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PARLIAMENTARY ELITES
OF NEW EUROPEAN PARTY FAMILIES:
UNSUCCESSFUL CHALLENGES
OR CHAOTIC SIGNS OF CHANGE?

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Parliamentary elites of new European party families: unsuccessful challenges or chaotic signs of change?¹

1. Anarchists, alternatives, beginners? “new politics” representative elites after 1970

In the logic of a long term-comparative analysis of parliamentary elite transformations in Europe, the study of political and sociological profiles of green, “new left/alternative left”, and ethnoregionalist MPs could be considered perhaps as a “residual” exercise, given the limited size of such political elites and their relatively short historical impact.

Differences between these party families, and particularly between the first two and the third one, are self-evident, and hardly need to be recalled here². But some interesting similarities may also be stressed. The first one is that they all represent a challenge, in a broad sense, to the established parties of their respective party systems. In different ways they have more or less, successfully tried to aggregate new interests and give a voice to issues that traditional parties usually neglect. The second similarity is a consequence of the first one and refers to the timing of the emergence of these parties. It has often been underscored that a slow process of de-freezing of traditional party alignments started in the seventies in many European countries, along with a new materialist / post-materialist cleavage. The rise of Green and New Left parties is usually interpreted as a result of this trend. An interesting, and not always emphasized, thing is that the birth (or at least the re-emergence) of ethnoregionalism takes place in the same years and, in a number of cases, it can be explained along the same lines as party de-alignment and rise of post-materialist issues (Melucci and Diani 1992), and failure to keep strong linkages between parties and civil society³ (Lawson and Merkl 1988). The ethnoregionalist party family is not a new one, strictly speaking, but many of its members have experienced a “second birth” in the seventies, both with a sudden electoral success, and with a sharp redefinition of goals and ideological references. This justifies their inclusion in

¹ We want to thank all the friends and colleagues from the *Eurelite Network* who have provided information and references about the political parties covered in the paper. In particular, we are grateful to Heinrich Best, Maurizio Cotta, Michael Edinger, Mogens Pedersen. Though the paper is the fruit of a collective work, Filippo Tronconi is particularly responsible for paragraphs 3 and 4 while Luca Verzichelli for 1, 2 and 5.

² In addition to the different ideological frameworks, these families differ in relation to their historical evolution (some ethno regionalist parties have their origins back into the XIX or early XX century), and of course to the issues and interests they represent in the political arena

³ The same mechanism of linkage failure, though operating in a definitely different direction, can be observed in the eighties, the years of the so called “silent counter-revolution” (Ignazi 1992). It is interesting anyway to notice that at least two parties belonging to the ethnoregionalist family – namely the Lega Nord and the Vlaams Blok – can be included in the list of extreme-right parties appeared along with the silent counter-revolution, and share with them a number of features.

this work. It is not by chance, after all, that most ethnoregionalist parties sit in Strasbourg in a common parliamentary group with the Greens, the Greens/European Free Alliance group (De Winter and Gomez-Reino 2002).

At the same time, these party families remain, after some thirty years from their emergence – or re-emergence - on the political scene of many European democracies, an “obscure object”, which can be approached starting from several points of view, and studied in the light of rather different Interpretative theories.

In a sense, to observe the emergence of new parliamentary elites, oriented/orientated towards some kind of radicalism and “minoritarian” ideological discourses, can mean to reflect upon a new form of political representation. Those representatives who are inspired by post-materialist and libertarian principles are, in fact, often depicted as alternative political actors: minor but significant “challengers” for the well consolidated and relatively cohesive political elites produced by the old *weberian* and *duvergerian* mass parties. The theory of the post-materialist challenge (Inglehart 1984) has been evoked, by many observers, as the first significant sign of the end of a party control over the process of political recruitment. A mechanical (but not always evident) consequence of such a challenge should have been the transformation of the political elite: particularly, the leadership originated by the new parties would have taken the semblances of an “anarchist elite” (Dalton 1996): more similar to some specific social groups than to a broad social class-based universe (Offe 1985), the new left elites would have brought a remarkable renewal not only in the physical bases of the political elites, but even in the criteria of recruitment and circulation. It is less clear if this “anarchist” pattern of change could apply to ethnoregionalist parties too. Some of them share with Greens and New Left parties a post-materialist attitude that could be reflected in the composition of their parliamentary elites, but others clearly do not.

In a different perspective – which does not concern the very nature of political elites but focusing on the consequences of party system change - one can approach the new *red-and-green* political elites, as well as the ethnic minorities elites, to stress their role of ultimate challengers to the traditionally *frozen* party alignments of the XX century (Beyme 1984; Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990). Mainly in an implicit way, several authors indicate the emergence of these minor *party families* as the completion of the long term transformation of party system in Europe. In this perspective, the *new left* family should be considered as a sort of re-definition of those values which had been once “submerged” by the existence of other

parties, namely, a strong radical socialism, and the strong Communist parties populating large areas of Western Europe between 1945 and 1990 (Bell 1993). In a similar way, the greens would have occupied the space – already evident in the seventies – created during the post-materialistic *revolution* and not completely “occupied” by the radical parties originated within the liberal and the socialist wings. On the other hand, the “ethnic revival” (Smith 1981) and the resurgence of peripheries, after a long wave of centralisation of political functions, have created – or re-created – in many European regions a political space favourable to the success of ethno-regionalist parties. In some cases the typical goals of ethno-regionalism (protection of minority languages, rediscovering of local cultural traditions, claim for autonomy from the centre of the state) have gone alongside with a clear positioning also on non-ethnic issues, towards left libertarian stances (this is the case, for example of the Welsh Plaid Cymru or the Spanish Bloque Nacionalista Galego), or more traditional social-democratic positions (the Scottish National Party), or even towards neo-populism (the Lega Nord and the Vlaams Blok). In these cases the challenge to traditional parties is more direct: ethno-regionalist parties explicitly contend votes to left and social-democratic parties or to moderate right or Christian-democratic parties. But, a third possible approach can be used in the study of new political party elites – somehow developed in a few analyses about the consequence of the entrance of post-materialist values in the European *high politics*⁴: the basic idea, here, is that these elites could be studied as *new born political elites*: their role during the period 1975-2000 should be conceived, following a *party lifespan approach* (Pedersen 1981), as a phase of socialization within the institutional arena, corresponding to the *childhood* of their parties. In fact, parliamentary elites from small alternative, protest or single issue parties seem to have gone through a long process of *adaptation* to the institutional side of politics (Della Porta and Diani 1999). In some cases (but it actually applies essentially to the green family and to a few ethno-regionalist parties), they have crossed the desert of their *instinctive opposition mode* and transformed themselves into governmental elites, thus reaching the fourth and final *threshold of relevance* which characterizes the maturation of a small party, according to a rokkanian long term perspective (Mueller Rommel 2002, 3).

The sub-title of the paper simplifies the complex theoretical puzzle we have briefly sketched out above, opening an explicit question. In fact, we are going to illustrate the meaning of

⁴ See some implications discussed by Pogunkte (2002) concluding a research on the experience of Green parties in some European national governments.

parliamentary elites' transformations in three *party families* of the European scenario, starting from two alternative working hypotheses: the first one explores the possibility that MPs expressed by these parties symbolize some *new challenges* for the overall profile of political representatives. The second hypothesis argues that the transformations in the parliamentary profiles within these parties indicate clear signs of instability within the whole democratic political class: the representatives of the new parties would be, in other words, less oriented to keep the paths of historical convergence which have until now characterized the evolution of many "traditional" party elites during the XX century (Best and Cotta 2000). However - here the *lifespan approach* comes again - this peculiar attitude to make the overall elite profile more various can be linked to an initial phase of party institutionalization, or perhaps it can represent a structural feature of a given party family.

The few data available and the reduced dimensions of the elite groups included in these ideological families will probably not lead us to robust and statistically significant findings. However, we hope to be able to clarify matters by discarding one of these two broad hypotheses and concentrating on the other one, or otherwise we have to keep exploring both of them. In the next paragraph we will clarify what kind of impact we can expect from the parliamentary presence of the "new party families" in Europe. Then, after some clarifications about the problems one finds in analyzing small parliamentary parties (par. 3), we will move to the presentation of some "working hypotheses", that will lead to the exploration of the parliamentary profiles of the three party families (par. 4). Finally, we will make an attempt to provide some comparative interpretations of our findings (par. 5).

2. The impact of three "new" party families within the European parliamentary representation

Green politics and *New Left politics* have become significant issues, in the Western democratic context, starting with the decade following the "post-materialist revolution" and, even more evidently, after 1990, whereby the decline of international communism helped the replacement of many *revolutionary movements* with alternative-ecologist parties (Mueller Rommel 2002; Bell 1993). In the same period, several ethno-regionalist parties gained representation in national parliaments for the first time, or increased it significantly. Politicians who can be classified as representatives of these parties are today active in many European legislatures. Since 1989, both a Green/European Free Alliance group and a

“European Alternative Left” group have been created in the European Parliament of Strasbourg, representing, respectively, the fourth and the fifth largest trans-European formations, after the Popular/conservative groups, the Party of the European Socialists and the Liberal-democratic federation.

Nonetheless, if new left, green politics, and ethnoregionalism have become typical key concepts indicating new challenges to the traditional European party systems (Mair 1993; Ware 1996), to say that *green*, *new left*, and *ethnoregionalist* parliamentary representatives could be conceived today as three strong and coherent realities in the current European parliamentary elites is far from being a shared assertion. A rough illustration of this impression is given by recent comparative assessments (Lane and Ersson 1999; Gallagher, Laver, Mair 2001), representing the evolution of the overall electoral force of the most important party families in Europe. According to most the observers, the *post-materialistic challenge* (Dalton 1996) to the European party systems has produced just one interesting (but feeble) result: the emergence of a “green” party family able to pervade a number of European party systems yet without crossing a slim threshold of about 5% of the voters. According to Ferdinand Mueller Rommel (2002) we should be able to read beyond this overall figure at least two different situations: the situation where we find a *strong green performer*, which have created the conditions for high and stable electoral results and parliamentary strength (Germany and Belgium, at least up to 2003 elections) and that of a *weak green performer*, where electoral results are modest and parliamentary representation is absent or very little.

Ethnoregionalist parties have consolidated their presence in European political systems during the seventies (the European average of votes was 1,6 in the sixties), but clearly their presence is limited to areas where some kind of ethnic distinctiveness, however defined, exists. Although present in most countries, sometimes as parties, sometimes in less clearly defined organizations, ethnoregionalist representatives have gained access to national parliaments in five countries, Belgium, Finland, Italy, Spain, and UK.

Concerning the *new left* parties, Lane and Ersson (1999) do not even recognize the “personality” of such a family, re-conducting the parties we consider (following Gallagher, Laver and Mair 2001) under this label to their primary “spiritual” families, namely the socialist and communist families (in case of “class” or “Marxist oriented” libertarian parties) or even the liberal family (in case of radical or “civil rights oriented” protest parties) (see Kitschelt 1988 for these definitions). In any case, we are talking about a family of parties

which would be present in a very limited number of democratic legislatures, reaching less than 2% of the average votes in Europe (Gallagher, Laver and Mair 2001, 230)⁵.

In this paper we are not going to contribute to the debate about the very nature of new European party families. What we want to do is to understand what real challenges have been brought to the historical patterns of parliamentary recruitment and career and, in case, what explanations - in terms of new party models or, on the contrary, in terms of country specific factors - can be provided. In this perspective, we will keep the original categories provided by the coding instructions of the *Cube-Eurelite project*, even if, in the context of the analysis of the different variables, we will refer to the *greens* and the *ethnoregionalist parties* in terms of *party families*, while we will produce mainly *country-specific explanatory discussions* when talking about new left parties.

Let's start discussing the reasons leading us to propose a specific analysis of parliamentary elites shaped within the three party families: the first possible objections, of course, concern the relative size of these minor parties. Our answer to this question is rather simple: green, ethnoregionalist, and new-left/libertarian elites (even if the latter are less present and recognizable) reflect minor but *consolidated* electoral areas. The extent of voters oriented towards the parties falling in these categories has grown, during the last two decades, in a large number of European democracies. This assertion is easy to be verified if one looks at the relative success of some green parties in the last two decades⁶. The electoral performance of ethnoregionalist parties has followed in many (but not all) cases a cyclical pattern⁷, that is reflected in the overall European average, reaching its peaks in the seventies and the nineties. As about the *new left* parties, we can still consider this group of political forces as a significant one only if we take the broadest definition of such a party family, including not only the libertarian radicals and socialists already active during the cold war, but also the heirs of the former communist parties (both from the western and the old central-eastern side of

⁵ More exactly, Gallagher et al. consider, in this family, the Danish SF (which has been coded by the Eurelite country experts under the socialist family), some Icelandic, Swiss and Irish parties (not analysed here because their countries are not included at the moment in our archive), the Dutch *green-left party* and the Norwegian Left socialists.

⁶ The green parties were recently able to get 9,4% in Austria. 8% in Finland, 5,6 in Belgium (summing the performances of the two ecologist parties), between 5 and 7% in Netherlands (where two elections have been held in 2002 and 2003) and 4,5% in France. Among the "weak" parties we have to mention the Irish greens (3,8%) the Danish greens (2,4%) and the Italian greens (2,2% of votes reached in 2001 with a list including also a small *social-democratic party*).

⁷ The Scottish National Party is probably the best example of this cyclical success: from 0,5% in 1966 (that means 5% of Scottish votes) it raised to 2,95% in 1974 (30,4% in Scotland), then slipped back to 1,1% in 1983 (11,8% in Scotland), and raised again to 2% in 1997 (21,9% in Scotland).

Europe) transformed in left-socialist forces not aligned with the *party of the European Socialists*. For the reason we will explain later, we will consider some *post-communist* parties under this label in this paper.

With these clarifications, we can confirm that new politics issues started having a relative parliamentary representation during the seventies, and made some significant developments in the following 25 years. That is to say, New left representation is, to a large extent, the effect of the students and workers mobilizations. It was developed in the age of the oil shocks and after the first echoes of the “planetary” contaminations. Thus, the political impact to be connected to these new (and small) parliamentary forces has to be measured mainly in terms of the degrees of innovation they were able to produce *vis à vis* the organizational and political continuity of the elites from other formations, particularly, the traditional families of the Communists, the Socialists and the Liberals.

The second reason marking the peculiarity of these party families is their attitude to represent “minority vocations”. Since the very beginning of their institutional history, all the parties included in these families were conceived as the creation of (small) sectors of political and/or intellectual elites who wanted to stress a specific set of demands (from civil rights, to environment protection, to the recognition of a minority language group) without a real or realistic capability to penetrate the largest part of the public opinion. These demands, in fact, have been usually considered “incompatible” or at least “isolated” from the traditional cleavage structure developed during the XX century and still perceived as the most important “predictor” of the party alignments. In other words, the historical transformations and the recent crises both of “middle class” and “worker class” parties could not change a rather frequent view: that is to say, *new politics parties* keep being perceived “different” from the traditional ones, but they are still less appealing than these latter.

3. How to deal with data on new parties: the small N problem and the significance of “challengers” MPs

Scholars involved in electoral analyses can avoid to impose severe cut off points, in order to select the parties to be analyzed, when they seem to be anyway relevant in the evolution of a given party system (Sartori 1976), and, actually, the small size of some parties can sometimes be the crucial variable in the selection of specific case studies (Mueller Rommel and Pridham 1991). Even those who want to study governmental behaviors are often attracted by the role

of *small pivotal* parties. On the other hand, when we have to study legislative elites, the minute dimension of some parliamentary groups can produce a number of problems in terms of data reliability and comparability.

As one can see, the dilemma we face in this paper is as much intellectually stimulating as empirically frustrating. In order to propose a realistic research design, we have decided to state a first cognitive problem which constitutes the puzzle of this paper: does the belonging to an ideological or spiritual party family of the “new politics”, give rise to the same strong distinctiveness that we have noted in most of the European experiences of the XX century (Best and Cotta 2000, conclusion, Borchert 2003)? This general problem entails an immediate question about the existence of a real divide between the old party elites’ configuration and the “new world”. In terms of political homogeneity, the question is particularly important if we look at the family of the *new left*. What is new left politics? How many parties and which ones can be definitively considered in this category? As reminded above, these questions still need to be answered by the experts of party politics, who deeply disagree on the existence of an autonomous “spiritual family” like that.

In the context of a comparative analysis of one dimension (the party by party dimension) of long term variation of XX century’s parliamentary elite, a very important task would be to provide a comprehensive account about the impact of the *new politics* on the parliamentary elite configuration over the last 25 years. Operatively, it means that we should try to achieve the following goals:

1. We should produce a systematic overview about the presence of ethnoregionalist, new left and green parliamentary elites in Europe over the last historical period. This would already be an original contribution, since most of the researches on new party families have preferred other levels of analysis, namely party organization, relationships with social groups, or the question of the “reliability of new parties in coalition governance and electoral strategies” (Mueller Rommel 2002). Moreover, studies on European ethnoregionalism have often focused, starting from the seventies, on the risks of violent conflicts among groups and the best ways to avoid them, or, more recently, on the growing powers regions are acquiring in many European countries. Specific studies on ethnoregionalist parliamentary representatives are, as a matter of fact, lacking at all.

2. We should individuate, within and outside the group of countries included in our dataset, some hints revealing the impact of these new groups of representatives in the recent transformation of parliamentary elites.
3. We should then extract the most relevant cases in point, to be discussed in depth. Namely, those examples of “new politics” parliamentary representation which would indicate a possible turning point or even an evidence of the discontinuity between the old and the new politics at the level of parliamentary elites.

In order to reach these goals, we will consider the period 1975-2003 which, following a party lifespan approach (Pedersen 1982), can be viewed on the whole as the *adolescence* of a number of our parties. Here the diachronic approach, dominating our research project, is therefore substituted by a synchronic one. At the same time, the descriptive-quantitative analysis is only useful to extract relevant cases to be discussed in a more interpretative perspective by means of a qualitative in depth analysis. Considering such an investigative framework, we propose to avoid, at this stage, sophisticate statistical and logical tools. Instead of this, we will try to understand what the data say, using the simplest descriptive indicator we have: the average values of the variables included in the DATACUBE. More exactly, we will try to individuate what are the series of average values, marking the most remarkable distances/similarities between the party families covered here and the general trends.

A final remark to be raised here concerns the different meanings we can attribute (and in fact we do attribute) to the impact of the different party families at the level of parliamentary elite transformation. As we will explain better in the conclusive section, in this approach, we can only consider a group of parties belonging to the same ideological stream as a “real family” when we are able to verify clear-cut features in the socio-political profile of a given elite, *vis à vis* the profile of other “competitor” parties. On the contrary, when the lines of distinction appeared at the initial moment of the parliamentary representation of a given party, and when they are not followed by a coherent cross-country consolidation of this peculiarity, we cannot speak of a real family of parliamentary representatives, and we will be forced to discuss eventual interesting data at the disaggregated “national party level”.

4. Working hypotheses and data exploration

Because of what we have illustrated above, this paper will not provide explanations of evident patterns of party elite transformations within the European parliaments. Conversely, we will try to provide *food for thoughts*, concerning the evolution of *new left*, *green* and *ethnoregionalist* parliamentary elites at the turn of the XXI century. The basic rationale for the paper can therefore be simplified in a single, ambitious but still undeveloped, question: do the new (minoritarian) elites linked to “alternative” party families and who appeared at the heart of European political scenario only after 1975, present significant signs of change vis a vis the traditional elites?

To answer this question we have at first to come back on the definition of party family itself: can we really speak about three autonomous families of parliamentary representation, looking at the empirical data? After having possibly measured some degree of distinctiveness in the profile of these elite groups, can we look for one (or more) pattern of parliamentary recruitment in order to interpret these signs of change?

The small dimension of the elite groups representing these new political actors and the short time span suggest avoiding, at the moment, any ambitious explanatory theories. Better to think in terms of “working hypotheses” which could be used to plan a wide set of empirical explorations. In this perspective, the main issue related to the transformation of the new “families” of parliamentary elites is the degree of dissimilarity towards the consolidated patterns of traditional parliamentary parties. Here, we should discover, at first, if the characters of the slices of parliamentary elite included in these two classes can be presented as the profile of an “outstanding minority”, due to the partial process of de-freezing of European party systems, or the possible alternative pattern of elite transformation, potentially pursued by other “post-materialist” parties, from the liberal galaxy to the new socialist one.

Starting from a “Rokkanian assumption” implying the consolidation of the whole party system and a long term continuity of the interests represented, we can develop here a first working hypothesis which sounds as follows:

Proposal 1: party system changes occurred after the seventies are basically the consequence of a challenge to the “old system of elite convergence” and, to a large extent, it marks the end of the standardisation which had characterised the pre-existing party elites.

In other words, in the old politics, party elites used to conflict among themselves over policy preferences and cultural values, but they were linked to rather similar processes of recruitment

and political career (Pedersen 1976; Cotta 1979). Conversely, “new politics“ elites are the fruit of a new demand of “diversity” and they therefore express such a diversity through their own processes of recruitment and circulation.

Let’s make it clear that this general argument about the *attempt* to reach a new “equilibrium” in the representative elite configuration does not imply the hypothesis of real “big changes” in the elite configuration. A rather frequent argument in the scientific debate about class voting persistence and weaknesses of “single issue orientations” stresses the point of a “too limited” appeal of green (and libertarian) political discourse (Dobson 2001). According to this view, the more the elites from the new parties would try to embody specific and innovative characters (low degree of political professionalism, orientation to represent new and/or disregarded social groups) the less they would find a large “consensus” from the traditional blocs of voters. Interestingly enough, some analyses of the Western European political elites in the age of the crisis of the party rule (Beyme 1993, Mastropaolo 1993) also stress the possible “convergence” both of right and left (protest or anti-establishment) parties towards a figure of “non-political-politician”. Following this line of reasoning, we can argue that

Proposal 1a: the consolidation of green, new left, and ethnoregionalist parties has brought remarkable signs of change within parliamentary elites. But these signs are essentially “negative” (the new elite tries to remain different from the old one). At the end of the day, the distinguishing elements in these elites are some striking but isolated features (rapid circulation and mortality, links with ONGs and associations, strong female representation, high and social sciences education) with no real establishment of a common “strong pattern” of political recruitment and socialisation.

On the contrary, one can follow the argument of the “libertarian” attitude of most of the green and new left movements (Kitschelt 1988), and some of the ethnoregionalist ones, emphasizing the “alternative“ message without taking into account the rise of a possible alternative ruling class. With this reasoning, we would probably reach the conclusion that...

Proposal 2: the emergence of “new politics” party families has to be conceived on the whole as a challenge to the classical “rationalism” of the organisation of political recruitment and political elites, that characterised all the “mass party” experiences. Therefore, the empirical findings we have to search for are indicators of “chaos” more than indicators of a specific elite configuration, To find out these kinds of evidence would mean, in other words, to confirm that new politics parties (or some of them) do not have any interest in consolidating specific models of political representation.

In this vision, the main argument is that green, new leftist, and ethnoregionalist elites do not represent a real challenge (although they bring evident signs of a chaotic change) simply

because they aim at challenging the relationship between elites and public, rather than modifying the “genetic structure” of the elites themselves.

Of course, we will have to contemplate the possibility that the three supposed party families could have different impacts and, therefore, the test of the two working hypotheses could bring different results speaking of green, new left, and ethnoregionalist MPs. We do not have to forget that, while the first family has already gained access to the core institutions in many European democracies⁸, the second and especially the third one are composed by very assorted forces, many of which are still at the borders of the European political systems. Therefore, we can conceive that the *lifespan* of the parties included in these families could be rather differently structured in comparison with the green parties.

On the bases of the above arguments, we will present, in the following pages, the descriptive data about the profiles of the three party families’ MPs in some European parliaments between 1975 and 2003⁹. The three series of data will be analyzed separately and compared with the average figures for the all MPs in the same parliaments, during the same time span. We will start with the green family, to continue with the other two party families in the next paragraphs.

Exploration 1: the profile of green representatives (1980-2003).

The Cube data set currently available includes twenty-two cases coded under the category of *greens*, coming from five countries: Germany, Austria, Finland Italy and France. The size of these groups of elected representatives is never larger than 55 Mps (the current size of the German *Gruenen Fraktion*). In terms of seat percentages, the size of the green group is normally smaller than 10%, reaching the peak of 14% in the current Finnish *Eduskunta*. In addition to these data, we can also analyse some figures referring to the members of the European parliament (MEPs) belonging to the green group between 1989 and 1999.

Social and political profiles of green MPs are significantly deviant in comparison with other groups of parliamentarians. Generally speaking, the confrontation with the whole body of representatives (considering the sole countries where Green MPs are) gives good reasons to those who define the environmentalist parliamentarians – in a somehow derogatory sense – *middle class radicals*. They are in fact well educated and clearly attached to particular social

⁸ Particularly relevant, under this point of view, is the access to the national government, which occurred in Belgium, Finland, Germany, France and Italy (Muller-Rommel 2002, 6 ff.).

⁹ We have used for the following analysis the most recent version of the DATACUBE archive (May 2004) and an archive, currently in progress, about the MEPs elected between 1979 and 1999.

or intellectual elite groups. Their typical feature, that of representing the public sector more than the private occupational groups (Dalton 1996) is confirmed by our data: in Germany, Italy and France the percentage of green representatives with such an occupational origin is greater than 50%. But even in Finland and in Austria this figure is higher than in the whole parliament. Nonetheless, this *public sector* orientation looks quite different from what we have observed in several European mass parties during the second half of the XX century: in fact, the components of the public sector background of many green MPs are professions like academics (very often with a *hard science* background), teachers and top-administrative officers, while diplomats, judges and military officers are absent.

Coming to the degree of pre-electoral political socialization, the picture is not very different from what we have seen looking at the “classic” XX century “class parties”. But we can argue that two peculiar factors are impacting on this relatively high level of political professionalisation: first of all, we are dealing with small parties scattered over the whole national territory and organized on a national basis. Therefore, it’s extremely probable that the competition for the parliamentary recruitment in this party could be virtually non-existing, being the few positions potentially available in parliament “reserved” for the national party leadership. The impression we have, especially if we focus on the biggest green group in Europe (the German *Grüne*) is that this national party leadership is very limited, and in the list of candidates pushed towards the parliamentary seats, many “non professionalized politicians” could find a place¹⁰.

A second peculiarity in the political socialization of this group of representatives resides in its “discontinuity”. Differently from the career path of many parliamentarians elected for the traditional mass parties (especially socialists and communists), the representatives from the Green groups show a significant degree of “mobility”: in fact they are very often recruited directly from the galaxy of social movements, and sometimes they have been experienced in other political formations. Unfortunately, we do not have coherent comparative data on this point, but a quick look at the profiles of Green parliamentarians belonging to the new born *European Greens* party confirm the impression that, generally speaking, the environmental career pattern could be rather different from other left parties (Dalton 1996, chapter 5)¹¹.

¹⁰ Three figures deriving from the data set on German greens support this. In fact, the average percentage of local elective backgrounds (27,3), party background (36,1) and full time paid politicians (13,9) is significantly smaller than the aggregate data recorded for the other party families.

¹¹ Examples of such type of career come from some Italian party leaders (Scalia, Mattioli, Francescato).

Some DATACUBE variables help us to define where exactly green politicians are different. Some studies produced in the past were stressing some particular intellectual and technical competencies of this elite group, due to the relevant role played by the *environmental associationism* on the recruitment of green politicians and, above all, on the circulation towards a pattern of political career (Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990). Data about green MPs individuate at least three interesting elements marking the peculiar profile of this party family: the predominance of scientific/environmental expertise, the orientation towards equal social/gender representation, and the relative weight of seniority in structuring the political careers.

The first character can easily be confirmed at the parliamentary level, if one looks at figures 1 and 2. In a few words, environmentalist representatives tend to be, in average, more erudite than their colleagues. Even in a highly *non professionalized* legislature like the EP, where many seats are left to personalities coming from the scientific community and the *civil society*, the greens maintain a small advantage in this particular ranking. According to our expectations, the greater extent of the academic background is to be totally ascribed to specific scientific competencies (figure 2): in fact, environmentalist parties bring in parliament a consistent degree of expertise in the technical and natural science fields.

FIGURE 1 AND FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

The second point to be stressed concerns the orientation of this new party family to overcome the traditional gender inequality in political representation. Data about female representation in the European parliaments are unquestionable (figure 3): in all the assemblies, the presence of female green MPs is much higher, in some cases twice, than the overall figures. The phenomenon is even more striking in diachronic perspective. The most recently elected parliaments are, in fact, characterized by the stabilization of female representation rates, while the growth of females among greens parliamentarians is still increasing in Germany (52,2% in 2002), Italy (37,5% in 2001), Finland (78,6% in 2003).

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

The third point we were mentioning above, the decline of seniority, draws our attention immediately to a question debated since the beginning of the green parliamentary experience, when a systematic rotation of representatives was put into practice by the German *fundamentalists*, and the “refusal” of the notion of political career used to be a typical catchword of the protest movements.

If we look at our data about MPs circulation, we can see that the green parties during the nineties have brought their parliamentary turnover to a more “usual” measure. It’s true that in average (figure 4) their rate of turnover is still higher than in other parties, but the differences are less remarkable and in any case increasingly lower¹². We can therefore assume that the transition to a “small but established” governmental party (Mueller Rommel 2002) implied, among other things, the consolidation of a parliamentary long standing elite. This does not mean that the green parties could not still be characterized today by a rather different concept of parliamentary recruitment. In fact, the mean age of newcomer MPs is still significantly lower than in other groups: the green representatives at their first election are at least 2 years younger than their colleagues, as all the country cases (let’s keep in mind that the figure about the French greens is not statistically significant, including only 9 MPs) as well as the EP data shown in figure 5.

FIGURE 4 AND FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

But the most evident example of difference between the profile of green MPs after 1975 and the overall distribution concerns the occupational backgrounds, namely the specific category “teachers and professors” and the aggregate category “public sector background”. The first is one of the most frequent feature in the whole population, whose range is oscillating between 10% and 25%. However, in the green MPs the rate is at least 10% higher in each national group, and the increase is also visible in the European Parliament where the overall figure is 23% and the green rate is 33%. As concerning the public sector background, the distances are much less evident, but the inclination of green parties to increase the representation of civil servants is tested in all the cases analyzed here (Figure 6 and 7).

FIGURE 6 AND FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE

Exploration 2: the profile of new left representatives. Let’s move to the *New Left* party family now. The existent data we can keep under control, using the DATACUBE file and some data on MEPs, cannot help us so much: in general, only 39 cases of our cube dataset have been coded as “new left” groupings of elected MPs. These groups come from 5 countries (Denmark, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and Norway) and, notwithstanding they are historically placed after the end of the WWII, their historical and ideological context seems to be rather different from a case to another: in Norway and the Netherlands we have traditional

¹² The percentage of newcomers among the Bundestag German greens, for example, declines from the 70% of the eighties to 23,4% in 1998 and 43,6% in 2002 (notwithstanding in this year there is an increase of seats from 47 to 55).

alternative left parties crossing the whole period after the war¹³. In Italy the new left appears with the crisis of the seventies (which also determined an increase on the new left representation in the two countries mentioned above) originating different parties, respectively characterised by a “liberal radical” and by “Marxist libertarian” origin. In Germany we have coded as “New left” the former communist party from DDR, after its re-adaptation in the competitive system. In Italy again, at the end of the XX century, we find *Rifondazione Comunista*, a new openly communist formation which was born from the fusion of the former “Stalinist” faction of Pci with some extreme groups of the new left. Finally, the Danish Faelles Kurs (*Ordinary way*), a recent radical-populist movement, which has been able to maintain a handful of seats since its first appearance (in 1987), but changing its ideological and strategic orientation in the party spectrum.

According to what has been said before, we have added to these figures the representation of the *post-communist + other left* groups in the European Parliament, after the fall of international communism: following the 1994 elections, the *European Unity Left* included MEPs from five EU countries: the Danish SF (*Left Socialists*), the French PCF, the Spanish *Izquierda Unida*, the Italian *Rifondazione Comunista*, the Portuguese PCP. This new formation could therefore be considered still a “traditional” communist elite”, being formed for the most part by representatives of the three communist parties (the French one, the Portuguese and the Greek) which had refused in 1989 to follow the Italian PDS in its slow approach to the socialist supranational party. Nonetheless, under the label of *Unity left*, the three *irreducible* communist parties could cohabit with a less “orthodox” communist party (the Spanish one) and, in with the 1995 accession, with the red-green representatives from the Finnish *left alliance* and the Swedish *Vansterpartiet*¹⁴. The process of transformation of this group, from a pure communist nature is even more evident after the 1999 elections: now, the EUL-NGL group is formed by MEPs coming from 10 EU member states, which are planning to open the road to a more formalized *European federation* where Marxist, libertarian and left-

¹³ The Socialist Left party in Norway (SV) was the heir of the left radicalism already present in the post-war period, but it has been consolidated particularly in 1973, when it led the anti-ECC protest. A similar origin, which is very much based on intellectuals contributions and links with young movements, has the pacifist-socialist (PSP) party in the Netherlands, active since the sixties. The other Dutch party considered in this family is the Radical-left party (PPR), founded in the seventies.

¹⁴ In fact, the adhesion of these parties was followed by the decision (1996) to change the name of the EP group from the simple *European Unity Left* to *European Unity Left- Nordic Green Left*.

environmentalist values could live together¹⁵. In addition to the parties already mentioned, the Dutch Left socialists, and some representatives of minor alternative left parties from Greek and France (particularly, *Lutte Ouvrière* and the *troskists*) are also part of this group, and reached a noticeable performance at the 1999 European elections.

Speaking from a parliamentary point of view, this family thus represents a noticeable area in Europe, but it's easy to note that *statistically speaking*, the average number of individual MPs falling in each cube entries is very small, obviously determining a problem of data unreliability. Using the same technique adopted for the other family analysed above, we can still build a synchronic analysis based on the parliamentary mandates covered during the interval 1975-2003. For what concerns the European Parliament, we will take into consideration only the fully *post communist* group of the last two legislatures (1994 and 1999).

Looking at the general distribution of the average values, the first impression is that in this family of national party delegations are much less correlated to each other, being more interrelated to country-specific determinants. Variability among countries (or better, among different party organisations) is always noticeable. However, we can identify some variables where a general trend is visible, putting into evidence a possible *common feature* of the representatives elected by these parties.

For instance, differently from the greens, *new left* MPs present a generally lower level of university education, even if the difference with the overall population of MPs is not so remarkable (figure 1). The salience of law degree as a main field of education is lower than the overall population (and this is a feature shared with the greens), but in this case such a decrease is equally balanced between humanities and scientific backgrounds. Significantly enough, all the *new left* parliamentary groups considered in these data present a small salience of local elective backgrounds (figure 8), but, on the contrary, political professionalism is well rooted among their representatives, as figures 9 and 10, about party offices and percentage of party and trade union officials.

¹⁵ During the month of January 2004, in Berlin, a meeting of European left parties was held, putting the bases for a common platform before the 2004 elections. During a following meeting in Rome (8 May 2004) the appeal for a party of European Left (EL) indicated the need to make communist, libertarian and environmentalist values living together. A coordination body of the new party federation has been elected, whose president is the leader of the Italian neo-communist party, Fausto Bertinotti. The parties included in this group are the Italian *Rifondazione Comunista*, the French Pcf, the German Pds, *Izquierda Unida*, the Austrian Communist party, the Slovak communists, the *party of the Democratic socialism* (Czech Republic), *the Boehm Communist part*, the Greek *Synaspismos*, the *Left party* from Luxemburg and the *workers party* from Estonia.

FIGURE 8, FIGURE 9 AND FIGURE 10 ABOUT HERE

This last information seems to be particularly interesting when drawing a tentative portrait of new left representatives. They belong to very different party organisations, having a very different ideological legacy. But, differently from other liberal or environmental radicals, they seem strongly subordinated to such organisations, under the profile of the parliamentary recruitment. Party organisation and party career still seem to matter, in this case, determining the structure of opportunity for a parliamentary election: the low percentage of party offices in the German Pds delegation (figure 9) is probably to be explained by the fact that only offices from the new party (and not from the communist organisation in the previous regime) have been coded. Looking at the following figure, about the percentage of full paid politicians, we can see how MPs from the same PDS and from Rifondazione Comunista show their high degree of political professionalism. But, also the Norwegian Left socialists and the Dutch pacifists seem to therefore indicate an interesting process of “re-professionalisation” of these party elites, which should be conducted to the ideological legacy of traditional Marxist organisations.

As a consequence, parliamentary selection seems to be much more connected with a (relatively) long period of party socialisation: the mean age of newcomer indicator, actually, assumes very different values in comparison with the green family (figure 5). In some particular cases where the *new parliamentary elite is*, in fact, the transposition of some *old party elites* from the communist era (take the case of the German PDS) this evidence is obvious. But even the other parties represented in this family show a mean age of parliamentary selections which is very close to the average, and very similar to the figures of conservative or right wing parties. The same inference is corroborated when one looks at the percentage of newcomers (Figure 4): In all the groups analysed here, the difference with the overall rate of turnover is larger than 10%. In this case, however, we should be able to distinguish if such a phenomenon has to be connected with the volatility of a given parliamentary elite (it can be the case of a not really consolidated party like the Danish *Faelles Kurs*) or, on the contrary, the decisive factor is the external party organisation, which is in some cases really able to continuously modify its parliamentary representation. That is to say, a typical feature of the Marxist party model, which still seems to be present in organisations like the German PDS or the new Italian Communist party.

In general, social and occupational backgrounds of these groups of MPs are not very different from the traditional configuration of Socialist parliamentary fractions. The representation of the public sector is normally higher than the average but not so deviant, with the exception of the Dutch case (figure 7). On the other hand, new left party groups tend to stress some particular features of their modernity: for instance, they show considerable number of personalities recruited from the media and from the intellectual milieu, as well as a remarkable number of woman, even if this figure remains smaller than in the green subgroup¹⁶.

Exploration 3: the profile of ethnoregionalist representatives. As already stated above, ethnoregionalist parties do not have an easy access to national parliaments. Their political vocation is, by definition, “minoritarian” and local. Furthermore, electoral formulas and the geographical cutting of electoral constituencies can have a strong impact on the capacity of these parties to gain representation, and have been historically used to either allow or to hamper their access to legislative bodies.

For the present research, data from four countries are available (Finland, Italy, Spain and UK), to which we can add the European Parliament. In two cases, Finland and Italy, data refer to one single party, the *Svenska Folkpartiet* and the *Lega Nord* respectively, while in the other two countries and in the EP, data cover several parties. In the Spanish case in 2000 (the last electoral year covered) eight parties sent their representative(s) to Madrid. Among them, the two biggest parties (the Catalan *Convergència i Unió* with 15 MPs, and the Basque *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* with 7 MPs) represent two thirds of the whole ethnoregionalist representatives, the remaining six parties summing up to 11 MPs¹⁷. British figures cover the *Scottish National Party* and the Welsh *Plaid Cymru*, as well as Northern Ireland parties, both unionist and nationalist¹⁸. The numerical impact of these parties in their parliaments is rather limited in UK (2.5 to 4.3%) and Finland (from 6.5% of 1987 the *Svenska Folkpartiet* has decreased to 4.5% in current legislature), and more important in Spain (normally around 8%)

¹⁶ The only new left party showing a clear increase of female representation is the German PDS. The other groups are quite close to their national average values.

¹⁷ In 2004 elections (not covered here), these figures have changed significantly. *Convergència* has slipped to 10 seats, while the left wing *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* has become the second regionalist party of Spain raising from one to eight MPs, thus getting one seat more than the *Partido Nacionalista Vasco*.

¹⁸ In this case Northern Ireland parties are prevalent, with 14 seats out of 23 after 2001 elections. The Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru have 5 and 4 seats respectively. Within Northern Ireland parties, it must be reminded that Sinn Fein elected representatives do not actually take the seats they win, refusing to swear the oath of allegiance. Thus, after 2001 elections, unionists have 11 seats, while nationalists are only represented by the three Social Democratic and Labour Party MPs.

and Italy. In this last case it is worth recalling the exceptional weight of the *Lega Nord* in 1994-1996 legislature. Having obtained a very favourable distribution of candidates in pre-electoral negotiations within the centre-right coalition (Di Virgilio 1995), the *Lega Nord* was, at the beginning of that legislature, the most numerous parliamentary group (117 MPs, 18.6% of seats) with just 8.4% of votes. As far as the European Parliament is concerned, we will take into account members of the European Free Alliance, where many ethnoregionalist MEPs sit. We have argued in the initial pages of this paper that ethnoregionalist parties could represent a challenge to the establishment, at least in some cases, playing a role functionally similar to that of new politics parties, even though in possibly different directions. Our aim is now to see if this argument is valid, and to what extent, for parliamentary representatives of this party family. One of the distinctive features of both greens and new left parties, as we have seen, is a relatively high circulation of representatives. For ethnoregionalist parties this is true only in the case of the *Lega Nord* (65.5% of newcomers, 23% more than the national average in the same period), while values are closer to the average in Spain and UK, and slightly lower in Finland and in the EP (figure 4). The same pattern applies to the seniority of MPs, another distinctive character of green parties. Here we find again that *Lega Nord* newcomers are on average four years younger than their Italian colleagues, but in Spain, UK and especially Finland, this value is reversed: ethnoregionalist newcomers are generally older than the average. Even the other typical feature of new politics parties – the strong female representation – is not present within the ethnoregionalist family (figure 3): the *Lega Nord* is close to the national average (11.9% of women, the mean being 10.4%), while in the other three countries (and in the EP) figures are below it (up to 10% less in the Finnish case). How should we interpret these data? Shall we simply abandon our hypothesis that ethnoregionalist parties share some features with the other two party families included in this analysis? There are, in our opinion, two ways of better articulating the hypothesis in order to keep it congruent to data. The first one is to be careful in distinguishing the ethnoregionalist party family in general terms from the parliamentary representatives of these parties. As we have seen, parliamentary representation of this group of parties is heavily constrained by their small size and territorial concentration. This introduces some unavoidable biases: MPs profiles never perfectly reflect party elite profiles, but in our case the distortion is even more evident, since only some of the parties gain representation at national level. The second point, often underlined by observers of this party family (see for instance Urwin 1983; De Winter 1998),

is that it includes diverse subjects, sharing the common features of territorial concentration and representation of (what is claimed to be) a minority group, but interpreting this representation in substantially different directions. If we look at the parties included in our data, we find indeed a new populist party (the Lega Nord) together with a moderate liberal party with a one-hundred year history (the Svenska Folkpartiet, founded in 1906); eight parties in Spain, ranging from the post-materialist left oriented Bloque Nacionalista Galego and Partido Andalucista, to the Christian Democratic Partido Nacionalista Vasco; seven parties in UK, from moderate to extremist unionists and nationalists of Northern Ireland to the Scottish and the Welsh party.

In this view, the three previously shown figures look more readable. The profile of the Lega Nord is closer to that of other “challengers”, in spite of its opposite ideological orientation, in terms of elite circulation, seniority and even female representation. The other parties are older and more contiguous to the political establishment¹⁹, and this contributes to explaining the “traditional” profile of their MPs.

The anti political establishment character of ethnoregionalist parties emerges again from the occupational background of their representatives. Full time politicians (figure 10) are underrepresented in three countries, being the Spanish figure equivalent to the national average, while they are slightly over represented in the EP. The *Lega Nord* shows, again, the most outstanding figure with only 4% of full time politicians, about one fifth of the national average. The other side of the coin is given by a relatively strong presence of representatives chosen from civil society. Not among intellectuals, as it happens with journalists and writers in the green parties, but rather coming from the world of private enterprises. Managers and businessmen are over represented, particularly in the British and the Finnish cases (figure 11).

FIGURE 11 ABOUT HERE

Finally, the territorial aspect of representation obviously gains a particular relevance when considering this party family. Data about local and regional political background are to some extent surprising. One could expect a generalized pattern of political careers beginning in local elective bodies, before reaching the few seats ethnoregionalist parties can wish for at national level. This only seems to be the case in Spain, where the percentage of MPs with a

¹⁹ The *Svenska Folkpartiet* has participated in most of the governmental coalitions since 1945 and, as a unique case in the European scenario, it has led the Finnish executive for a short period in 1954. In the British and Spanish cases, as we have already noticed, moderate centre-right parties are predominant in terms of parliamentary seats.

local or regional political background is 10 points above the national average. In Finland the two values are equal, while in Italy and UK we find a reversed situation, ethnoregionalist representatives having less local/regional political experience than their national colleagues (figure 8). A possible interpretation of these data is that local and regional political experiences indicate different aspects from a cases to another: the importance of territoriality emerges in some case, while in others this variable seems to be a proxy for political seniority and party careers. A different view on links between parties and territory is the place of birth of MPs (figure 12). In this case the territorial vocation of the ethnoregionalist party family emerges clearly in all parliaments where they are present. 80 to 95% of ethnoregional MPs are elected in the same region where they were born, while the average value is about 70% in Italy and UK, and much lower in the other countries.

FIGURE 12 ABOUT HERE

5. Towards a tentative interpretation

To get a comprehensive interpretation, in the light of the working hypotheses illustrated above, we will probably have to wait for a few more years: the re-definition of a new and post-communist party family is currently taking place, while the definitive configuration of the green representatives will be only possible when the threshold of the *maturity age* will be overcome by these parties. As we see concerning the ethnoregionalist parties, where both the different parliamentary size and the diverse role played within the party systems seem to have a strong impact on the elite profile of the few examples included in this family. Nonetheless, we can at least provide a first comparative report based on the systemic distribution of some DATACUBE variables (main social and political backgrounds of MPs) during the period 1975-2003. Such an elaboration is useful to come back to the synchronic perspective we have addressed at the beginning of the paper, and to test the general hypothesis considering these three party elites as potential alternatives to “traditional” MPs. What is particularly interesting, in this perspective, is the deviation between the profile of the three groups of MPs here analysed and the overall profile of the European representatives.

In more details, we will now try to extract some evidences emerged from a basic comparison of means, in order to develop a first interpretative model contrasting the profiles of the three families. As supposed to using the data included in the charts of the previous section, we will use deviations of the weighted means (concerning some selected social and political

variables) of the three party families from the overall means in 12 European parliaments. Here we will not compare the measure of a given group of parties from the all MPs elected *in the same parliaments where these parties are competing*. On the contrary, we will produce a virtual comparison using the measures of the three party families studied here and the wide-ranging profile of European representatives, in order to have discern the capability of our three groups to “deviate” from the general picture (Figure 13).

FIGURE 13 ABOUT HERE

Let’s read these data carefully: green MPs are characterised by features which can be connected with “post-modern” demands: a (relative) high percentage of women among MPs, many non-legal-professionals, many teachers and intellectuals, but low percentages of “traditional” characters of modern parliamentary elite like “lawyers in politics”, full party and pressure groups officials and former blue collar workers. Conversely, new left groups mix some of these characters (women, professionals) with some “traditional” features (full time politicians, party background). Coherently with our expectations, green MPs are largely recruited within the public sector (in this respect they are very alike the socialists) while new left MPs are equally divided among “public sector occupations”, private occupations and purely political backgrounds, and the Ethnoregionalists show a clear predominance of *private sector* background (namely lawyers and businessmen).

Finally, the average age of access in Parliament of these groups of representatives is different: the greens show the younger age (at least three years less than the average of the socialists group), while New left and regionalist MPs do not deviate too much from the overall trend. This evidence can also be read as a trace of the different pattern of political socialisation of the typical “new politics” formations of the green (and perhaps some alternative left) camp.

Of course, the above arguments have to be considered *cum grano salis*. If specific characters like female representation and university background are confirmed in all the national sub-groups of greens, the same cannot be said about the indicators of political professionalisation. One can take the case of the comparison between the two most durable green parliamentary representation (Italians and German) to show it: if the first subgroup is characterised by a low degree of full time politicians, the latter present a significant percentage of professional politicians and a low percentage of lawyer (the strongest occupational background among Italian green MPs).

This is not surprising if one keeps in mind the original difference between fundamentalist and middle-class factions of the green movement (Mueller Rommel 1989; O’Neill 1997, 17). The small size of sub-groups among new left MPs does not allow the same control by country. But this is another good reason why it is important to carefully consider all kinds of generalisations at this level of analysis.

Our final exercises summarise the evidence that we have illustrated so far by way of some synthetic indexes. In figure 14 we compare the three party families on the basis of 1) the average presence of intellectuals among their parliamentary representatives, and 2) the average presence of full time politicians. The first index is given by the sum of journalists and writers and teachers and professors; the second one summarizes the percentages of full time politicians living off politics even before the parliamentary recruitment. As in figure 13, the values are expressed in deviations from the overall mean of European MPs, that is ideally located at the intersection of the origin of the axes. The diameter of the circle is proportional to the standard deviation internal to each party family, giving a rough idea of how heterogeneous they are.

FIGURE 14 ABOUT HERE

The figure suggests three deeply diverging profiles. As expected, green parties show a high percentage of intellectual MPs, combined with a low number of full time politicians. Ethnoregionalists share this last feature with the greens, but intellectual workers are in this case below the overall mean. The New Left family shows the strongest presence of full time politicians, and is located somewhere half way (but well above the mean) in terms of intellectual representatives.

In figure 15 we consider two more aspects. On one dimension we have the public or private sector background of parliamentary representatives, obtained by subtracting the percentage of managers and businessmen from that of public sector employees. On the other one we have an index of postmaterialism of MPs which is built combining information on female representation, newcomers and mean age of newcomers, following the assumption that a high number of women and a larger circulation of elites are typical features of new politics organizations.

FIGURE 15 ABOUT HERE

This time the difference emerges more clearly between ethnoregionalists and the other two party families. Green parties show the highest positive deviations from the overall mean on

both dimensions, confirming on one side their public sector profile, and on the other, their commitment to a balanced gender representation and their challenge to the “iron law of oligarchy”, that claims long career patterns and slow elite circulation. Also New Left parties show positive figures, both on post-materialist profile and prevalence of representatives with a public sector background, even though their score is lower than that of the greens on both dimensions. On the contrary, the profile of ethnoregionalists MPs is more oriented towards the world of private enterprises and lacks, on average, the characteristics of postmaterialist representation.

* * *

In this paper we have tried to develop some general hypotheses about the recent emergence and the following transformation/consolidation of parliamentary elites representing the most recent party families of the European scenario. The basic rationale of the paper resides in the idea to investigate about the effects of the “original features” of these parties on their parliamentary troops, and about the possible adaptation/acquiescence of these elites within the parliamentary context (this last hypothesis seems to apply particularly to the green family).

In the first section we have introduced two arguments: the first of them is summarised by the idea of a persistent challenge to the old parliamentary elite, the second one is reflected by the picture of a number of “disordered signs of change”. A change which cannot be ascribed to the emergence of alternative models of recruitment and elite circulation, since they can be better explained by a general decline/crisis of some traditional characters *across* different party families. At this stage, we cannot say very much about the “solidity” of the above arguments. Nonetheless, we can at least say that the first one has to be considered a promising explanatory proposal for further analyses: looking, particularly, at the green parliamentary elite, we can say *some kind of challenge has emerged* in this period. A challenge related with the peculiar social and political background of MPs, which have been probably modified during the years, with the passage from an anti-party to a more pragmatic profile (O’Neill 1997).

On the other hand, we can argue that there are some interesting disordered signs of change, particularly in the area of the new libertarian-left and in some groups of MPs representing ethno-regional parties. These groups are very different from each other, and somehow differ within themselves: the features showed by some cultural heritage (for instance the high degree

of political professionalization of MPs from post-communist parties) are balanced by other aspects typically rooted in new libertarian and left-populist parties.

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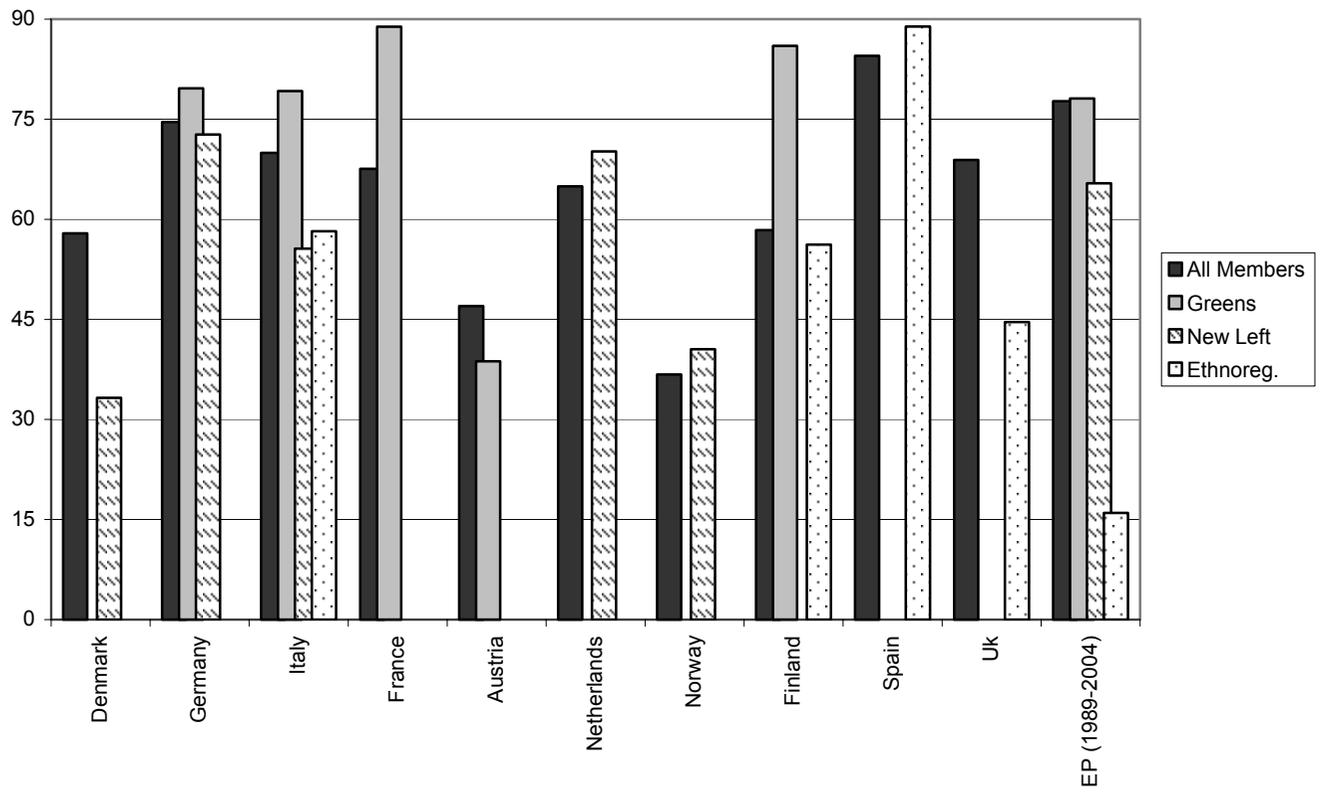


Figure 1. % of university education in some European Parliaments (average 1975-last elections). Values weighted by the size of each group

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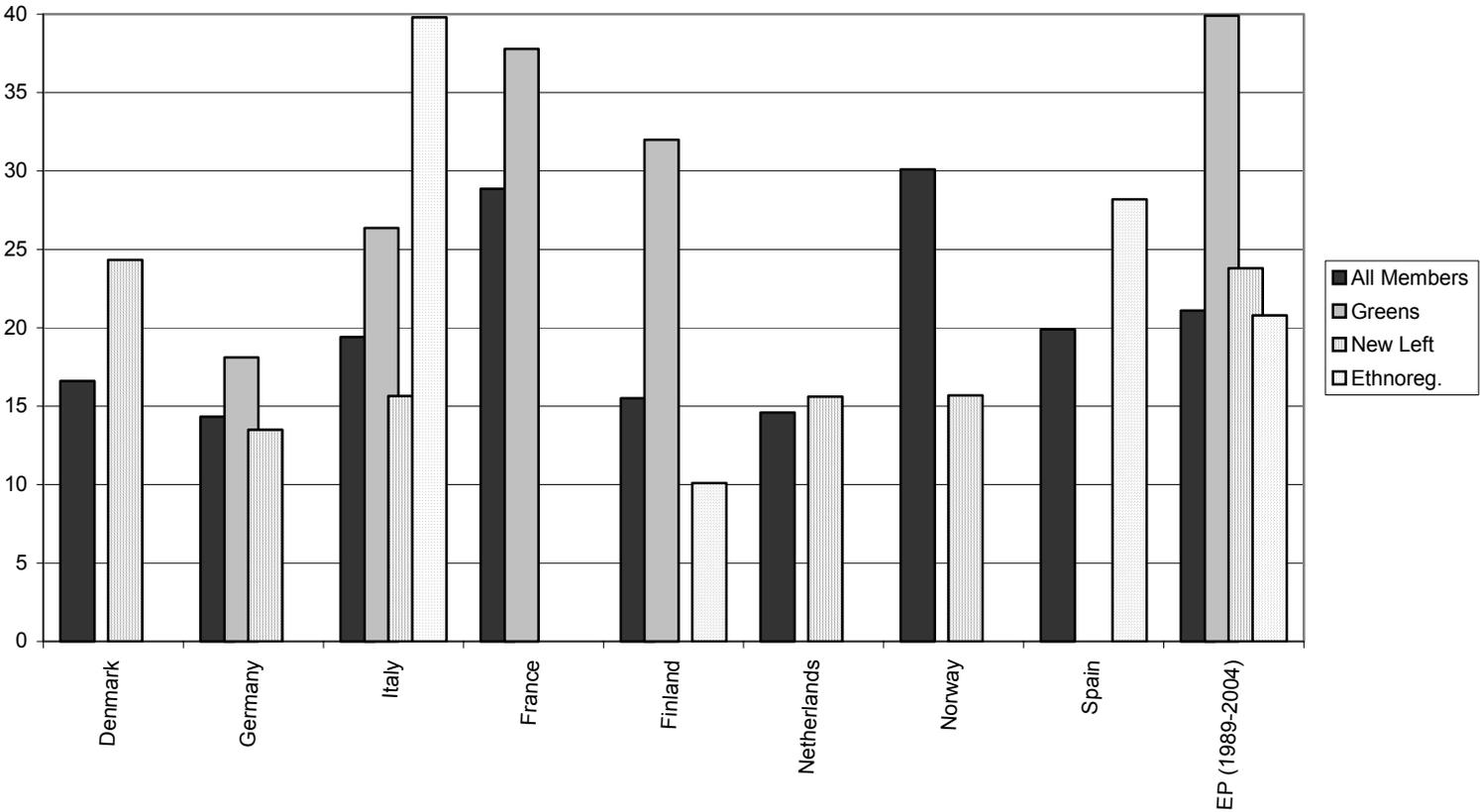


Figure 2. % of technical/scientific type of university degree among the European MPs (average 1975-last elections). Values weighted by the size of each group

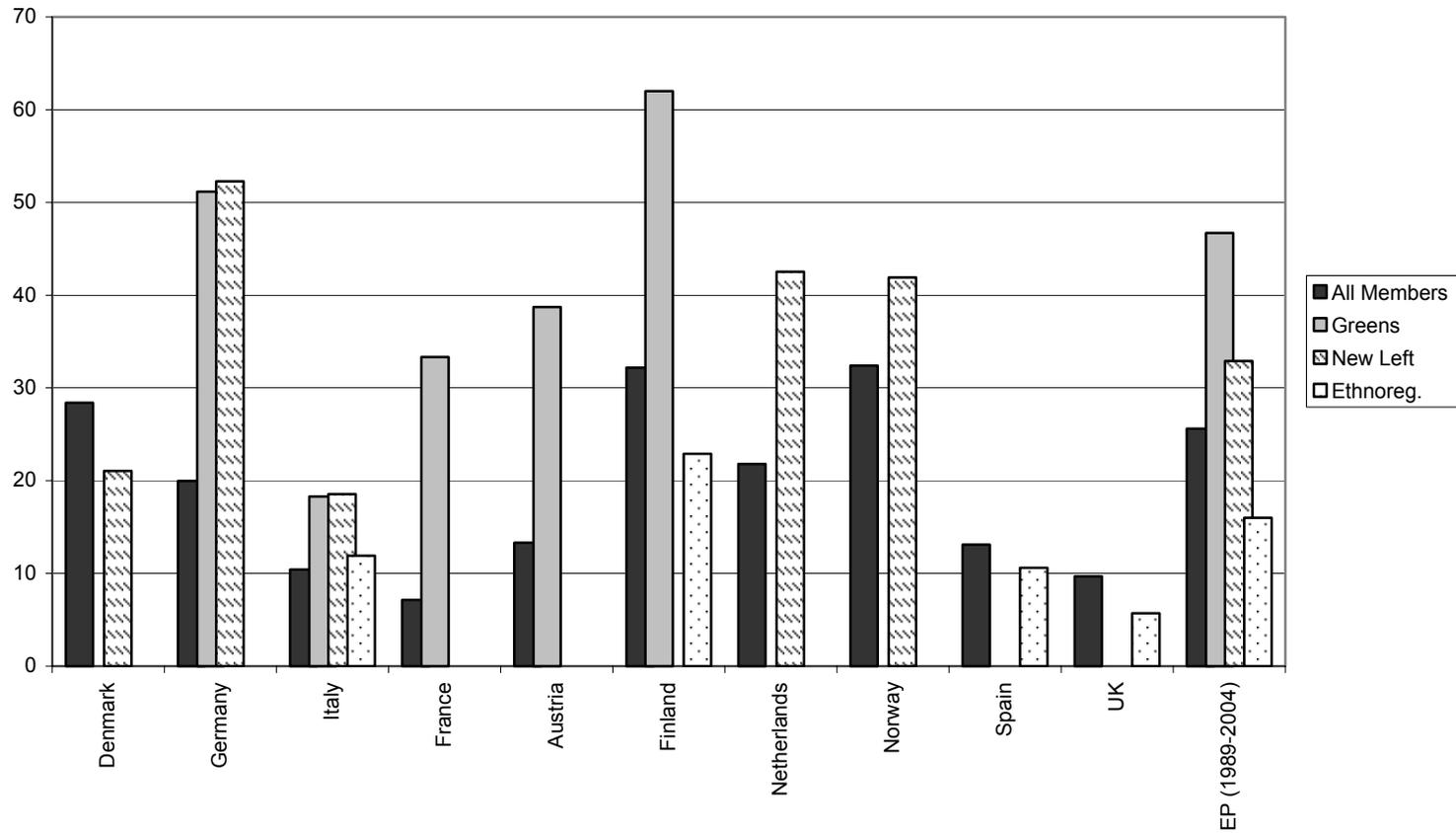


Figure 3. % of female MPs in some European parliaments (average 1975-last elections). Values weighted by the size of each group

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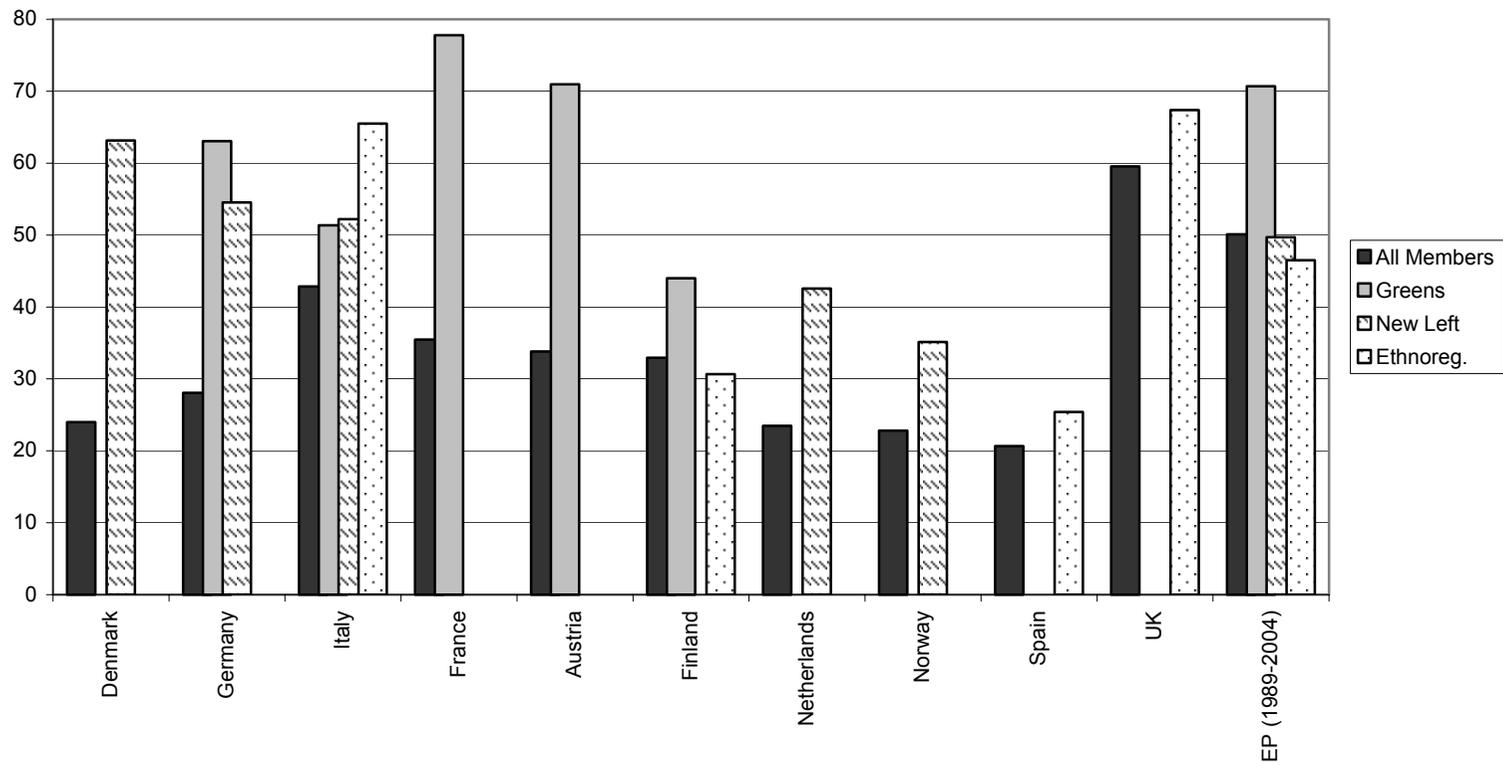


Figure 4. % of Newcomers in some European parliaments (average 1975-last elections). Values weighted by the size of each group

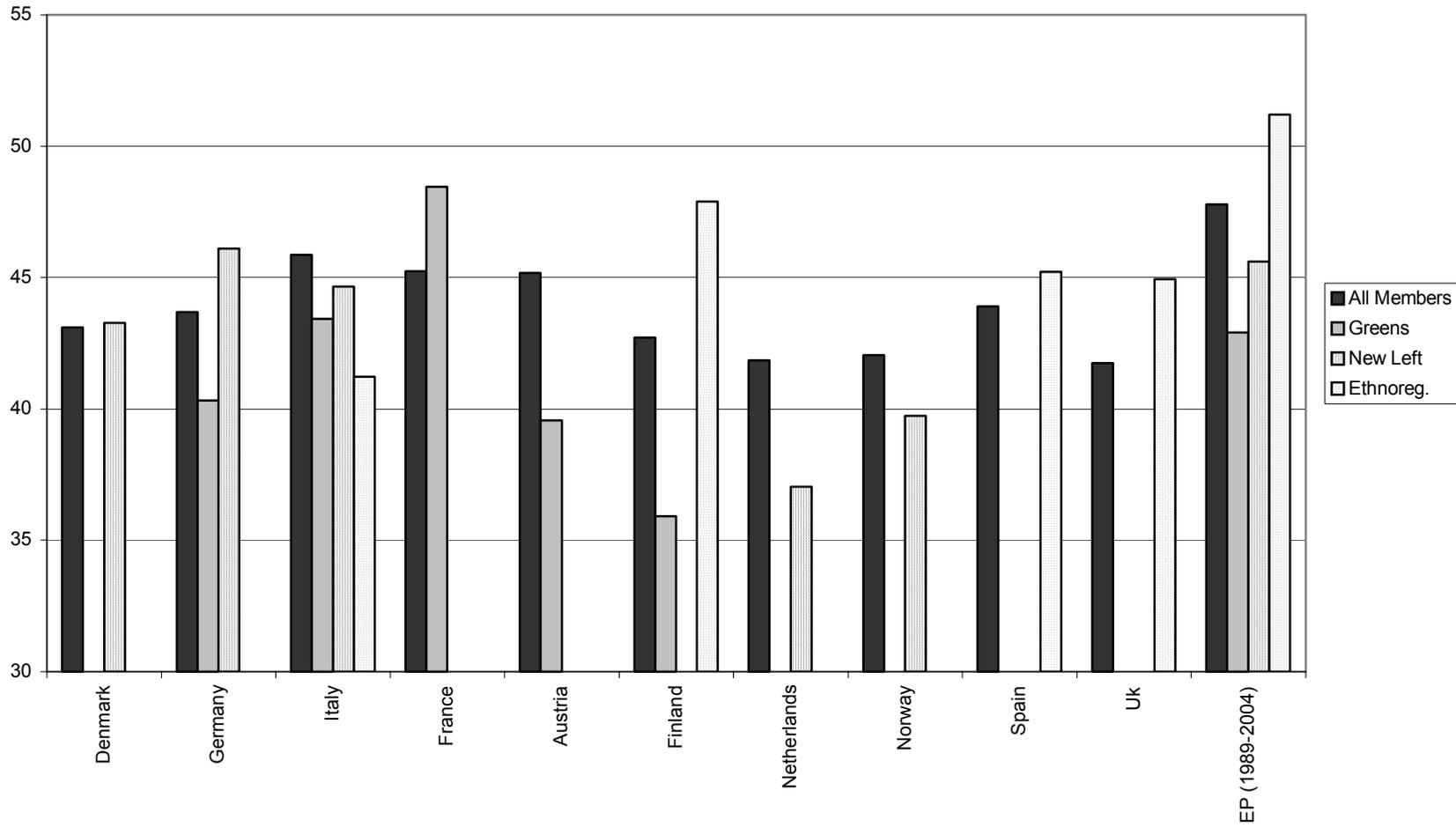


Figure 5. Mean age of Newcomers in some European parliaments (average 1975-last elections). Values weighted by the size of each group

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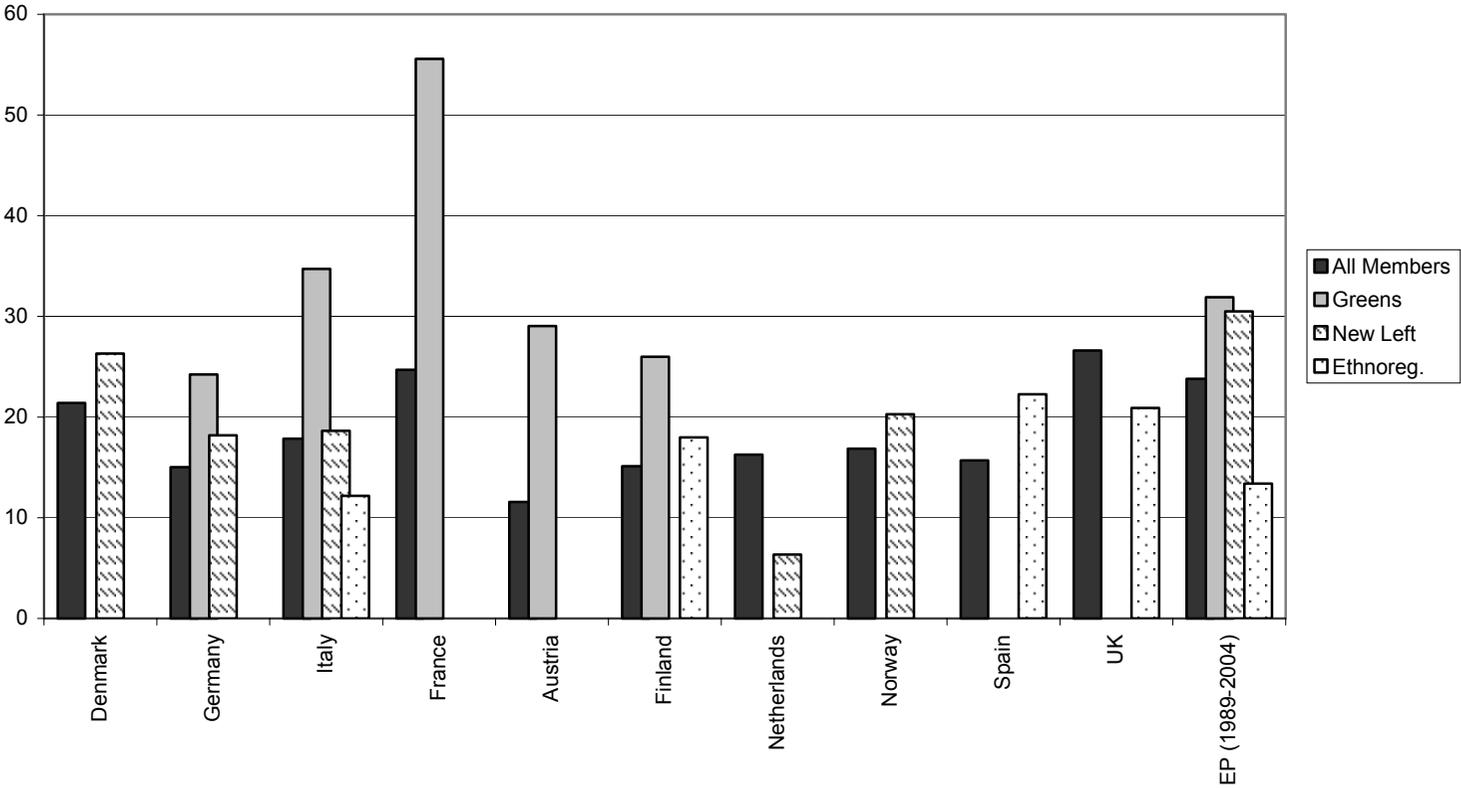


Figure 6. % of teachers in some European parliaments (average 1975-last elections). Values weighted by the size of each group

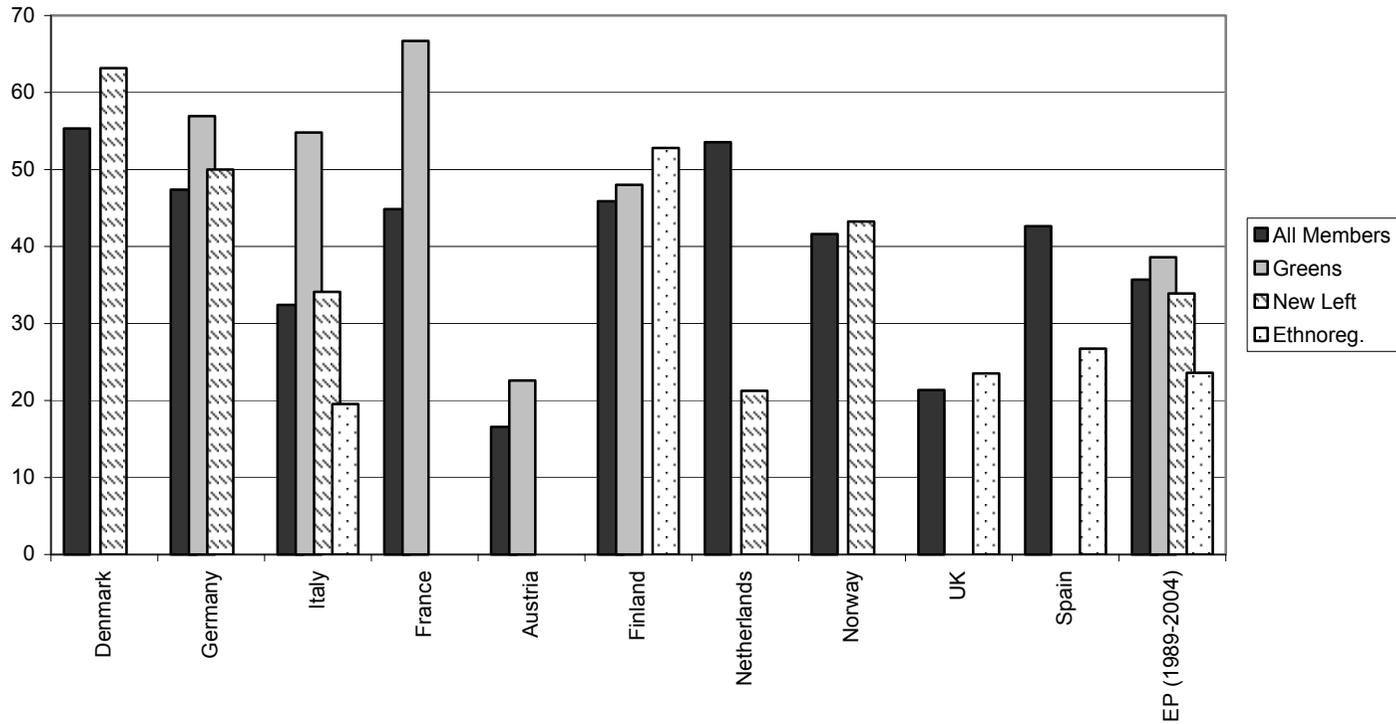


Figure 7. % of MPs with public sector occupational background in some European parliaments (average 1975-last elections). Values weighted by the size of each group

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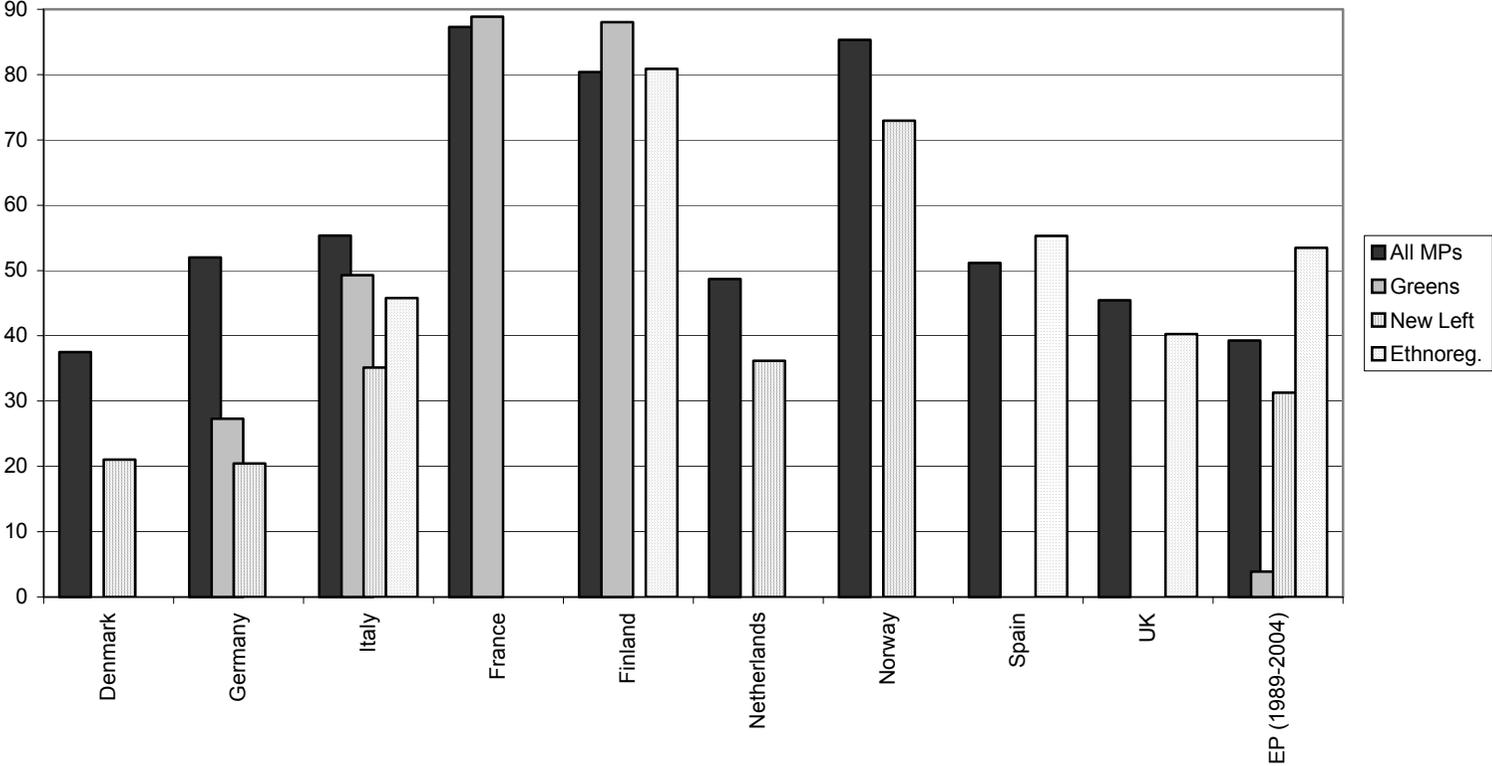


Figure 8. % of MPs with local elective background in some European parliaments (average 1975-last elections). Values weighted by the size of each group

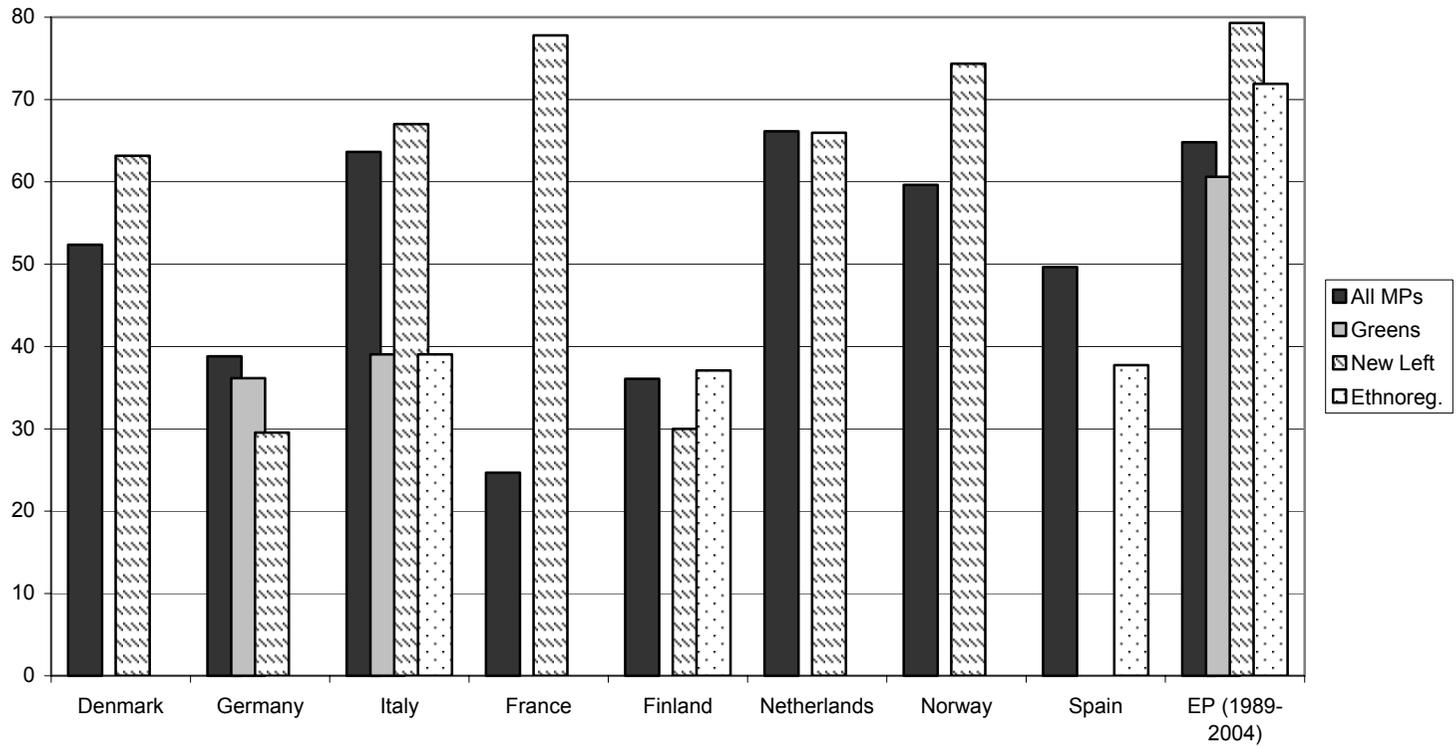


Figure 9. % of MPs with party office background in some European parliaments (average 1975-last elections). Values weighted by the size of each group

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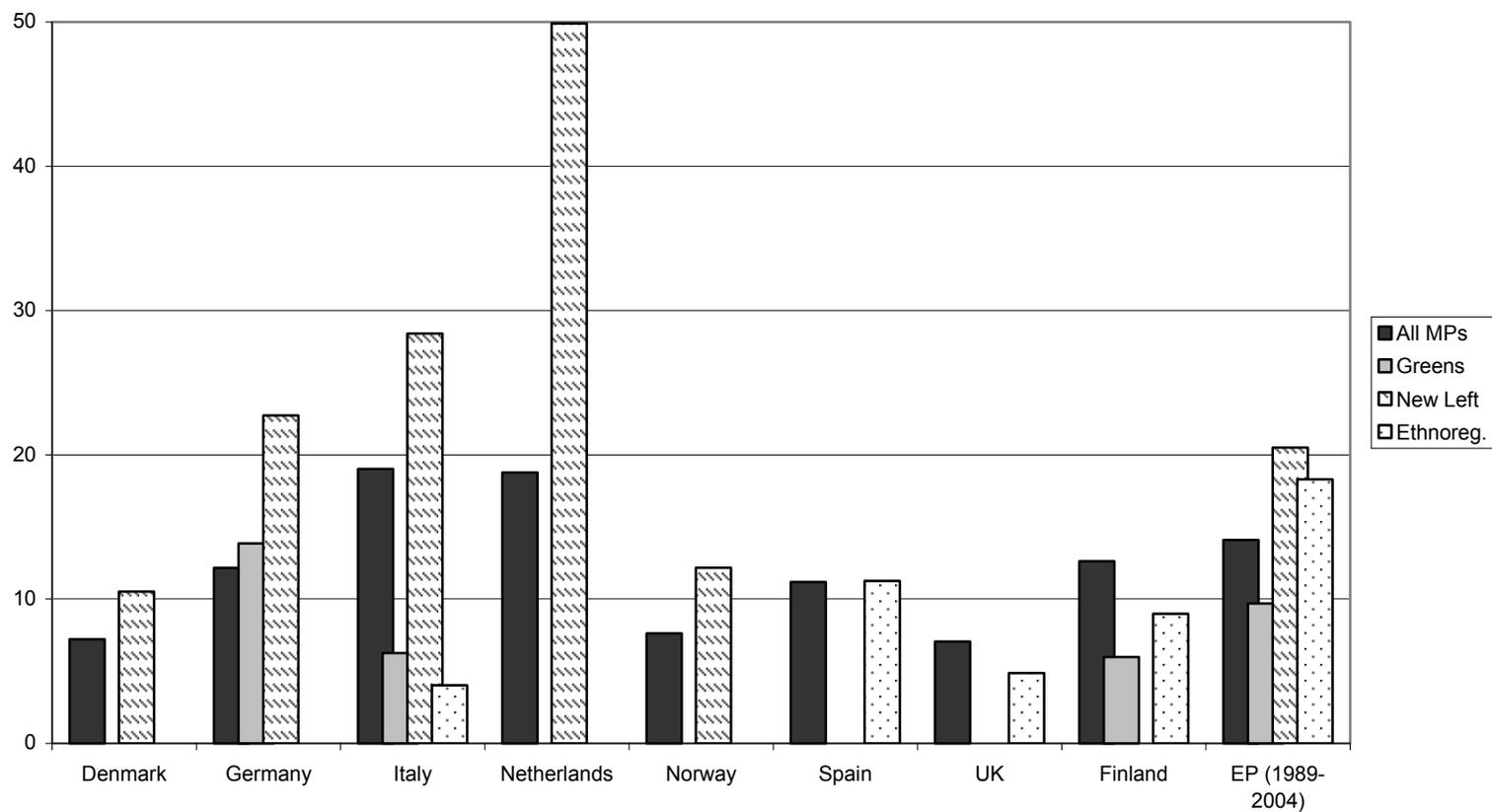


Figure 10. % of full time politician MPs in some European parliaments (average 1975-last elections). Values weighted by the size of each group

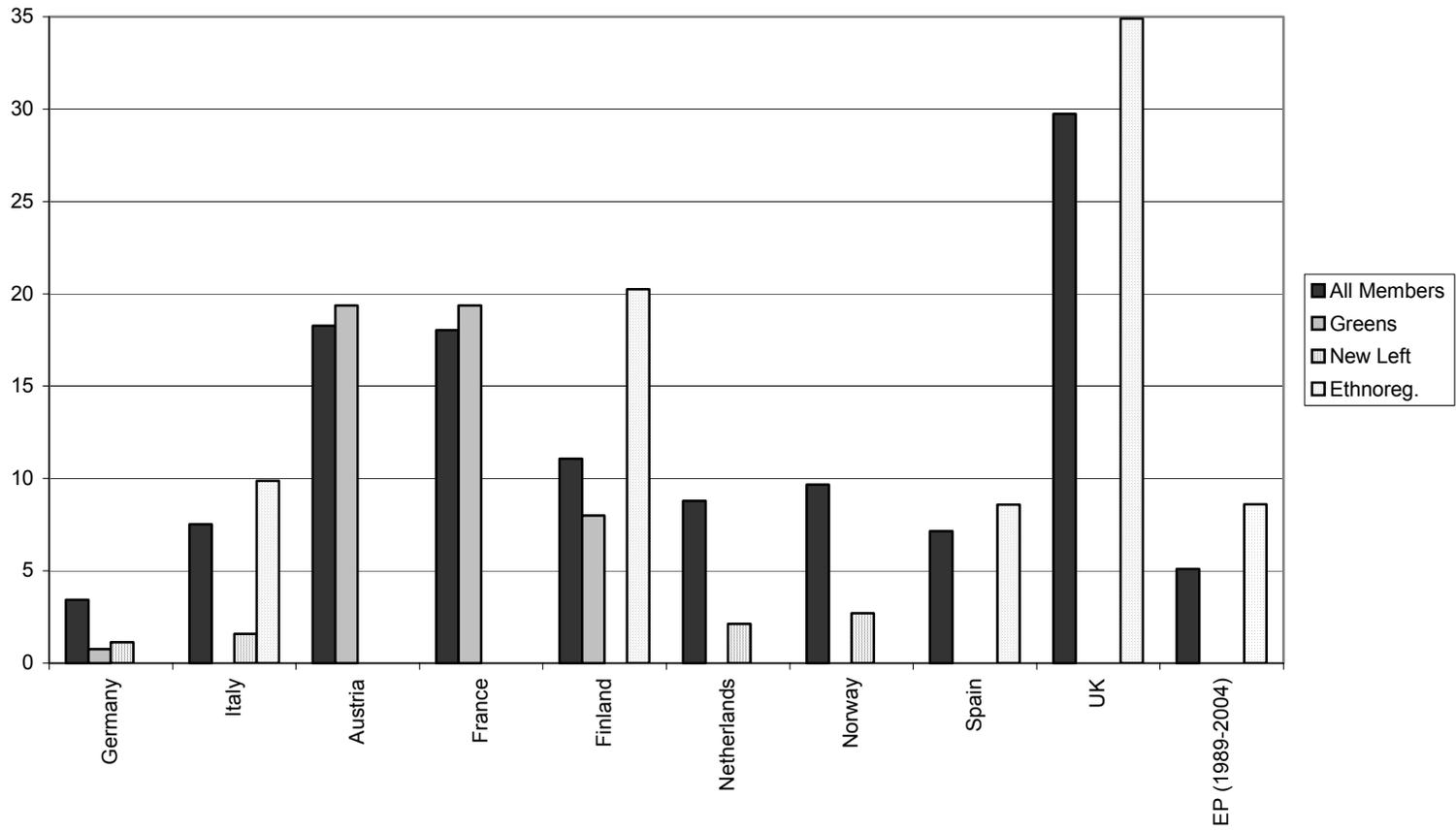


Figure 11. % of Businessmen/Managers in some European parliaments (average 1975-last elections). Values weighted by the size of each group

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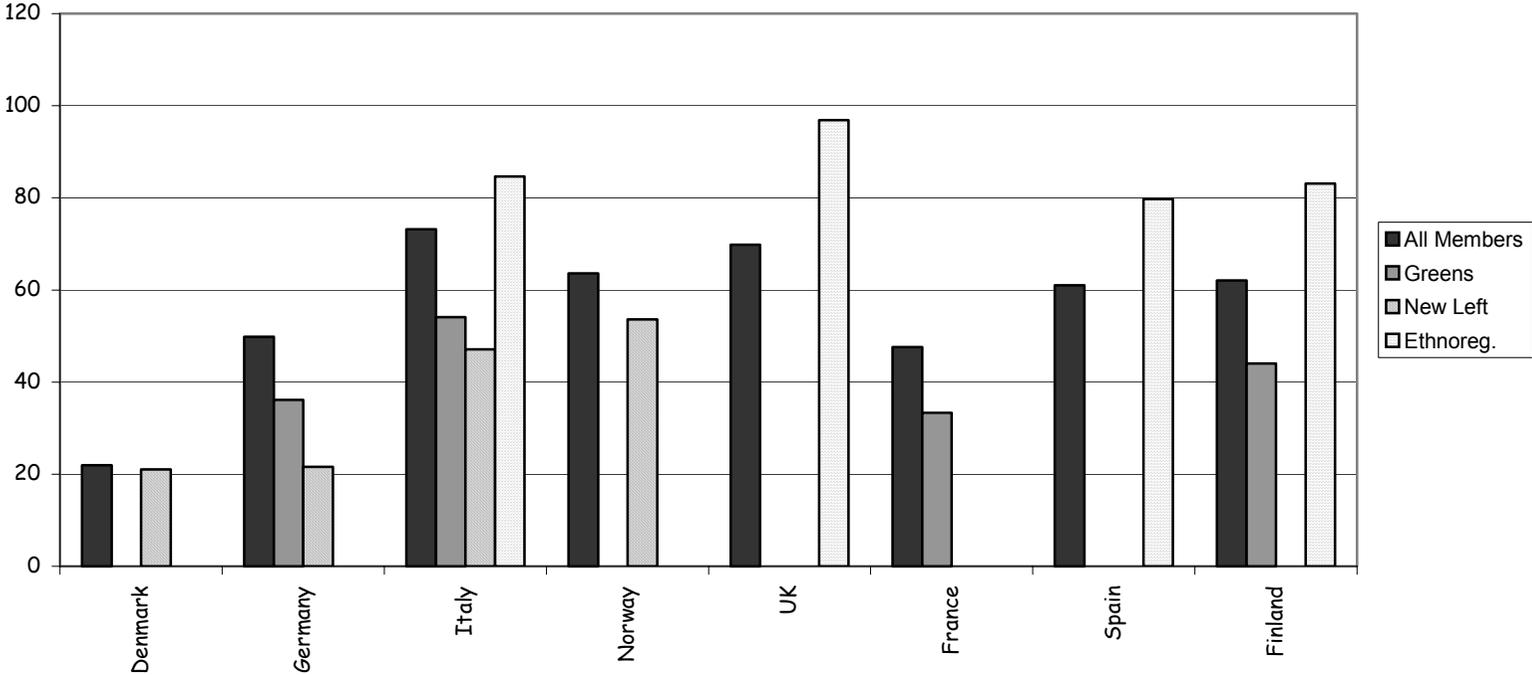


Figure 12. % of MPs born and elected in the same region in some European parliaments (average 1975-last elections). Values weighted by the size of each group

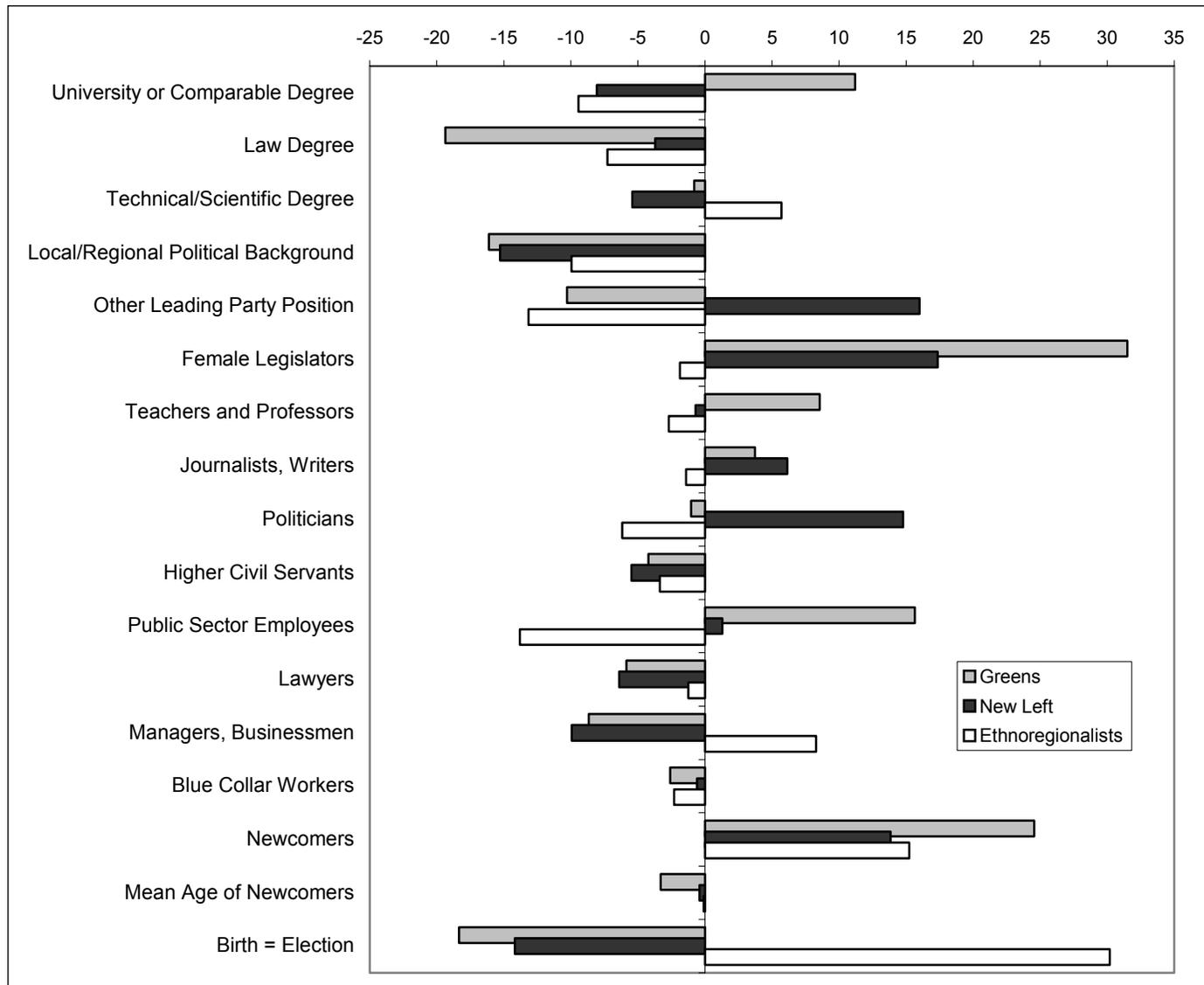


Figure 13. Social and political background of MPs. Deviations of three party families from overall means in 12 European parliaments (1975-last elections, values weighted by number of mandates)

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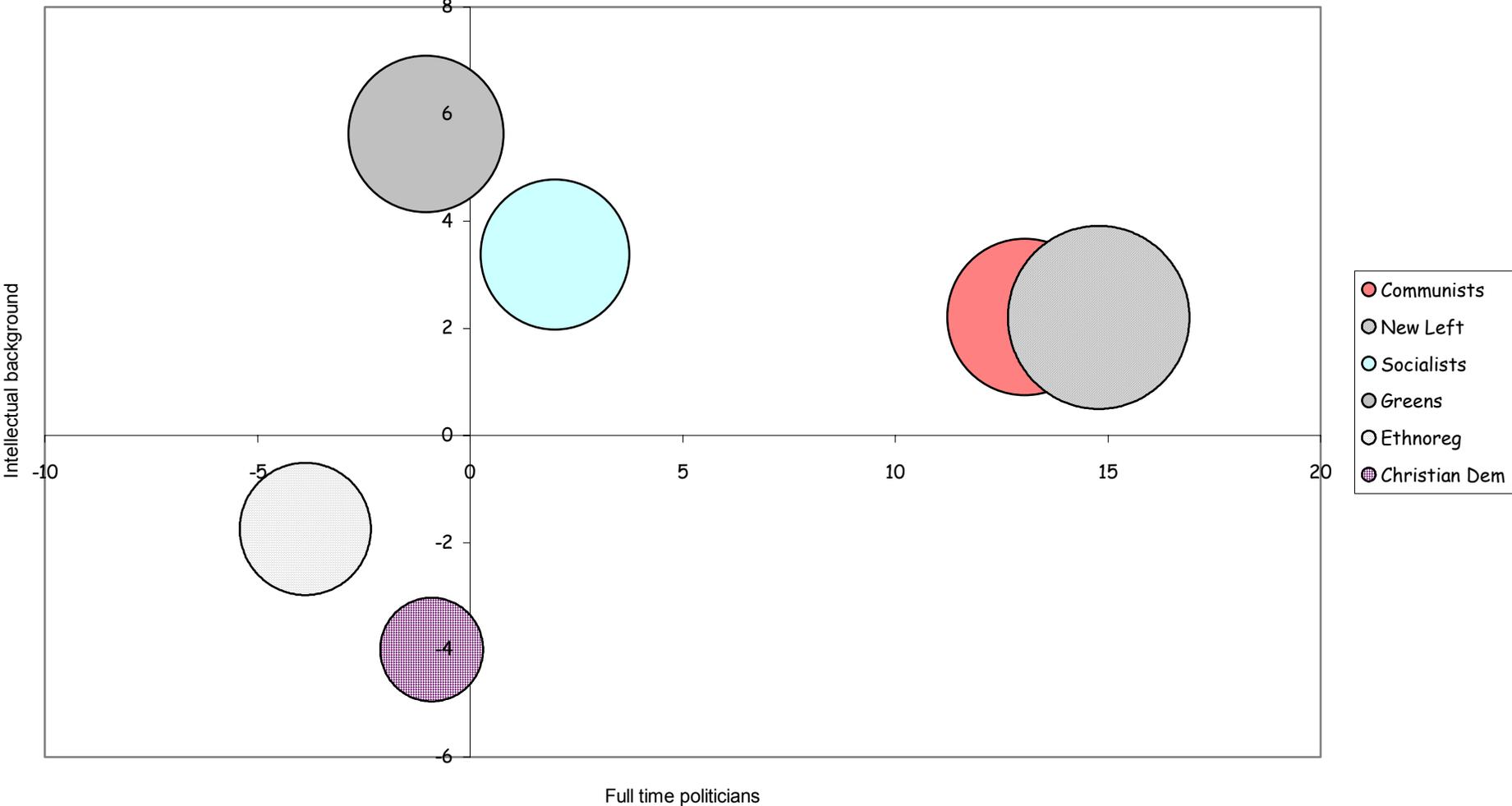


Figure 14. Intellectual and political background of Greens, New Left and Ethnoregionalist MPs.

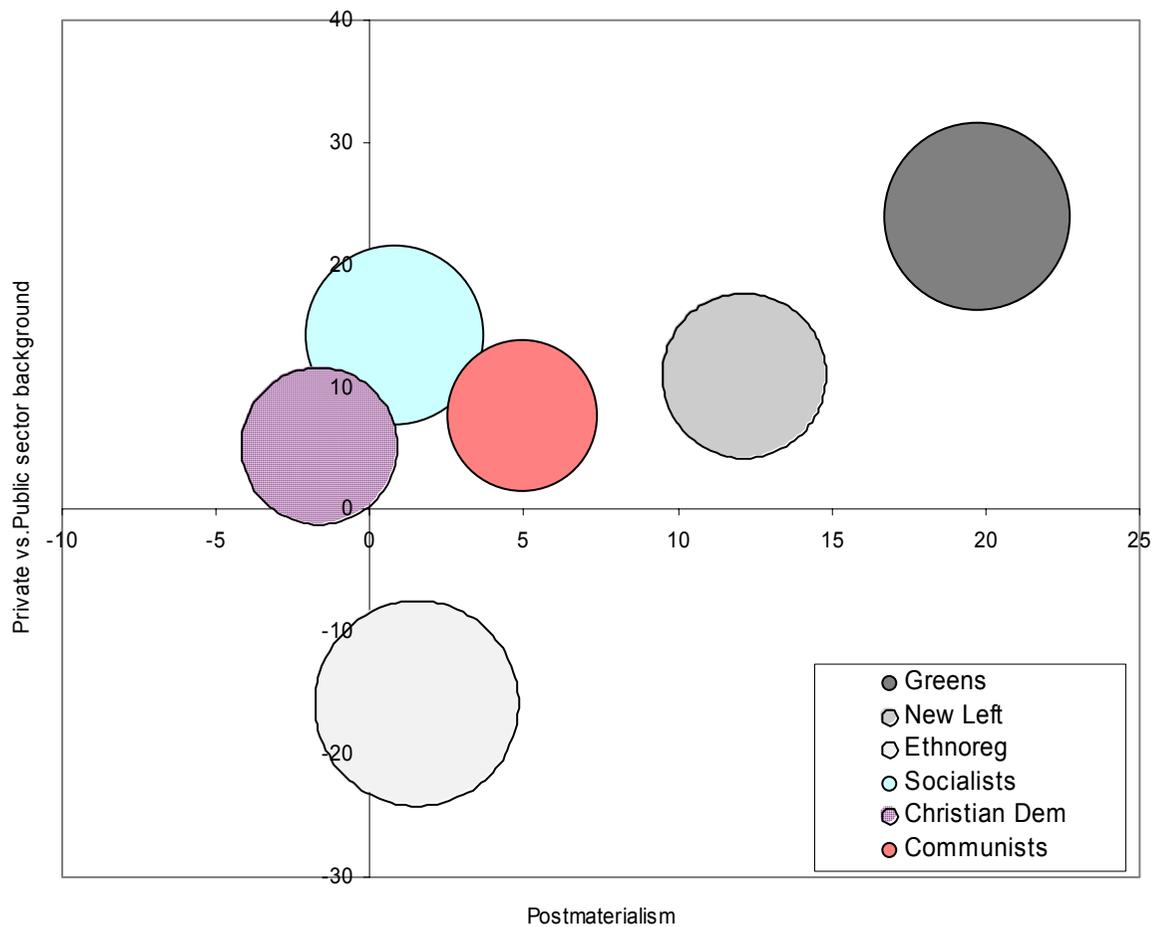


Figure 15. Public/Private sector background and postmaterialist profile of of Greens, New Left and Ethnoregionalist MPs.

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