal Arad- who once worked for Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's campaign- to help with the PRM’s 2004 election campaign”⁷⁸. These, as well as the surprising and poorly-received dedication of a statue of Yitzhak Rabin in Brasov, Romania were meant to show a break from the Holocaust-denial and anti-Semitic rhetoric that Mr. Tudor and the party have been associated with during the previous decade. These “transformational” attempts clearly show rational, interest-based behavior. The PRM’s application was turned down by the EPP-ED, however. The twenty three members of the ITS group cannot realistically hope that their formation will have a direct effect

⁷⁸<http://www.tol.cz/look/BRR/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=9&NrIssue=1&NrSection=1&NrArticle=11471> Last consulted July 28, 2007

on voting because of its small size but the other institutional benefits are available and attractive to them.

In terms of Aldrich's model for coalition formation adopted in the present research, the parties and individual MEPs who formed the ITS group had many institutional incentives to do so. First of all, there are financial incentives. Upon approval the ITS group "will receive funding of around € 50,000 (\$65,102) for each member".⁷⁹ Ambitious politicians would certainly be enticed by the prospect of increased funding in comparison to what a non-attached MEP is entitled to. The money is intended for secretarial support, translations, travel and all other functions that facilitate the running of a political office. The amount of personal remuneration is greater as well.

Secondly, the strictly measured floor time, which members of groups and non-attached MEPs have access to, is allotted in respect to the size of the group. Clearly, this is a very important incentive for parliamentarians who function in an institution primarily designed to present viewpoints and tender proposals in plenary. Thirdly, by the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, groups are assigned chairpersonships and vice-chairpersonships of a certain number of committees. These are very significant because they have "the power to influence the parliament's agenda".⁸⁰ As proof of the desire to prevent the ITS from gaining access to the chairs of the two committees which should have been given them "on Thursday (February 01, 2007) lawmakers decided to break with convention and called for secret ballots. ITS' two nominees for the Parliament's culture and transport committees were then voted down."⁸¹ The chairs and vice-chairs of all the remaining 20 committees were then confirmed without voting. This blockade clearly shows the desirability of this institutional incentive for party group formation measured by the sternness of the response of the rest of the MEPs.

⁷⁹ <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2335201,00.html> 02. 02. 2007 Last consulted July 23, 2007

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

The second element of coalition formation, the feasibility to ally, became a reality with Bulgaria’s and Romania’s entry to the EU as this provided both the number of MEPs and the number of countries to qualify for the formation of a party group. ITS barely passed the 20 MEP threshold with a one person advantage.

The third criterion for evaluation of the hypothesis is the availability, or lack thereof, of a superior solution to the envisaged objectives. Certainly this matter is dependent on the EP’s rules and there is no better way to obtain more funding, gain access to institutional benefits and access the podium more frequently. Bruno Gollnisch’s opening address to the EP after the ITS group establishment speaks in support of the above.

“As Mrs. Mussolini said, we are also planning to bring an end to the somewhat discriminatory situation suffered by the Non-Attached Members by comparison with those MEPs who belong to a group. Unfortunately, this discrimination will continue for those who remain Non-Attached as they do not have the same political, administrative and financial resources as the other groups.”⁸²

As presented and argued, this hypothesis shows the clearest proof of the opportunistic goals for the creation of the ITS group. This is not a normative judgment, however, but an expression of the most parsimonious, evidence-butressed proposition for the formation of the Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty group. The ITS group was formed instrumentally to achieve the goals specified above and not to bring together really like-minded parties and individuals under the same, coordinated leadership.

b) Hypothesis 2-A Boost to Domestic Credibility:

The second hypothesis for the ITS group formation lies in assumptions less proximate to the institution of the European Parliament itself, but it is reasoned on the individual parties’ electoral bases- the national voters. Since the electors of the EP are nationals voting for national parties, it is important for these parties to have the greatest credibility with their electorates and

⁸² <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20070115+ITEM-008+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN&query=INTERV&detail=1-016> Monday, 15 January 2007 – Strasbourg Last consulted July 11, 2007

important visibility via media exposure or participation in significant international bodies.

According to Simon Hix the “main factors behind voting in the EP are the policy positions of national parties...it is the principles that control candidate selection (the national parties) which ultimately determine how MEPs behave.”⁸³ Since European Parliament elections are often perceived as second-order elections, it is the national parties and their respective electorates who matter the most. Therefore, it can be assumed that participation in the European Parliament will have important influence on domestic credibility and visibility for the constituent parties of the ITS group. By definition, however, Far-Right parties are not inclined to international cooperation. This is why it is not clear whether more visible representation in the EU, a set of institutions which embody great animosity among domestic constituencies, will be beneficial or not to the national electorate. On the one hand, national voters may see this as a possibility for more vocal opposition to supranational EU integration from within the European Parliament. On the other hand, this may detract domestic support if cooperation with other nationalist parties is seen as an identity betrayal or as a sign of corruption or a softening of the parties’ hard line.

When this hypothesis is submitted for analysis to the three criteria, it emerges less convincing than the first. Incentives to ally would be indeterminate as it is not clear how domestic electorates will react to the alliance as detailed above. Western European Far-Right parties have been losing ground lately. The Front National had a rather poor showing at the 2007 presidential elections and an absolutely disastrous score in the legislative elections, gaining no seats. The 2006 legislative elections saw the FPÖ share at 11.05% and the BZÖ, which had seceded from it in 2005 barely made it into the National Council with 4.1%⁸⁴. The Italian general elections of 2006 granted Fiamma Tricolore and Alternativa Sociale no seats in either the

⁸³ Hix, Simon, “Parliamentary Behavior with Two Principals: Preferences, Parties and Voting in the European Parliament”, pg.696

⁸⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austrian_legislative_election%2C_2006 Last consulted July 30, 2007

Senate or the Chamber of Deputies.⁸⁵ In the 2005 regional elections Alessandra Mussolini and Luca Romagnoli ran together under Alternativa Sociale where the group gained a maximum of 2.7% of the vote in one of the thirteen regions amid allegations of signature fixing.⁸⁶ Only the Vlaams Belang has recorded improved performance lately but it is an outlier in the ITS group because of its essentially secessionist platform. In the June 2007 general elections it won 11.89% in the Senate and 11.99% in the Chamber of Representatives⁸⁷. In the 2006 municipal elections it became the top party in Flanders with 28.2%, a hike of 4% since 2004⁸⁸.

Looking Eastward to Partidul România Mare and Ataka, the picture is quite similar. The PRM gained 23% of the vote in the 2000 Romanian legislative elections and 13.2% in the 2004 elections⁸⁹. Similarly, the party’s leader, Mr. Tudor scored second in the 2000 Presidential elections with 33% of the vote but dropped to 12.57% in the 2004 Presidential elections⁹⁰.

Ataka is only two years old and it is difficult to observe a trend in its popularity, however, in the 2006 presidential elections its leader, Mr. Siderov, made it to the run-off where he lost with 24% to the incumbent Georgi Parvanov, who gained 76% of the vote⁹¹. In the parliamentary elections of the previous year Ataka made its debut becoming the fourth strongest party in the National Assembly with 8.9% of the vote⁹².

With the observation of the electoral downturn for all but one party in the ITS group and with one party presented at the polls only twice, it becomes apparent that at least five of the seven parties in this study have been on a downward trajectory in the past few years. If the parties’ leaders assume they will gain domestic credibility by forming a group at the EP this may be conceived as an incentive to ally, however this assumption is only conjectural. The second

⁸⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_general_election%2C_2006 Last consulted July 30, 2007

⁸⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_regional_elections%2C_2005 Last consulted July 30, 2007

⁸⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgian_general_election%2C_2007 Last consulted July 30, 2007

⁸⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgian_municipal_elections%2C_2006 Last consulted July 30, 2007

⁸⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_Romania_Party Last consulted July 30, 2007

⁹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanian_legislative_election%2C_2004 Last consulted July 30, 2007

⁹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgarian_presidential_election%2C_2006 Last consulted July 30, 2007

⁹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgarian_parliamentary_election%2C_2005 Last consulted July 29, 2007

question about the feasibility to ally is also rather indeterminate in the context of this hypothesis. This will depend entirely on the assumption of the potential benefits to domestic credibility that can be acquired by forming the ITS group. As far as this analysis can surmise the calculus at play can only be one of wishful thinking and is based on future anticipation. Considering the relatively desperate situation of most of the observed parties it is possible that the leadership considered this shot in the dark as a potential remedy to their weak domestic performance. The third angle of analysis reveals that there is, indeed a superior solution to the need for improved domestic popularity and that is to actually focus on the domestic dimension of the parties' platforms, publicity and support-seeking. Altogether this hypothesis has some probabilistic value as Siderov, Strache, Mussolini, Romagnoli, LePen, Tudor and Vanheke may be placing their bets of career realization and improved image on the prestige to be gained at the forum of the European Parliament. However, this is not nearly as parsimonious an explanation for the formation of the ITS group as the first hypothesis that focuses on the evident institutional benefits of group formation. Importantly though, the findings of the testing of this hypothesis reveal how desperate for political office and exposure the parties to the ITS group may be.

c) Hypothesis 3-A Pan-European Far-Right Ideology:

Popular opinion, political commentators, as well as politicians are baffled by the creation of a Far-Right coalition in the European Parliament and with the aid of sensationalist media publications and in the absence of systematic discourse on the matter they are often convulsively fearful of an impending rise of xenophobia and a nationalistic take-over of European politics. There are, of course, reasonable concerns about the ethno-cultural balance on the old continent. However, there is no indication of the creation of a Pan-European nationalism that can overthrow the dominance of legitimate, mainstream parties. With the evidence provided earlier of the uncertain electoral conditions of Far-Right parties throughout Europe should come an assuaging of such fears. Particularly in regards to the European Parliament, the observation of

the three historical Far-Right party groups' fortunes is indicative of the weakly allied, non-political character of such formations. There are all indications that the ITS group would be no different.

The continuity of connections between the main figures who headed the respective parties in the past and at present does not indicate ideological alliance in the ITS group, however. In a statement to the press about the formation of the ITS group Alessandra Mussolini said that "It is more a technical than a political group... We are mainly getting together out of necessity. Survival is only possible in a political group", she added, referring to the fact that groups have a right to more funds and political positions in the European Parliament, something non-attached MEPs do not have."⁹³ This is a sign of a different kind of continuity, however. It shows that the ITS group acts very much like the TDI and the TGER, where there was no coalition on an ideological basis. It is very likely to expect similar objective for the creation of the current Far-Right group and the two preceding groups.

Still, it is important to consider how the proposition that there is a Pan-European Far-Right ideology in the making may unfold. If indeed there is a sense of such kinship among the seven parties, they would want to align their policy preferences and coordinate their actions. They would hope to attract more MEPs which would lead to a potential rise of Far-Right influence in the EP.

When examining the incentives to ally, the analysis of this hypothesis produces rather mixed results. The seven parties involved have substantially divergent policy objectives, domestic political profiles and managerial styles as shown in the preceding discussion of their platforms and in Carter's and this author's classification of party typology and attitudes toward key elements of Far-Right ideology. The Vlaams Belang is secessionist, the Partidul România Mare is irredentist, The Front National is strongly anti-immigration while Fiamma Tricolore

⁹³ Mahony, Honor. "Plans for European far-right group intensify", EUobserver, January 8, 2007, <http://euobserver.com/9/23196> Last consulted on January 13, 2007

focuses on Italian economic and political sovereignty much more than on the family, which is coveted by *Azione Sociale con Alessandra Mussolini* and the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*. Aldrich's proposition that parties form coalitions to reduce collective action problems by policy coordination is rather problematic in regard to the ITS group. In fact, forming this coalition may aggravate collective action problems if policy coordination is an objective. However, as Alessandra Mussolini was quoted earlier, this group is more of a technical than a political arrangement- which points to the instrumental use of group formation as a strategy and it undermines the idea of a presumed Pan-European Far-Right ideology.

Considering the feasibility to ally within the framework of this hypothesis delivers equally ambiguous conclusions. According to Carter's and the author's assessment, four of the seven parties (FN, FPÖ, PRM, VB) are strongly-led but factionalized and one (A) is poorly-organized and poorly-led. Information about the other two (FT, ASAM) is not conclusive but their predecessor, (MSI) was classified as factionalized, and indeed it broke in two bringing an end to the GER. Considering the relative internal instability of these parties due to the particular character of their platforms, the pathos of their controversial leaders and the variability of their electorates, it appears very unlikely that they can coordinate under the bizarre conditions of international nationalist cooperation. Therefore this hypothesis fails to pass yet another hurdle en route to coalition-formation.

In regards to the availability of a superior solution if it is assumed that there is a common ideology, a superior solution would, indeed, be a party group but one with closely coordinated policy objectives and tight political cooperation. The fact that there are outright announcements of the technical character of the ITS group shows that this superior solution is not on the agenda. Certainly there are important issues of overlap of interests and platforms but they are very far from a definition of an ideology as described in the previous section of the present

research. This, in turn, points to the non-coordinated, non-ideological essence of the formation. This hypothesis fails on all three accounts and can therefore be considered invalid.

7. CONCLUSIONS:

The thorough examination of the institutional structure of the European Parliament; its regulations on group formation and the incentives provided for that; the seven parties’ platforms; the ITS group’s own policy objectives and the theoretical literature on transnational political cooperation in the European Parliament and the rational-theoretic framework for coalition formation have delivered a conclusion that overwhelmingly favors the first hypothesis, doubts the second and discards the third. The most convincing rationale for the creation of the ITS group is based on the desire to consume the institutional benefits offered to groups in the European Parliament and which are not available to non-attached MEPs- more funds, more floor time in plenary and the chairpersonship and vice-chairpersonship of a number of committees. The hypothesis that the ITS group was formed to boost the domestic credibility and visibility of the seven parties appears more dubious because it is not clear how such a move would actually reflect on the opinion of the domestic electorates. Importantly, however, the observation of the consistent decline of the Parliamentary, Presidential, Regional and Municipal electoral fortunes of at least five of the seven parties supports the validity of the first hypothesis. It is very likely that desperate for political office and exposure, the parties which are losing ground on all levels of domestic elections are attempting to consolidate some influence in the European Parliament. This desperation (as well as the careful examination of the party management styles and attitudes toward important programmatic issues such as immigration, racism, democracy, parliamentarism and pluralism) further shows that it is improbable that there is any creation of a united Pan-European Far-Right ideology. All of the evidence points to the instrumental, opportunistic nature of the move to create the Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty group. It is also likely that the leaders of these parties are hopeful of improving their domestic

image based on the exposure they get as a unit in the EP. Clearly time is necessary to show how the political life of these parties unfolds. An additional assurance of that lies in the structure and programs of the three preceding Far-Right groups, the GER, the TGER and the TDI, which actually had many of the same political actors involved. They were not politically coordinated and functioned as technical groups- another name for a group with no real convergent ideologies.

Based on the evidence presented and the understanding of the instrumental rationale behind the Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty group it is very unlikely that this formation will have any effect on policy-making in the European parliament and it is very doubtful that it will manage to attract more members or even to withstand external pressures and internal misalignment. Those who fear a surge of political Right Extremism in the European Parliament can rest assured of the improbability of such an event. There is no Pan-European Far-Right ideology in the making but a desperate scramble for the comforts of European office and the advantages of boosted secretarial support, travel and speaking time. It is not likely that the European project will be derailed if the political mainstream continues to be socially, economically and politically relevant, thus stealing the clout of xenophobic, populist and nationalistic parties of dubious popularity.

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