

Workshop Joint Sessions, Lisbon 2009

Title: ***Party Government and Parliamentary Democracy in the new Europe***

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Outline of Topic

The study of Party Government is among the core themes within Comparative Politics. Particularly in Europe the comparative analysis of Party Government has been on the research agenda for long and been conducive to theoretical and empirical advances. The workshop not only allows for assessing the various extant approaches to the study of Party Government, but also for critically discussing its concepts, indicators and available data in relation to the material and procedural performances of European democracies in East and West Europe. Additionally, the workshop provides an opportunity to explore new theoretical avenues, modes of analysis and related evidence to develop the study of Party Government across *all* parliamentary democracies in Europe.

The directors feel that this is an appropriate time and opportunity to reflect on these matters. For the life and times of party government in European parliamentary democracies appear to have become more and more volatile, publicly contested and is sometimes considered as jeopardizing the democratic quality of the polity (think e.g. of: the present cases in Belgium and Italy, the protests against government in Hungary and the Netherlands, the leadership of the British cabinet et cetera). In other words: since the nineties one can observe turmoil and changing patterns of party government throughout Europe that obviously is conducive to not only reconsidering existing approaches, but also are clearly in need of closer empirical examination by means of comparative analysis.

Relation to Existing Research

There is a longstanding tradition in the study of party government (see for example: Blondel & Müller-Rommel, 1993; Budge & Keman, 1990; Budge & Laver, 1992; Klingemann et al., 1994; Warwick, 1994; Laver & Shepsle, 1996; Müller, Strøm & Bergman, 2003; Blondel & Cotta, 2000; Woldendorp et al., 2000; Keman, 2006). Yet, the differences between the various approaches are considerably in terms of theory,

type of data used and focus for explanation. For example, on the one hand Rational Choice theory driven institutionalism is employed, on the other hand comparative empirical approaches are used that are more actor oriented to develop theories of party government and their interactions with legislatures. Another strand of literature focuses more on what party government produces in material terms (like Welfare States; Schmidt, 2002) and procedural terms (democratic quality of decision-making; Keman, 2002). Finally, we feel that the role of political elites and organized interests deserves more attention in studying party government across the 'new' Europe and its functioning of late (Blondel, 2002).

In summary: existing research on democratic party government is characterized by different approaches, on the one hand, and emphasizes different modes of governance in view of its functioning as the 'engine room' of parliamentary democracy in Europe. However, up to now most research has been directed towards West European democracies and less to the Eastern Europe. One of the goals of this workshop would be to extend and elaborate existing and fresh approaches of party government to the 'whole' Europe (see also: Blondel & Müller-Rommel, 2001; Blondel, Müller-Rommel & Malova, 2007). Finally during the last decade a number of relevant data have been developed in which the many features of party government have been comparatively collected and often transformed to allow a more systematic cross-system and cross-time analysis of party government (e.g. Woldendorp et al., 2000; Armingeon, 2006). The use and abuse of these data are in dire need of conceptual discussion and cross-validation in view of their various applications to parliamentary democracy across East and West Europe.

The workshop includes the following topics for further discussion and analysis:

- The formation process of coalition government and multi-party system dynamics.
- Types of government and variations in ideological composition and patterns party representation.
- Consequences of government termination and patterns of democratic (in)stability.
- Executive/Legislative relations and the room for manoeuvre of party government.

- The role of political elites and organized interests in the functioning of party government.
- Policy seeking behaviour and related performances of democratic party government.
- Assessing existing data collections of party government and the need for further developments.

Participants

We would like to invite both the established and the emerging researchers of this field from the Eastern and Western Europe. Having both categories participating and representing various approaches as well as different areas within Europe would be a bonus which we will endeavour.

Type of paper

We welcome papers that cover the items mentioned above, either theoretical or empirically driven. Our preference is to have papers tabled that deliberately combine both theory and evidence from a comparative perspective (be it comparable case studies, cross-national or cross-time analyses).

Finally, it should also be noted that this workshop has the support of the ECPR Standing Group on Political Parties.

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