

Institutionalisation of European political parties. Niedermayer's model revisited¹

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Abstract

According to Niedermayer's concept of Europarties' development (1983), these organisations have to go through three phases (contact, cooperation, integration) to be fully institutionalised. The aim of this article is to analyse relationships between Europarties and their member parties on the basis of statutes of the former in order to answer the question of where individual Europarties should currently be placed in the Niedermayer's model. The subjects of the analysis are all entities existing in the ninth European Parliament term of office (2019–2024): EPP, PES, ALDE, EGP, ECR, ID, PEL, EFA, EDP, ECPM. The analysis demonstrates that some Europarties tend to create supranational structure (e.g. EPP), others settle for transnational cooperation (e.g. PES). Therefore, we can ask whether completing the integration phase is the only way to institutionalise the Europarty.

Keywords: Europarties, party structures, institutionalisation, EPP, PES, European Parliament

Instytucjonalizacja europejskich partii politycznych. Model Niedermayera odczytany na nowo

Streszczenie

Zgodnie z koncepcją rozwoju europartii Niedermayera (1983) organizacje te muszą przejść przez trzy fazy (kontakt, współpraca, integracja), aby mogły zostać w pełni zinstytucjonalizowane. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza relacji między europartiami i ich partiami członkowskimi przepro-

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wadzona na podstawie statutów tych pierwszych, aby odpowiedzieć na pytanie, gdzie w modelu Niedermayera powinny być obecnie umiejscowione poszczególne europartie. Przedmiotem analizy są wszystkie podmioty istniejące w dziewiątej kadencji Parlamentu Europejskiego (2019–2024): EPP, PES, ALDE, EGP, ECR, ID, PEL, EFA, EDP, ECPM. Analiza wykazała, że podczas gdy niektóre europartie dążą do tworzenia struktur ponadnarodowych (np. EPP), inne zadowolają się transnarodową współpracą (np. PES). Można zatem postawić pytanie, czy dokończenie fazy integracji jest jedyną drogą instytucjonalizacji europartii.

Słowa kluczowe: europartie, struktury partyjne, instytucjonalizacja, EPP, PES, Parlament Europejski

There is a growing literature on institutionalisation of political parties encompassing the seminal works of Huntington (1968), Janda (1980), Panebianco (1988), Rose and Mackie (1988), Harmel and Svåsand (1993), Randall and Svåsand (2002), Basedau and Stroh (2008), Harmel, Svåsand and Mjelde (2019), or Jakobson, Saarts and Kalev (2021). However, these concepts are related to political parties at the national level, and there are some doubts as to whether they can be used for research on transnational party federations (TPFs) that developed into Europarties² because of their nature (parties *sui generis* operating in the political system of the European Union) and the special way of creation (emerging from cooperation of national political parties) (Witkowska 2014; Paczeński 2021).³

As far as development of TPFs is concerned, there is an interesting concept – exclusively devoted to these entities – elaborated by Oskar Niedermayer (1983). According to this model, transnational federations of political parties have to go through three stages (contact, cooperation, and integration) in order to be institutionalised. The stages differ from each other in terms of intensity of intra-party interactions. Organisations that successfully accomplished this process can be deemed as fully-fledged Europarties. In the other well-known concept of Europarties' development elaborated by Hix and Lord (1997) intra-party relations were also taken into consideration, however, they were completed by external relations between Europarties and other institutions of the EU political system (external dimension of institutionalisation). Since **the aim of this article** is to analyse the relations within Europarties occurring between European and national party structures (internal dimension of institutionalisation), the Niedermayer's model seems perfectly suited for this purpose. The research should be definitely located within the neoinstitutional approach. The **methods** employed in this research include the content analysis based on formal rules (Europarties' statutes and rules of procedure) and comparative analysis.

The **subjects of the analysis** are all entities that gained the formal status of Europarties on the basis of the *Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1141/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the statute and funding of European political*

² Jakobson, Saarts and Kalev (2021) mentioned transnational dimension of institutionalisation, however, in their article it is related to domestic parties, which organise their extraterritorial branches abroad in order to help emigrants to vote in national elections.

³ Some scholars used concept of institutionalisation elaborated to investigate domestic parties in order to study Europarties, see e.g. Wiśniewska (2020) who decided to employ the concept of Harmel and Svåsand (1993) to analyse conservative group in the EP.

parties and European political foundations (Regulation 1141/2014)⁴ and were registered by the Authority for European Political Parties and Foundations in the ninth EP term of office (2019–2024). The collection includes ten entities (EPP, PES, ALDE, EGP, ECR, ID, PEL, EFA, EDP, ECPM) that are presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Europarties in the ninth European Parliament term of office (2019–2024).

	Name of Europarty	Abbrev.	Beginning of the cooperation	Ideological and programmatic attitudes	Political group in the EP connected with Europarty
1	European Peoples' Party	EPP	1976	Christian democracy, liberal conservatism, pro-Europeanism	Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)
2	Party of European Socialists	PES	1974 (Confederation of Socialist Parties of the European Community), under current name since 1992	social democracy, pro-Europeanism	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament
3	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe	ALDE	1976 (Federation of Liberal and Democrat Parties in Europe), under current name since 2012	liberalism, pro-Europeanism	Renew Europe Group
4	European Green Party	EGP	1979 (Coordination of European Green and Radical Parties), under current name since 2004	green politics, pro-Europeanism	Group of the Greens/ European Free Alliance
5	European Conservatives and Reformists Party	ECR	2009 (Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe)	conservative, economic liberalism, Euroscepticism	European Conservatives and Reformists Group

⁴ This regulation was amended in 2015 (twice), as well as in 2018 and 2019.

6	Identity and Democracy Party	ID	2014 (Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom), under current name since 2019	nationalism, right-wing populism, hard Euroscepticism	Identity and Democracy Group
7	Party of European Left	PEL	2004	democratic socialism, communism, soft Euroscepticism	Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left
8	European Free Alliance	EFA	1981	regionalism, national minorities, pro-Europeanism	Group of the Greens/ European Free Alliance
9	European Democratic Party	EDP	2004	centrism, pro-Europeanism	Renew Europe Group
10	European Christian Political Movement	ECPM	2002	Christian democracy, social conservatism, soft Euroscepticism	European Conservatives and Reformists Group

Source: List of registered European Political Parties, <http://www.appf.europa.eu/appf/en/parties-and-foundations/registered-parties.html> (1.07.2023).

According to the Regulation 1141/2014, *European political party* means a political alliance, composed of political parties and/or citizens, which pursues political aims and is registered in accordance with the conditions laid down in this document (see: Regulation 1141/2014: art. 2).⁵ In order to be registered, Europarty must have its seat in EU Member State; its member parties must be represented in at least one quarter of the Member States (by MEPs, MPs, members of regional parliaments or assemblies)⁶, or must have received at least three per cent of the votes cast in each of at least one quarter of the Member States at the most recent EP elections; must observe in its programme and activities the values, on which the Union is founded⁷; must have participated in EP elec-

⁵ In the Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1141/2014, notions *European political parties* and *European parties at the European level* are used interchangeable, similarly in this article, here the notion *Europarties* known from the subject literature is added as well.

⁶ In the Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 2018/673 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 May 2018 amending Regulation of 2014, it was added that member parties of one Europarty are not members of another Europarty, hence since then domestic party can be a member of solely one Europarty (see: Regulation 2018/673).

⁷ As expressed in Article 2 TEU, namely: "respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities".

tions or have expressed the intention to participate in the next EP elections; and must not pursue profit goals (Regulation 1141/2014: art. 3). Each Europarty, which is represented in the European Parliament by at least one of MEPs, may apply for funding from the general budget of the European Union (Regulation 1141/2014: art. 17).

Differences in the level of Europarties' development may exist due to the fact that they have been founded in various periods from the 1970s until now. It follows the Huntington's concept, where *time* is a vital component of institutionalisation. The ability of the party structure to survive (durability) and to adapt to the changing environment (adaptability) serve as the main indicators of the party institutionalisation's level (Huntington 1968). Following this pattern, it can be hypothesised that Europarties established earlier should be more institutionalised than these created lately, and consequently entities founded at the same time should be at the similar level of institutionalisation. However, this does not always have to be the case, because Europarties can follow diverse paths of development and oppose a transfer of sovereignty from the national to European level.

Relations between European and national party structures are tested on the basis of some Niedermayer's indicators ascribed to the subsequent stages of development (Niedermayer 1983), but also more sophisticated tool used to investigate intra-party relations in multi-level organisations, mainly parties operating in federal or decentralised political systems (Fabre 2011; Thorlakson 2009, 2013; Deschouwer 2000, 2003), namely influence exerted by national parties on the Europarty structures. All this serves to verify **hypothesis** that parties created at the same time can be at various stages of development due to following their own paths and making own choices that are not always consistent with the Niedermayer's model, especially with its assumption about the need to transfer sovereignty.

The article begins with a theoretical framework that includes a brief presentation of the Niedermayer's model (Niedermayer 1983). This concept should be treated as a starting point, it provides certain theoretical categories requiring further operationalisation. While measuring the level of Europarties development, the author mentions transnational communication and common policy formulation, but focuses mainly on organisational aspects. Tools used to describe relationships between different layers in multi-level parties are employed here, i.e. the influence of lower-level structures on higher-level structures and their involvement in the decision-making process. At the end of this article there are some conclusions and recommendations for further research.

Niedermayer's model as the main concept of Europarties' institutionalisation

Niedermayer elaborated his model of Europarties' development basing on the definition of European integration by Ernst B. Haas (1958) and his assumption that there is a kind of balance between national and supranational organisational structures. Integration is perceived as: "process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations, and political activities to-

ward a new and larger centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing national states" (Haas 1958: p. 16, 105–107). Niedermayer transferred this definition to his concept of the Europarties' development. His aim was to show the path that organisations have to go through for becoming fully-fledged Europarties, what can be considered as a synonymous of institutionalisation process defined by Huntington as "the process by which organisations and procedures acquire value and stability" (Huntington 1968: p. 12).

Niedermayer distinguished three phases of Europarties' development: **contact, cooperation and integration** that differ in terms of intra-party relations' intensity. Among components of these phases he decided to investigate communication, organisation, and policy formulation. When it comes to **communication**, in the first phase it is temporary. Member (national) parties meet in specific periods of time, for specific purposes. In the second and third phases it is more permanent. As far as **organisation** is concerned in the contact phase it is non-existent, there are only interactions between national parties. In the cooperation phase there is a transnational organisation, and in the integration phase – a supranational one. However, to place Europarties in proper phases more indicators are needed, including possibility of individual membership, existence of transnational subunits, and their incorporation in the decision-making process, principle of representation (composition of Europarties' bodies), resolving conflicts (decision-making in Europarties' bodies), range of competences and use of common symbols. The last component – common **policy formulation** – requires interactions between national parties, it shows similarities and reveals differences in their political stances. At the contact stage, it is possible, but not necessary, to define a common policy, at the cooperation and integration stage it is mandatory. The higher the level of integration, the more extensive and detailed the common programmes. It is important in order to achieve the stage of integration. Europarties must have unlimited competencies, and sovereignty of member parties must be partially or fully transferred to transnational European structures which in effect transform into supranational ones. However, full reorientation of loyalties, expectations and activities is not required, it is more about system with multiple loyalties, where supranational level is one of several (Niedermayer 1983: p. 16).

Coined in the very beginning phase of party cooperation at the European level, the Niedermayer's concept has been still used in the subject literature in the XXI century (Delwit et al. 2004). Johansson and Zervakis noticed that European parties have developed significantly since the time of their founding and have become institutionalised beyond the phases of mere contact and cooperation, and therefore should be placed somewhere between the second and third stage or even in the third stage of the Niedermayer's concept (Johansson, Zervakis 2002).

Ladrech claimed that the Party of European Socialists (PES) should be placed in the second stage of the development, in his opinion: "the final stage of Niedermayer's operational concept is quite a far-off proposition, as it would necessitate a much more federalised European-national relationship" (Ladrech 2002b: p. 93). In the other publication from the same period he located at the second stage both biggest Europarties, the

PES and the EPP, because of “a permanent organisations and frequent and prepared interaction” (Ladrech 2002a: p. 399). According to Sandström, the liberal Europarty (till 2012 the European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party, ELDR, then the Alliance of Liberal and Democrats for Europe, ALDE) since its founding in 1976 in a form of TPF moved from contact to cooperation and even entered the integration phase, however, it has not yet fulfilled all the criteria of the Niedermayer’s model ascribed to this stage (Sandström 2002: p. 108, 174; 2004). In turn, Dietz, who studied the Green parties’ cooperation at the beginning of the century, admitted that it is not as advanced as it is in the case of the other mainstream party families (Christian democrats, socialists, liberals). This is partly because of some traditions of earlier international cooperation of these families in their global organisations and political groups in the Common Assembly of the European Community of Coal and Steel, both kinds of organisations that helped them to create the TPFs in the 1970s. The lack of such support can be deemed as a reason of later founding of the green parties’ organisation and looser cooperation that, however, surely moved from the contact to cooperation stage, but still has not managed to come beyond it (Dietz 2002: p. 127, 150).

Overall, it must be admitted that in order to ascribe individual Europarties to the subsequent stages detailed analyses should be conducted. The preliminary research based on the formal documents of the Europarties conducted in 2013 has proven that then existed Europarties were somewhere between the second and third stage of their development (Kosowska-Gąstoł 2015, 2017). However, whereas some of them seemed to lean towards the third phase, the others opposed this direction of change. The presented results of the analysis should be perceived as a continuation and extension of previous research aimed at tracing the changes occurring within the following years and explaining the state of affairs.

Measuring the level of Europarties’ development

Transnational communication and common policy formulation

Niedermayer’s first indicator of Europarty development is transnational communication between member parties. Initially, contacts and meetings of political elites of national parties from the same party families were organised *ad hoc*, currently they are permanent in each of the ten entities formally recognised as Europarties. This is, *inter alia*, due to the Regulations on Europarties (2003, 2014) that imposed on the organisation the obligation to have its seat, where the central administration of Europarty is located (Regulation 1141/2014: art. 3.1(a) together with art. 2 (11)), but also common “bodies and offices holding the power of administrative, financial, and legal representation” (Regulation 1141/2014: art. 4.1 (f)).

The situation is similar when we consider the other indicator of the Niedermayer’s model, which is a common policy formulation. The mentioned Regulation on Europarties has obliged these entities to include in their statutes (necessary to be registered) provisions covering “a political programme setting out their purpose and objectives” (Regula-

tion 1141/2014: art. 4.1(c)). Therefore, each Europarty must agree on common values and principles and develop a common platform even if it is based on the lowest common denominator. There are differences between Europarties, because some of them have managed to adopt common programmes and detailed political manifestos before the EP elections, while others have limited their activities in this area to accepting more general joint declarations and statements. Each Europarty is able to define the basic principles of common policy, which are included in its declarations and also presented in votes, motions, and speeches delivered by its representatives in the European Parliament, thus meeting the criteria assigned to the second and third stages of the Niedermayer's model. However, it should be emphasised that the issue of formulating common programmes and policies is certainly complex and requires extensive, detailed analyses that are beyond the scope of the article.

Permanent organisation

The organisational structure seems to be the indicator that mostly differentiates the Europarties. Although the Regulation 1141/2014 on Europarties obliged these entities to establish joint bodies and develop a decision-making process, some parties are based on transnational cooperation (second stage), while others have moved closer to supranational solutions (third stage). In order to assess the level of integration within Europarties, this research used indicators such as individual membership and concept developed to study parties in multi-level political systems such as influence of the national parties on European party structures.

Individual membership

European political parties operate as political alliances that form a kind of networks that encompass their member parties and associated organisations. However, individual Europarties differ significantly on this matter, some accept as their full members only parties from EU Member States, while others extend this category to parties from all over Europe. In addition to full membership, there are also other opportunities to collaborate such as associated membership or being an observer party.

What is more important from the point of view of this article, is individual membership. According to the Niedermayer's model, at the first stage of the Europarties' development the issue is non-existent. The cooperation is based on contacts between members (mainly elites) of national parties. The issue appears in the second stage. Permanent cooperation may extend beyond collective membership related to national parties and associated organisations to include individual membership. Niedermayer distinguished **double membership**, when members of national parties belonging to Europarties are at the same time members of these Europarties. However, membership can also be of **parallel** nature, when individuals belong to Europarties regardless of whether they are members of national parties or not. At the third stage, individual membership exists only at the European level, and members of Europarties are automatically members of their territorial substructures (Niedermayer 1983: p. 32), that is national parties.

From the analysis of the Europarties' statutes it is evident that formally all entities decided to introduce a kind of individual membership and none of them have dropped membership in national parties in favour of the Europarties, hence all should be located at the second stage of development. However, there are some differences between them. Europarty membership can be opened for all EU citizens or limited to some groups. The second difference is that noticed by Niedermayer: membership can be double or parallel.

The analysis shows that most open and parallel membership characterises the far-right, Eurosceptic party *Identity and Democracy*. Individual members can join it regardless of whether they belong to its member parties or not. Moreover, individual members are entitled to take part in meetings of this association with the right of expression and initiative as well as the right to vote (ID's Statute, see: ID 2019). Natural persons are also mentioned among associate members of the ALDE (see: ALDE 2023); however, their role seems to be currently limited compared to the period when it was the only category of individual membership (ALDE's Statute, see: ALDE 2016). Open, but double, membership occurs in the PES and the PEL, where all members of national parties belonging to the Europarty are at the same time members of that Europarty. In the PES they are called "PES activists" and can create city groups authorised to present their policy proposals (see: PES 2018, 2019). In the PEL the decision on this kind of membership is perceived as an option that can be decided by national parties, which act here as gate-keepers, there is also possibility for individuals from European countries associated with the EU to join or create national group of individual members, hence in this Europarty we are actually dealing with both kinds of open membership – double and parallel (PEL's Statute, see: PEL 2022), but unlike in the ID, these members are not included in the decision-making process.

At the other end of the continuum are Europarties that have chosen to accept as individual members only MEPs from both member parties and beyond (EPP, ALDE, EGP, EDP, ECPM) or only MEPs from outside member parties (PES again, ECR, EFA). Some Europarties decided to offer this kind of membership also to members of national or regional parliaments and assemblies (ECR, EGP, EDP, ECPM), or even for European Commissioners (ECR), members of European institutions and bodies provided for by treaties (EDP), individuals who hold elected offices and are not members of national parties, and organisations belonging to the Europarty (EFA) etc.

To sum up, two biggest Europarties introduced in their statutes different concepts of individual membership. The EPP decided on membership limited to MEPs elected from lists of its member parties and other MEPs by decision of the Political Assembly on the proposal of the Presidency (EPP's Statute, see: EPP 2019, 2022), whereas the PES adopted more open strategy based on double membership (PES's Statute, see: PES 2018, 2019). The solution similar to this of the PES exists in the PEL, hence it is worth considering whether the ideology has something to do with it. Many Europarties follow the path set by the EPP, focusing mainly on MEPs as their individual members, in this way they adapt to the Regulation of 2014, according to which EU funding for the Europarty depends

largely on the number of MEPs who have declared their membership in this party. It is especially visible in the case of the ALDE party, which underwent a transformation in this regard.

The ALDE party was the first that opted for an open individual membership for all interested citizens regardless of whether they were from member parties or not, their delegates took part in meetings of decision-making bodies with the right to voice their opinion and to vote (ALDE's Statute, see: ALDE 2016). However, after changing the statutory provision, the ALDE introduced individual membership for MEPs elected from lists of member parties (*ex-officio*) and for other MEPs who can join individually. Natural persons can still belong to the Europarty, but their role seems to be limited (ALDE 2023). Hence the only Europarty currently based on membership open for all citizens is the Eurosceptic ID party, the other Europarties are composed of their member parties (collective membership) with individual membership designed mainly for MEPs who are needed to secure the Europarty financing from the EU or MPs and members of regional parliaments or assemblies to secure the legal recognition as Europarty.

Influence of member parties on European structures

All registered Europarties have developed transnational organisational structures typical for the second stage of Niedermayer's model. They are based mainly on the decision-making and executive (steering) bodies, however, some entities have created more extensive structures including additional administrative bodies etc. As far as the decision-making bodies are concerned, there are usually two – broader called the *Congress* and narrower known as the *Political Assembly* or the *Council*, only three Europarties limit their structures to one body of this kind – ID, EDP, ECPM. In the case of executive body, it is most often the *Presidency, Bureau, Committee* or *Board*, sometimes there are two bodies of this type, but one of a more administrative nature.

Some Europarties are far advanced on their development path and close to entering the phase of supranational organisation. At the transnational stage the influence of national parties on Europarty structures is strong, at the supranational level it is much weaker. The best way to measure it is to use two indicators – the composition of the Europarty bodies that include national parties' representatives and the involvement of the latter in the decision-making process within Europarties.

The involvement of national parties' in Europarty bodies is deemed as strong when their representatives (*party on the ground*) have the largest share in the composition of Europarties' bodies. The influence is weak when the composition of Europarties' bodies is dominated by other subsystems, *party in central office* (Europarty officers and narrower bodies) and *party in public office* (Europarties' politicians in the EU bodies etc.) (Katz, Mair 1993). *Table 2* presents the variables, which characterise the involvement of national parties in Europarty bodies (representation) and the meaning of scores ranging from 1 (that is strong involvement) to 3 (that is weak involvement).

Table 2: National parties' involvement in composition of Europarty bodies – coding scheme.

Decision-making bodies (eg. Congress, Council)	1 strong	representatives of member parties and possibly some representatives of other subsystems of party structure
	2 medium	representatives of member parties and a lot of representatives of other subsystems of party structure
	3 weak	representatives of member parties in minority, domination of other subsystems of party structure
Executive (steering) bodies (eg. Board or Presidency)	1 strong	representatives of all member parties approved by the highest decision-making body and possibly some <i>ex officio</i> members
	2 medium	representatives elected by the highest decision-making body (not all member parties are represented), and possibly <i>ex officio</i> members, but former dominate
	3 weak	representatives of member parties elected by the highest decision-making body in minority , <i>ex officio</i> members dominate

Source: developed by the author on the basis of the subject literature.

The analyses of the composition of Europarty structures and national parties' involvement were conducted on the basis of formal documents: party statutes and rules of procedure. The results are presented in *Table 3*.

Table 3: The involvement of national parties in Europarty bodies (representation).

	Europarty	Decision-making body (broader)	Decision-making body (narrower)	Executive (steering) body
1	EPP	2	2	2
2	PES	1	1	1
3	ALDE	1	1	2
4	EGP	1	1	2
5	ECR	1	1	2
6	ID (MENL)	1		2
7	PEL	1	1	1
8	EFA	1	1	2
9	EDP	2		2
10	ECPM	2		2

Source: developed by the author on the basis of the Europarties' statutes.

Table 3 demonstrates that in none of the ten analysed Europarties the level of national parties' involvement is weak (code 3). In most decision-making bodies it is strong (code 1) and in most executive ones – medium (code 2). Comparisons of particular parties indicate some differences between them. Firstly, three parties: the EPP, EDP, ECPM seem to be closer on their way to the supranational structure than the others. Secondly, two leftist Europarties (PES, PEL) seem to oppose the general tendency towards a more supranational executives, they are the only entities, in which all member parties have their representatives in the executive bodies. However, it must be admitted that even if the executive bodies of the ECR and the EDP do not gather all member parties, they seem also highly representative (see: ECR 2022; EDP 2019, 2021).

Turning to the issue of **the national parties' involvement in the Europarty decision-making process**, it is perceived as strong when political decisions are made unanimously⁸. In this case each member party can serve as a veto player. The influence is weakest when the decisions are made by a simple majority of votes. The first situation is typical for the transnational structure, the second – for supranational one. Political decisions can be made by unanimity (strong influence, code 1), qualified majority (medium, code 2), absolute majority (weak, code 3), and simple majority (very weak, code 4).

Europarties make different decisions and therefore use different procedures. The administrative decisions are usually made by a simple majority of votes, while decisions on admitting new members or dissolving the organisation are made by a qualified majority. The most important are the political decisions, and they will be the subject of the analysis here, the results of which are presented in *Table 4*. Unlike the participation of national parties in the Europarty bodies' composition, here the engagement of national parties is mostly weak or very weak. The only exception seems to be the PES, partly also the EGP. In the socialist party decisions shall be made by consensus (code 1) and – merely if it cannot be reached – by a qualified majority (code 2, hence the average 1.5). In the green party decisions in decision-making bodies are made by a qualified majority (code 2), in executive body – by a simple majority (code 4). It is worth noting that the EPP change the way the decisions are made from an absolute majority (code 3) to a simple majority (code 4), which can be considered as a step towards the greater supranationality.

Table 4: The involvement of national parties in the decision-making process in Europarties.

	Europarty	Decision-making body (broader)	Decision-making body (narrower)	Executive (steering) body
1	EPP	4	4	4
2	PES	1.5	1.5	1.5
3	ALDE	4	4	4
4	EGP	2	2	4

⁸ As far as composition of the bodies is concerned, there are taken into consideration only their members with voting rights.

5	ECR	-	4	4
6	ID (MENL)	3		3
7	PEL	4	4	4
8	EFA	4	4	4
9	EDP	4		-
10	ECPM	3		-

Source: developed by the author on the basis of the Europarties' statutes currently in force (see: ALDE 2016, 2023; ECPM 2021; ECR 2022; EDP 2021; EFA 2022; EGP 2022a,b; EPP 2022; ID 2019; PEL 2022; PES 2019).

Overall, from the research on member parties' influence on European structures it is obvious that the Party of European Socialists keeps it at the highest level. Whereas the others tend more or less towards supranational structure, the organisation of socialists includes all member parties in its executive body and keeps on decision-making basing on unanimity or qualified majority, allowing therefore member parties to serve as veto-players.

Conclusions

The analysis of the formal documents of Europarties has proven that they can be located between the second and third stages of the Niedermayer's model. However, while some Europarties strive to develop the supranational structures (third stage), others seem to oppose this direction of development. The best example of the former is the European People's Party, and the latter – the Party of European Socialists.

The Europarties have decided to adopt various solutions regarding their individual membership that can be limited (closed) or open, double or parallel. Most of them ensure that their decision-making bodies are sufficiently representative. As far as their member parties are concerned, however, it is quite differently in the case of executive bodies, except the PES and the PEL. Similarly, most Europarties decided to accept a simple majority or an absolute majority as the way of decision-making in their bodies, except the PES and the EGP, which adopted unanimity and qualified majority (the EGP – only in decision-making bodies).

Two largest parties (EPP, PES) that were founded at the same time in the mid-1970s seem to have different approaches to party cooperation. The EPP tends to develop its own structures in isolation from the member parties. Its membership is limited to MEPs, its bodies are based on member parties, but also largely on party officers and EU politicians, the decisions are made by a simple majority. The development is quite different in the case of the PES. Despite a long tradition of cooperation, the socialist Europarty seems to have no ambitions to create a fully supranational structure. It has adopted open double membership, which means that the PES is simply based on members of its member parties. The same principle concerns its organisational structure, which is

created based on national party structures not in isolation from them. This Europarty has included representatives of all member parties not only in the decision-making bodies, but also in the executive organ. Adopting unanimity or a qualified majority as a decision-making method, it confirmed treating national parties as foreground organisations and possible veto-players.

Taking into consideration the differences between parties created at the same time, it is worth asking questions about the model of their development. Long-lasting party cooperation within the PES did not lead to progress towards a supranational organisation, hence it is supposed that this is not the only direction of the Europarties' development. The Nidermayer's model seems to be the convincing, but not the only option. The Europarties can act as multi-level parties in which the transfer of sovereignty from national to European level does not occur. Decentralised Europarties can prove their usefulness in multi-level political system of the EU, in which decisions are made at different level, as they are well-suited to act at each of these levels.

However, the research was conducted merely on the basis of formal documents, hence empirical analyses are required to confirm these initial findings. As the two left-wing parties (PES, PEL) are often located close to each other in the Nidermayer's model, it is worth considering further research on correlations between the Europarty structures and their ideological and programmatic stances.

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