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THE LINKS BETWEEN WESTERN EUROPEAN PARTIES  
AND THEIR SUPPORTERS.  
THE ROLE OF PERSONALISATION

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## **The links between Western European parties and their supporters. The role of personalisation**

Despite increasingly serious difficulties encountered currently in accounting for the links between parties and their electorate, in Western Europe as well as elsewhere in the world, notions about the nature of these links elaborated in the 1940s and 1950s have remained broadly unchanged. These notions were, first, that 'modern' parties had a 'mass character' (Duverger, 1955), by opposition to traditional 'notables' parties and, second, that parties are linked to electors by means of social cleavages of which Lipset and Rokkan gave a detailed description in their well-known 1966 article (Lipset and Rokkan, 1966).

Yet there are strong grounds for believing that, to say the least, these notions need to be substantially 'revised'. It has indeed been recognised for decades that, in Western Europe, the 'mass' character of many parties was becoming rather questionable; electoral behaviour studies have also shown repeatedly that the role of such social cleavages as class and religion was often tenuous in accounting for why electors voted: it seemed therefore difficult to believe that the role of these cleavages in linking supporters to parties was not also diminishing rapidly. These points did not lead to a major 'revision' of the 'theory', however. Despite the fact that the last two or three decades of the twentieth century indicated that the 'cement' provided by cleavages was losing its strength, what characterised party theory can best be described as efforts at 'patching up' while ignoring the central problem: the general view that, in principle at least, Western European parties relied for their existence on social cleavages and on social cleavages alone was not fundamentally challenged.

On the other hand, as the social cleavages cement was cracking at the edges and sometimes at the centre and was occasionally turning into fine powder, the day-to-day examination of the current state of parties, perhaps more journalistic than 'academic', admittedly, was ostensibly showing that another type of link between these parties and their supporters was becoming ubiquitous, namely the link provided by personalities. This was not so just outside Western Europe, for instance in pluralistic party systems of the Third World: these party systems had always been regarded as 'different' and in effect as less 'mature' than Western European party systems; but the role of personalities seemed to be spreading even in Western Europe. Indeed, the refusal to take personalities seriously into account was a specifically Western European phenomenon, as a section of the academic literature in the

United States was having a different view, though without attempting to go beyond the specific case of American parties.

There was perhaps another reason accounting for the refusal to introduce (or re-introduce) personalities, at any rate in a central position, in the analysis of parties: that was the fact that the role of personalities could be said to have been 'perverted' as a result of what had occurred since World War I in Europe, under both fascist and communist regimes. The 'personality cults' which had prevailed in these political systems had had such tragic consequences that it was perhaps natural that the theory should simply ignore these developments and, at best, treat them as aberrations, particularly at the time: it is questionable as to whether such an attitude is the correct one, however. This is not to say that 'personality cults' should be justified or even be made 'acceptable' as a result of their being examined by the academic students of parties and of party-citizen relationships; this is merely to point out that a general theory of parties cannot be elaborated, whether we like it or not, unless we take into account the fact that these modes of behaviour have been and possibly continue to be rather widespread and that they are manifestations, however distorted, of a kind of relationship between citizens and parties.

'Classical' Western European party theory has thus not taken personalities into account. This is so not just because the key link between parties and their supporters was regarded as being provided by social cleavages; this is so also because to recognise that personalities had a major part to play in the build-up and maintenance of contemporary Western parties meant either that parties were in some way returning to 'pre-modern' 'notable' structures or that they were unacceptably leading to brutal forms of 'personality cult'. There was therefore a tendency to remain silent about the problem or at most to consider it as marginal within the well-established parties and be manifest at the 'extremist' 'peripheries' of the ideological spectrum only. Electoral ties of a personal character placing parties in orbit or sustaining declining parties were thus regarded as exceptions or as aberrations.

These 'exceptions' or 'aberrations' seemed none the less to become rather frequent. They were becoming frequent, even if we remained within the realm of liberal democracies, not just in the South of Western Europe, which had always been regarded as somewhat 'different' from the Northwestern 'core'. They were becoming rather frequent also in those very polities of that 'core', such as Britain or the Scandinavian countries, where the 'social cleavage' theory of parties had originated as it seemed to be based there on a solid empirical reality.

The time has therefore come to consider whether it is realistic to continue to regard as correct the view that social cleavages are the paramount, indeed the explanatory factor accounting for the relationship between ('modern') parties and their supporters or whether one should examine closely the extent to which personal ties also play a part, not just 'exceptionally', but almost routinely,

alongside these cleavages. If such an inquiry is needed, one also needs to determine the precise characteristics of the personal ties which are found to exist in 'modern' Western (European) parties. Do personalities primarily help existing parties based on cleavages to survive and perhaps prosper? Do they also create parties?

These are the questions to which this paper is devoted. It is because the problems posed by the role of personalities in Western European (and, increasingly in Eastern European) parties lead at least to a reassessment of the role of cleavages in ('modern liberal democratic') party formation and support in the area that the paper concentrates on European parties: the point is not to discuss European parties because they might be 'special'; it is on the contrary to see whether such a reassessment might ultimately help to construct a model of the basis of support of parties which might be applicable more generally.

The paper thus first considers some of the ways in which changes in the links between parties and supporters seem already to have taken place in Europe. It then examines the reasons why there might be a general case for revising the model which has prevailed in the course of the second half of the twentieth century, especially in considering the part which personalities can play; there is also an attempt to identify the reasons why the 'classical' model did seem to 'fit' better when it was elaborated than in the early part of the twenty-first century. The third part of the paper then turns to an empirical analysis of the ways in which personalities play a part in the build-up and continued maintenance of many parties in Europe, in particular since the early 1990s; it also indicates that the links which emerge in this way differ from the links between parties and supporters in parties of 'notables' of the 'pre-modern' variety.

## **1. The apparent decline of the role of social cleavages in Western Europe**

Let us briefly examine the problems which the studies of parties seem to encounter in Europe and primarily in Western Europe. Three types of phenomena appear to have taken place, to an extent simultaneously but mainly successively, volatility, decline and collapse. While there was a moment - the late 1950s and the first part of the 1960s - when parties seemed to be like rocks in the Western European landscape, such an image became increasingly unrealistic from the 1970s. The first sign that all was not right was provided by increases in volatility, as the 1979 Pedersen article showed (Pedersen, 1979): volatility meant that electors moved from one party to another; it also meant that they moved in and out of abstention which was also generally on the increase. Then came decline: parties which had dominated the scene, the Norwegian Labour party, the Italian Christian Democrats, the three Dutch Christian parties, to mention only a few, gradually lost a fraction of their electorate to new bodies. Finally, there was collapse, notably in Italy, but elsewhere as well. Admittedly, there had been the earlier collapse of the French Christian Democrat party, the MRP, in the 1950s and of the Spanish UCD in the early 1980s, but, in both cases, it could at least be plausibly argued that these organisations had not had sufficient time to build a truly loyal popular support. This surely was not the case of the Italian Christian Democracy, of the Italian Socialists, of the Canadian Progressive Conservatives or of the Japanese Socialists, this last party not having recovered from its alliance with the Liberal Democrats, which did, on the other hand, perhaps surprisingly, survive almost unscathed. Key 'pillars' of the panorama of politics were thus suddenly at risk. Hence the worry expressed, as these events were taking place, by Katz and Mair, who in two occasions in the early part of their work on *Party Organisations*, raised openly the problem of party 'survival'. They felt that a solution, perhaps the only one, was for the state to come to the rescue (presumably rather than the people) to sustain parties. They pointed out that "the State has become unquestionably important for the survival of political parties" (p.8) and by doing so they suggested that "...the parties can thus be seen as helping to lay the basis for their own survival" (p. 11) (Katz and Mair, 1982).

Something deeply troublesome thus seemed to be occurring in the relationship between people and parties in Western Europe. Yet it is rather difficult to believe that a genuine solution to the problem should be for the parties to shield themselves with the help of the state: 'adjustments' of this kind may succeed for a while, but do not seem likely to constitute a true alternative to what the 'classical' model proposed when it referred to cleavages as the bases for parties. At best, these 'remedies' may slow down decline and perhaps avoid total collapse. They do not indicate whether and in what ways the existing parties might recover the support which they once had or whether other parties with a different base would obtain the kind of support which their predecessors had obtained in the past.

The problem may be felt to lie exclusively with those cleavages identified by Lipset and Rokkan, however, as these may no longer be as relevant as in the past; other cleavages could be in the process of replacing them. There would then be a kind of lull between the 'older' (perhaps more materialist) cleavages and the 'newer' (perhaps more post-materialist) cleavages. The four sets of cleavage structures which were mentioned had been 'frozen' from the 1920s well into the 1960s (p. 50), but Lipset and Rokkan never assumed that they would remain permanently frozen. Indeed, at the end of their paper, while discussing the future, the authors pointed to troubles among Labour parties to conclude that "[i]t is still too early to say what kinds of politics this will engender" (56). It may be that class, religion, rural-urban or centre-periphery distinctions are no longer sufficiently potent in Western Europe to sustain large parties. It may be, to quote Lipset and Rokkan again, that a new "hierarchy of cleavages" (p. 6) is about to take shape but that it takes time for such a development to occur (Lipset and Rokkan, 1966).

Yet little seemed to occur in Western Europe to suggest that new cleavages were about to replace the older ones, as had occurred in the nineteenth century when a new cleavage led to the decline of pre-existing ones. On the contrary, three sets of phenomena took place which did undermine the very concept of a link between parties and supporters based on cleavages. First, new parties did emerge, sometimes to put forward new issues, such as the Greens, but often as a result of a split among existing parties, as in the Netherlands, Denmark or Norway. What these parties did was primarily to lead to greater fragmentation and to a loosening of the ties of citizens with both new and old bodies. Second, many of the larger parties came closer to each other ideologically and programmatically, as Downs had suggested in the 1950s and as Kirchheimer had begun to detail in the 1960s. These developments occurred in large part at the instigation of the leadership, as in the case of the German SPD in the 1950s, of the Spanish PSOE in the 1970s, of the French Socialist party in the 1980s and of the British Labour party in the 1980s and 1990s. Third, as a number of parties collapsed, leaders at the fringe of classical politics came to build organisations, some of which played only a limited and somewhat ephemeral part, but a few of which, the Gaullist party in particular but probably also Berlusconi's *Forza Italia*, were to gain an important place in the party system: these leader-based parties may be labelled 'populist' although the concept covers a wide variety of types of organisations, some of which have more of a cleavage base than others, for instance of a territorial 'peripheral' kind. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that party support in Western Europe at the beginning of the twenty-first century is markedly less based on social cleavages than in the past and that personal ties have begun to play an important part.

Overall, while little was done to integrate developments in other pluralistic polities into a world-wide theory of party support, some effort was made in relation to Eastern Europe to examine whether

support for the parties which emerged in that area in the 1990s could be accounted for in terms of a cleavage theory. It is indeed the area of the world in which the Lipset-Rokkan model is quoted most regularly by scholars analysing party developments (Evans and Whitefield, 1993; Kitschelt *et al.*, 1999). Yet it is questionable as to whether all the developments which occurred since 1990 in the area suggest that the links between parties and supporters are indeed generally based on social cleavages: as in Western Europe, volatility is often exceptionally high and, here and there, new parties have emerged in which leaders have played a crucial part, while leadership has also played a critical part in the more 'established' parties as well.

It is indeed useful at this point to make a little detour in order to consider currently prevailing views on the subject in the United States. Broadly speaking, cleavages no longer play much of a part in the analysis of the relationship between people and parties in the scholarly literature of that country: the parties are simply 'different', as, in 1979, in an APSR article entitled "The New American Political Party", Schlesinger stated when he remarked that American parties were "alive and well" contrary to what had been claimed for some time (Schlesinger, 1979). Moreover and very pointedly, in the 1980s, Sorauf made what amounted to a 'profession of faith' in a new model: "The American electorate thus found the candidate-centred party better tailored to their preferences than the party dominated, integrated, and unified by a party organization..... [P]arties reflect the political-psychological needs of voters. The rise of personalism in political campaigning is a case in point..... Behind the personalism is the need of many citizens for personal leadership, for flesh-and-blood embodiment of distant government, even for the vicarious ego strength of a confident public figure" (Sorauf, 1985, S504-5). Of course, American parties had been at least partly based on social cleavages, for instance ethnic cleavages, and these links have not wholly disappeared, but their part had become limited: they were in the background, while candidates and leaders occupied the front of the stage. It is as if, contrary to what has so often been claimed, the opening up of the party nominations which had resulted from the primaries had had the effect, not of destroying parties, but of rendering these almost 'sacred' in the American political process, at the very moment when European parties were liable to decline and even disappear. Admittedly, the two classical US parties do not go entirely unchallenged: third parties have periodically emerged and, at times, have played a significant part in presidential elections. Yet these parties, too, have been based on leaders, sometimes almost exclusively. They have been often also described (or have described themselves) as 'populist', a label which is probably as vague in these cases as when it is applied to Western European or even Latin American parties. A distinct American party 'theory' thus emerged: it emerged because it appeared better able than the 'classical' theory to account for the way American parties had fared in the second half of the twentieth century, although there is a lack of interest for cross-national analysis and for the examination of the general conditions

under which developments such as those which took place among American parties would be likely to occur.

The case for a re-examination of the basis of parties in Europe in general and in Western Europe in particular is thus very strong. It is simply no longer appropriate to assume that what holds supporters to parties - and often holds them for short periods only - are social cleavages alone. Given that personalities appear ostensibly to have come on the front of the stage, one has to look for a model which is able to accommodate these personalities alongside the social groups from which parties have been felt to emerge and with which they have been associated in the classical model. To do so, however, one needs to go back a little, look at the type of relationships existing between individuals and the world around them and see why social cleavages were at one point in time the key linkage but not longer seem to be in the same position in the early part of the twenty-first century.

## **2. Challenges to the classical model of Western European parties**

As one reflects on what might be the sources of the problems faced by the 'classical' model of Western European parties, two serious difficulties emerge. First, the monopoly which is given to groups in linking parties to their supporters appears unrealistic. Second, the mechanism by which supporters relate to 'their' party is not defined, indeed not even considered.

### **2.1 The two objects of allegiance: groups and personalities**

It is not clear why the 'classical' model did imply that the only form of allegiance which supporters may have towards parties was by means of a relationship between these supporters and what has to be referred to as 'parent-groups': religious or class-based groups such as churches and trade unions, for instance, were regarded as being, in a sense, the 'parents' of the parties as these pre-dated the parties and typically helped these 'new' organisations to develop. Yet to claim, expressly or by implication, that, in ordinary life, individuals display sentiments of allegiance or loyalty towards groups only is manifestly mistaken; in ordinary life, too, individuals display sentiments of allegiance or loyalty towards individuals. Nor does this display of allegiance or loyalty towards individuals occur exceptionally: some parties do seem to be markedly dependent on the 'charismatic' character of their leadership, a sign that the allegiance or loyalty of citizens towards individuals takes place frequently, indeed perhaps routinely. People are loyal, sometimes very loyal to persons whom they know and admire. As a matter of fact, while allegiance to groups and loyalty to individuals are analytically distinct, they also go side by side: they may conflict with each other in some cases; they also help each other in many occasions. Thus a link with a party which is exclusively due to allegiance to a group is rare and exceptional; on the other hand, as we shall suggest at greater length later, a link with

a party which is exclusively due to allegiance towards an individual may be more common, although the counterpart may also be that, when this is the case, the party may be less stable or even may not last long. In the normal way, the two types of links take place at the same time, as when someone supports a party as a result of allegiance towards a group but is also loyal to the leader of that party.

It is indeed rather surprising that the question of the allegiance to personalities should not have been raised – or should have been raised purely as an aside – not only by Lipset and Rokkan but by those who have been concerned subsequently with the question of the link between parties and their supporters. Kirchheimer does mention the possible role of leaders, but only in a limited manner and almost incidentally (Kirchheimer, 1966). Lipset and Rokkan do not mention them at all. Yet leaders did play a substantial part in the creation and life of nineteenth and early twentieth century parties, as Weber did note. Indeed, Socialist leaders have been most prominent, alongside Conservative and Liberal party leaders, in Western European countries. While it may be the case, though this point would have to be examined systematically, that individual leadership played a larger part than is typically recognised in the build-up of parties at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first, there is at least enough impressionistic evidence to suggest that there was substantial leadership presence earlier, on both Right and Left. The role of leaders can therefore be regarded as having been critical in the setting up and development of Western European parties as well as being critical more recently.

It is simply markedly more realistic to claim that parties are likely to depend both on the allegiance which citizens have to some groups – by way of a ‘transfer’ of allegiance of which the notion of ‘social cleavage’ constitutes a short-cut expression – and on the allegiance or loyalty to some individuals than to claim that they depend exclusively on ‘social cleavages’. Admittedly, the specific character of that combination of the two elements is difficult to determine in concrete situations. Robust indicators need first to be devised: these cannot be devised, however, so long as it is believed that the role of personalities in the build-up of parties is episodic or exceptional.

The view that there is allegiance both to a ‘parent-group’ and to personalities does not mean that the nature and characteristics of that allegiance are the same. Allegiance to a parent group is, so to speak, more ‘basic’, as groups (may) remain influential for much longer periods than individuals (although the allegiance to some leaders can last beyond the death of these leaders, as the Peron case amply demonstrates); since allegiance to a group is more ‘basic’, it probably fluctuates less. This may indeed be one of the reasons why ‘classical’ theory stressed exclusively the role of social cleavages in building links between parties and their supporters: these links may be modified only slowly, while allegiance to personalities may oscillate more rapidly and with greater amplitude. Such a conclusion, if valid, clearly does not affect the overall proposition that loyalty to personalities has to be taken into

account alongside loyalty to groups. Indeed, even if it is more volatile, loyalty to personalities is not axiomatically less important than loyalty to groups.

The *relative* importance of the two sets of allegiance in given party situations, however, and in particular the importance of personalities in this context, are unquestionably difficult to measure, however. Admittedly, opinion polls provide some impression of the popularity of the leaders of most parties, in the West at least and indeed increasingly elsewhere. A leader-popularity index may well measure the relative 'weight' of various leaders at a particular time: but it does not help to compare the 'weight' of these leaders to that of a 'parent group'. Moreover, even if one notes that a party's standing in the electorate is increased as a result of the popularity of a leader, one cannot determine easily, if at all, the extent of 'popularity' of the group sustaining the party, either in itself (is it indeed possible to assess the allegiance of supporters to a group without any reference to the allegiance to other groups?) or by reference to other groups: even in this case it is most unlikely that there will be means of measuring the allegiance of citizens to a variety of groups. It seems therefore impossible, at this point in time at least, to test precisely or even without substantial margins of error the extent to which an individual is loyal to a party because of the allegiance of that individual to a parent-group or to one or more personalities: one can only hope to determine what the situation is likely to be in broad terms. This is perhaps a further reason why allegiance to groups has been felt to be all-important in 'classical' theory while allegiance to personalities could be disregarded.

This last standpoint is of course understandable only if there is indeed a prima facie case for arguing that there is always a 'parent-group' behind the allegiance of individuals to 'their' party: this is far from being axiomatic, however. Indeed, the empirical analysis of the support given to parties in the Third World, even in a pluralistic context, has always been regarded as being in many cases based almost exclusively on support given to personalities, be they 'notables' in the case of traditional parties or 'populist' leaders in non-traditional situations such as those which often occur in Latin America. It seems that at least some Western European parties, perhaps more often small parties, are in a somewhat similar predicament: for instance, in the case of parties established as a result of a split in which a particular leader may play a substantial part, it may be difficult to discover whether a 'parent-group' is indeed behind such a party; indeed, many supporters of that splinter party may view themselves as associated to the new organisation not because they are no longer loyal to the original 'parent-group' but, on the contrary, because they feel that they are more loyal to the 'parent-group' than those who did remain in the original party.

Thus, while it seems improbable that a precise measurement will ever take place of the relative importance of group loyalty and of the loyalty to personalities in the build-up of the allegiance to parties, it is none the less essential to obtain an impression, as accurate as possible, of the relative

strength of the two elements. This has to be done, even if this means, on the one hand, merely determining whether any group can be regarded as being, so to speak, the ‘parent’ of the party and, on the other, merely determining how popular a leader is and how long that popularity has lasted. We shall return to that second point in the next section of this paper, as this seems to be the only means of assessing how far personalities play a part in the build-up of party support. Meanwhile, at least an aspect of the first of these points can begin to be assessed as one examines more closely how the link between loyalty to a ‘parent-group’ and allegiance to a party develops, that is to say what is the link between ‘cleavages’ and party support.

## **2.2 Loyalty to a party through a ‘parent-group’: from ‘cleavage’ to ‘preoccupations’**

It has typically been held as axiomatic, in Western Europe at least, that at any rate the main parties were in some sense the product of such large social cleavages as religion or class, to which ethnicity and regional/national feelings should be added. These parties may indeed, as parties, have been the product of such ‘cleavages’, but it is not permissible to conclude from such a link that the same does occur in the minds of citizens. This is so for two reasons: first, it is not axiomatic that those who ‘objectively’ fall within what has to be referred to as a given social category recognise that this is the case; second, even if they do, they may not consider that any allegiance to what might be described as a ‘dependent’ party has to follow automatically from the allegiance to that social category.

The conception that ‘cleavages’ account for the support of individuals to a ‘dependent’ party constitutes a short-cut which assumes that something almost as unconscious as a reflex takes place in the minds of the citizens who belong ‘objectively’ to a social category (whether they are or not also members of a formally constituted group) leads them, first to recognise that they belong to that category and, second, to transfer that allegiance to the social category to allegiance to the ‘dependent’ party. These two steps are in reality far from following each other automatically. What has to occur is a process of socialisation which is likely to take time and during which, incidentally, personalities are likely to play a part, to begin with family and friends. One must therefore expect that there will a hiatus and at least a delay between the allegiance to the ‘parent-group’ and the allegiance to the party. That assumption of ‘automaticity’ results manifestly from the notion that the social environment alone accounts for the attitudes and behaviour of individuals and that no role needs to be attributed to the psychological characteristics of individuals and in particular to the need for individuals to be conscious of their allegiance to the social category to which they ‘objectively’ belong and to recognise that such an allegiance may lead to allegiance to party.

As a matter of fact, a link between individual and social category group and, subsequently, between individual and ‘dependent’ party results from the corresponding social cleavage only if that individual

is profoundly concerned by the question posed by the appartenance to the 'parent' social category and he or she feels that there is a need to 'escalate', so to speak, by translating the question on to the political plane, for instance because the relevant social category is threatened. This may happen and indeed does happen, but not necessarily and not always. For that condition to be fulfilled, appartenance to the social category must indeed be viewed by the individuals concerned as truly important.

In reality, it is far from clear that all members of the society are sufficiently concerned to react in that way. At a minimum, there will be major variations from individual to individual in the sentiments which they have with respect to the relevant social category and to the party which is connected to that category. For the individual to be truly close to the social category and to the 'dependent' party, the sentiment which gives rise to the allegiance to the social category must constitute a major *preoccupation* for the individual. The link between individual and 'parent' group, as well between individual and 'dependent' party will result in something close to 'automaticity' – that is to say that the social cleavage will have the desired effect – only if what the relevant social category and the 'dependent' party represent constitutes a major preoccupation of the individual concerned.

Admittedly, the notion of preoccupation is not invoked in the context of the problem posed by cleavages since psychological characteristics of individuals are not taken into account in the model. Yet matters of this kind are now examined, indeed regularly examined in opinion surveys, for instance when these ask about the 'worries' which respondents may have; the existence of such worries is indeed generally regarded as having a negative effect on the individuals' feelings for the government and perhaps for the whole political system. Yet these 'worries' or indeed any 'worries' are not mentioned in the context of the build-up of the allegiance of individuals towards groups or towards parties. As a matter of fact, what is at stake is not just 'worries' but longer-term and deeper problems which the individual faces: this is why the word 'preoccupations' appears to be a more adequate expression. Preoccupations are central to the allegiance to a social category and, through that category, to the party because they indicate that the individual concerned does feel that he or she 'belongs' to the social category. If individuals are truly preoccupied by a problem, they will be motivated to undertake some political action and, assuming that they do not go beyond the limits of 'liberal-democratic' behaviour (perhaps because they are too few of them to be able to do so or because they do not wish to act illegally), they are likely to look for some organisation, a movement perhaps, a party perhaps, which will enable them to be less 'preoccupied'.

Why, then, given that strong preoccupations are needed on the part of individuals for these to owe allegiance to a group and to a party, did social cleavages seem to lead directly from allegiance to a social category to allegiance to a party at the end of the nineteenth century and during a large part of

the twentieth? What occurred at the time, indeed for reasons analysed with great care by Lipset and Rokkan, was that large numbers of citizens in Western European countries came to be 'preoccupied' by their status in society. They lived for instance in an area which was deprived because it was peripheral, to a regional/national social category or a religion which was in a minority and/or was persecuted or to a social class which was ill-treated and led to life conditions which were held by these individuals to be unacceptable. Thus the status of individuals belonging to these categories was (or often was, if they were 'conscious' of the problem) a major preoccupation for these individuals, as well indeed as for some others who felt that such a situation was not tolerable. It was because that status was held not to be tolerable that the allegiance to the group came to be strong and that the 'escalation' into politics took place and individuals joined or supported a party. The link was not automatic; it was not even direct: there was a mediating element which was constituted by the strength of the preoccupations about status among the individuals concerned, both for those who belonged to the social categories in question and for others who shared the same preoccupation.

One can thus understand why social cleavages played such an important part in Western Europe at that point in time that they could be regarded as being a 'short-cut' from the individual to the social category and to the party; but one can also understand why such a conjunction between social category and preoccupation, while not fortuitous in the circumstances, should not always occur, indeed might not even occur frequently. That conjunction has not occurred, at any rate to the same extent, in Western Europe at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first. Preoccupations associated with status have markedly diminished in intensity in Western Europe, except, in some countries – indeed in parts of some countries – in relation to regional/national feelings: these sentiments appear also to be particularly strong in parts of Eastern Europe.

There are, on the other hand, other preoccupations – indeed strong ones – in Western Europe, but they are not in the main associated with the status of individuals in society. They tend to relate to problems of Western societies, for instance crime, immigration, job security and, though to a lesser extent, with the environment. These problems have not typically led to the setting up of organisations, except to an extent with respect to the environment; they are in any case almost never associated with a recognisable social category. Thus, although the problem of job security can be regarded as being part of the matters which trade unions deal with, it seems to be dissociated from sentiments vis-à-vis trade unions in the minds of most citizens. The result has been in many cases an escalation at the level of parties without the support of formally constituted groups or without a feeling of belonging to a social category and, not surprisingly, with a major part being played, as groups are small or non-existent, by personalities. The relative weakness of formally-constituted groups and of recognised social categories where preoccupations have been strong has created a situation which is new to Western

Europe since industrialisation took place there; but it is not altogether new in the contemporary world as it has characterised many countries outside Western Europe.

The cleavage base of parties has not wholly disappeared, to be sure; but it has declined and will no doubt continue to do so. The citizens are unlikely to be any longer mainly 'preoccupied', in Europe, with their 'status' in the society and thus to feel automatically that they belong to social categories linked to one of the major 'cleavages' (geography, religion or class); the preoccupations are likely to be increasingly with matters of a different character. In such a context, personalities have and will continue to have a greater opportunity than before to play a part in the build-up and life of parties of Western Europe.

### **2.3 The changing nature of the link between individuals, groups and personalities**

Meanwhile, however, the nature of the link between individuals and personalities has changed from what it was in the context of 'parties of notables'. The relationship between individuals and party was then 'clientelistic', as it was based on loyalty to a personality on the basis of long-standing, often atavistic links. This is no longer the case when preoccupations constitute the link between citizens and personalities and, through personalities, between citizens and the party.

In the course of the passage from the 'traditional' to the 'modern' type of party the clientelistic link with the notables was replaced by a link to a social category, indeed often to a formally-constituted group as well. This occurred as more and more citizens became (or were made to become) aware that their key problem was that they belonged to a social category which was 'deprived' in the society: the problem was one of 'status' of that social category in the society. The link no longer was with persons – the 'notables' – but with the abstract entity constituted by the social category. Yet that new link with the group remained in some sense of a clientelistic nature, as individuals related to the social category – and thus to the party – in a similar manner to that in which individuals had related to notables: there was no 'discussion' as to why the individual belonged to the group, so to speak; the link was regarded as 'obvious' and directly consequential on the fact that the individual had a given (deprived) status as a result of his or her geographical location, religion or class.

Some distance gradually emerged between individual and party, however, and 'preoccupations' came to grow. These started to constitute intermediate elements in the relationship between individual and party. 'Belongingness' came to be replaced, gradually admittedly, by a form of 'instrumentalism'. Whether this means that European societies were moving 'en bloc' towards a new 'post-modern' phase is debatable: at most such a movement occurred in part only, as loyalties to parties or even to notables have not wholly disappeared. Yet societal changes, both in terms of improved educational opportunities and in terms of major developments in the mass media no doubt had the effect of

accelerating the process by which a wedge – that constituted by ‘preoccupations’ – emerged between individual and party, thus creating greater distance between that individual and the party.

The type of personalisation which occurs in this context naturally differs from the clientelism which characterised ‘pre-modern’ ‘notable’ parties. The main characteristic of clientelism is that it links individuals to personalities (or to groups) by way of a feeling of belonging, as we saw. To this extent, clientelism in ‘parties of notables’ is comparable to feudal links: the ‘client’ gives his or her support to the notable and to the party in exchange for specific help given by the notable and by the party when such a help is needed. In the ‘modern’ forms of personalisation arising out of the preoccupations of citizens, the link stems from the fact that the individual supports the personality ‘because’ he or she believes that that personality will reduce the psychological tension resulting from the ‘preoccupations’ of the individual. The strength of the ‘preoccupations’ is one of the key factors (the other factors having to do with the way in which the personality is presented to the individual) accounting for the strength of the link between individual and personality.

When it is not described as a form of ‘personality cult’, a point which we shall shortly examine, this link between individual and personality is typically regarded as being a manifestation of ‘populism’. To claim that this label applies to all types of non-clientelistic relationships between individuals and personalities would entail that populism be viewed as being in all cases mediated by ‘preoccupations’ of individuals coupled with the belief that personalities can at least significantly reduce the impact of these preoccupations. This is scarcely part of the usual definition – or interpretation – of populism, as this phenomenon is typically regarded, on the contrary, as characterised by a direct, unmediated relationship between individual and political leader. As a matter of fact, the question of the nature of the link between individual and personality in the case of populism does not seem to have been analysed systematically. Populism seems often to be regarded as a ‘milder’ form of ‘personality cult’ more likely to emerge and develop in liberal democratic societies than pure ‘personality cult’ situations. Populism becomes as a result somewhat more acceptable than the ‘virulent’ forms which characterised fascist and communist regimes from the 1920s onwards.

The fact that ‘preoccupations’ have come to play a major part in the build-up of the links between citizens and parties makes it possible to understand better why there has been greater ‘volatility’ at elections, as well as why there has been more ‘independence’ of electors vis-à-vis the parties. Both the ‘traditional’ relationship between individuals and parties - a relationship based on a clientelistic link via notables – and the ‘modern’ relationship – based on a cleavage link vis-a-vis a group and, through that group, vis-à-vis a party – had one common characteristic: the association with the party was not based on any ‘issue’, but on what was referred to as ‘belongingness’. Citizens supported a party because of a position which they had in society. As the sense of ‘belonging’ has disappeared or

has at least been markedly reduced, the support of citizens is naturally less strong. With the type of personalisation which emerges when preoccupations grow independently from the sense of 'belonging' to the party, the stress is on the preoccupations, first, on the personality of the leader second and, only third, on the party. The type of link to the party which results from the fact that individuals feel that the leader of the party understands the preoccupations of these individuals is less secure and less permanent. It is based on the hope and belief that the personality who embodies and runs the party will solve the problem or problems which preoccupy the individual.

#### **2.4 The question of the 'personality cult' and the role of personalities in right-wing and left-wing parties**

The question of the role of personalities in parties and in liberal democracies in general is not merely an empirical question; it is also ideological in the sense that many, especially on the Left, have considered that role to be fundamentally 'improper'. Such a standpoint is regarded by some as logical in that it seems to them inconsistent that a democratic system should give substantial influence to personalities. Such an attitude is also understandable in that parties of the Left, as well as some parties of the Centre and even of the Right did have to fight 'parties of notables' in order to establish their influence. Moreover, in the course of the twentieth century, these parties had to oppose authoritarian parties of the Right of the Fascist variety in which personalities played a key and indeed the key part. The actions of these leaders went beyond what is conventionally regarded as 'populism' and constituted a 'personality cult'. Of course, 'personality cults' have been particularly developed in totalitarian and even authoritarian parties which claimed to be of the Left, Communist in particular; but this has not prevented parties of the liberal-democratic Left from being among those which have most opposed personalisation. As a matter of fact, the most extreme examples of opposition to personalisation in principle is probably constituted by the Green parties in which systematic efforts have been made to reduce the influence of leaders, for instance by instituting rapid rotation at the top. Yet, while parties of the (liberal-democratic) Left, Social-democratic parties in particular, have been typically rather opposed to pronounced levels of personalisation in their midst, this has not meant that personalities played no or even a limited part in the life of these parties. The influence of personalities has often been large, although it has also been often somewhat concealed. It is indeed not clear in this respect that there has been any increase in personalisation in these parties in the course of the last decades of the twentieth century, a matter which surely needs to be empirically tested, as it would throw light on the extent to which the role of cleavages was truly predominant in earlier decades. All that seems possible to claim is that the influence of leaders was ostensibly large in parties of the Left in a number of cases, for instance in Germany before World War I in the SPD, a point which was

indeed regarded as central by Michels, although he viewed these leaders as 'bureaucratized' rather than drawing direct allegiance from the party supporters.

The fact that parties of the Left have tended to be ostensibly ideologically opposed to personalities playing a key part appears to have had two important consequences, however. First, among the more established parties of the Left, conflicts over personalities have been often linked to and indeed been regarded as mainly ideological conflicts within these parties: the parties were deemed to clash (at least to appear to clash) over ideological lines rather than over personalities. Second, a parallel development occurred in the case of new parties on the Left: personality conflicts, for instance leading to splits from existing parties, have tended to be covered by an ideological mantle. Overall, however, the practical difference between Right and Left on the matter of personalities does not appear to be sufficiently large to justify, at any rate in principle, drawing a fundamental distinction between the two sides of the ideological divide in this respect.

### **3. Personalisation and European parties at the beginning of the twenty-first century**

Two main related propositions have been put forward about (Western) European political parties in the previous section. The first is that new preoccupations have prevailed in the minds of citizens and that these are affecting the links between citizens and parties, the effect of social cleavages having been markedly reduced in the process. The second is that personalities enjoying a (non-clientelistic) support play a significant part in contemporary European parties, although it is not claimed that the role of such non-clientelistic support did not exist earlier and in particular before the second half of the twentieth century. This section attempts to throw some light on the questions posed by the second of these propositions. It therefore examines the extent to which personalities play a substantial part in the support which European parties, both Western and Eastern, receive from the citizenry. The analysis focuses here on the leaders of the parties, not because other important party members do not play any part in helping to build popular support for their parties, but in order attempt to suggest that at least some leaders may have such an effect.

As was pointed out in the previous section, a rigorous testing of the two propositions which have just been mentioned would require the elaboration of precise indicators of the nature of citizens' support for parties in Europe over a number of decades and of the extent to which social structural variables formed the basis of this support alongside personalisation. Such a precise assessment is precluded in the current state of our knowledge. The aim of this section is therefore more modest: it is to indicate that there is a prima facie case for arguing that some leaders have played a significant part in building support for the parties to which they belonged and, in a number of situations, which they created. The analysis covers Western Europe since the end of World War 2 and Eastern Europe since the fall of Communism in 1990. To attempt to determine whether there appears to have been an increase in the impact of leaders on the support which parties enjoyed, the analysis of Western European parties is divided into three periods, from 1945 to the mid-sixties, from the mid-sixties to the mid-eighties and from the mid-eighties to the early years of the twenty-first century; those leaders who straddled over more than one of these periods are placed in the period in which their popularity in the country and their impact on party support appears to have been greatest.

#### **3.1 The types of intervention of leaders in the process of development of parties and the role of the size of the parties in the political system**

The 'help' given by party leaders to boost the strength of their party among the citizens can range from being non-existent or very limited to being very large and almost total, as when the leader creates the party and that party is entirely dependent on that leader for its support among the population. Such a dimension is therefore analytically continuous. In practice, given the measurement

difficulties which have been mentioned, one can distinguish only among four discrete situations. These correspond to: 1) very little or no influence of the leader on the support obtained by a party; 2) some influence exercised by the leader in helping to build popular support for the party, the action of the leader consisting in defending the programme of the party; 3) rather more influence exercised by the leader in helping to build popular support for the party, the support for the party in the population being boosted by the leader succeeding in changing the programme or the main policies of the party; 4) the outright building of an entirely new party which the leader 'launches' in the electorate; an analogous, though perhaps somewhat more limited kind of influence is exercised by a leader who takes over a declining and almost 'bankrupt' party and succeeds in giving that party a 'new lease of life'. These two cases seem indeed analogous, although the parties which fall into one or the other of the two sub-categories may be different in character and ideology: the entirely new creations of parties are often of an 'extremist' character, while the parties which are 'rebuilt' sometimes seem to be located at the centre of the ideological spectrum, as in the case of some liberal parties which have been 'revived' in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet these 'revivals' have typically not been spectacular or have been very slow, except, seemingly, when the leader of the party takes 'idiosyncratic' and even extreme positions and thus appears to be more in tune with the preoccupations of at least some members of the citizenry.

Although these four forms of intervention of leaders are part of a single dimension of influence, there are major differences, at any rate in practice and in particular in Western Europe, between the first three and the fourth. Where parties have been established for a substantial period, the creation of (viable) new parties and even the revival of what are often fossilised parties are likely to be difficult. These parties are therefore likely to start and to remain rather small and in many, possibly most cases, to be marginal, though there are a few exceptions, even in Europe, as we shall see and as is indeed well-known. This tends to give most newly-created or revived parties a place in the party system which is different from that of the established parties whose support in the population may or may not be boosted by leaders. It is thus more realistic to examine the role of leaders in the building or rebuilding of parties separately from the role of leaders in established parties.

### **3.2 The forms of intervention of leaders in large pre-existing parties**

There is no point in examining here the first of the four situations; the cases of leaders who have little influence or even none at all on the support received by their party are apparently numerous: these cases are regarded as the 'norm' by the 'classical' theory; indeed, a crude categorisation suggests that about three quarters of the Western European prime ministers since World War fall in this category, with large variations from country to country, however. Moreover, if instruments existed making it

possible to assess with precision the extent to which leaders and other top party personalities boost the support given to their party, many of these leaders and top party personalities would appear to make at least some contribution, locally or nationally, to this support. As such a fine-tuned measurement cannot be achieved, at any rate as yet, it is more realistic to assume, when there is no strong circumstantial evidence suggesting that a leader boosts the popular support enjoyed by his or her party, that such a leader has no or only a tiny effect on the level of the popular support of the party.

There is, on the other hand, a minority of about a quarter of the prime ministers who appear to have played a significant part in helping an existing party to increase its popular support: these cases seem to be spread about evenly across Western Europe throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Despite the fact that assessments are imprecise, one can distinguish between two levels of strength of the influence of the party leaders as a result of what leaders are able to do. Some boost the support for their party, but do not change it; others transform the nature, character and goals of the party.

The first and less strong form of influence can be described as helping the party to *amplify its popular support in the direction in which it has been going*. This means that such a party is not confronted with new preoccupations among the supporters of the party or that the leader does not notice that any new preoccupations exist. This type of influence could therefore be regarded as only an extension of the ‘classical’ theory and therefore as ‘normal’: the party’s base does not seem altered; it is none the less a substantial departure from the ‘pure classical model’. The proportion of such cases appears to be at least 10 percent of the Western European prime ministers (Table 1).

**Table 1** *European leaders who appear to have boosted the appeal of their party*

*a) Western Europe*

	Amplified	Transformed	Formed new party or revamped old	
			marginal	large
To 1965	Drees Gerhardsen Erlander Macmillan Togliatti	De Valera Adenauer De Gasperi Papandreou Sr	Uomo Qualunque Poujade	De Gaulle
1965-1985	Kekkonen Kreisky Haughey Berlinguer Lubbers Dehaene	Brandt Mitterrand Karamanlis Thatcher Soares	Hage (N) Glistrup (DK)	(Pujol)
1985-2004	Kohl Schroeder Martens	Gonzales Craxi Papandreou Jr Aznar Blair	Haider Le Pen Anders (N) Kjaersgaard (DK) Bossi Fortijn Dewinter	Berlusconi

*b) Eastern Europe*

	Amplified	Transformed	Formed new party or revamped old	
			marginal	large
1990-2004	Walesa?	Laar (EST) Antall Klaus Meciar Orban	Olechisky Tudor Lepper	Saavisar (EST) ? Skele (LV) ? Adamkus (LIT) ? Paksas (LIT) ? Simeon

Notes:

- 1) The countries analysed are, for Western Europe all except Luxemburg, Iceland and Malta and, for Eastern Europe, the eight new members who joined the EU in 2004 plus Romania and Bulgaria.
- 2) It is assumed that there were about 100 prime ministers (and presidents in the French and Finnish cases) in Western Europe during the post World War 2 period.
- 3) The cases of the Baltic states raise problems as the variations from one election to the next are often very substantial.

One example is that of Macmillan in Britain. In the 1950s and even in the 1960s, it was commonly believed and seemingly documented from the evidence of British elections that personalities did not have a significant impact on the result, either at constituency level or at national level. Indeed, there were cases in which it did seem that the leader exercised ostensibly no influence at all. Churchill not only did not win the 1945 election despite of his war record but he won the 1951 election only because of the electoral system, since more votes went to Labour than to the Conservatives, despite the fact that the Labour government had had serious internal difficulties and that it had in effect implemented what seemed to be the bulk if not all of its programme. Yet Macmillan, who became leader in 1957 after the Suez debacle in which his predecessor, Eden, had been directly involved, did seem to have a personal following: the victory of the Conservatives at the 1959 election appeared to have been in part due to the prime minister's appeal; but it was an appeal to continue in the way the party had acted in the last decade: Macmillan seemed to boost the party's strength without having to change the line.

Similar examples can be found in other European countries. In the early postwar period, one can note the cases of Togliatti and Berlinguer in Italy, although they were not government leaders, of Erlander in Sweden, of Gerhardsen in Norway, of Drees in the Netherlands. Since the 1970s, some leaders had the same effect, as Lubbers in the Netherlands, Martens and Dehaene in Belgium, Kohl and Schroeder (at least in the first phase) in Germany.

There is another way in which leaders appear to affect and to affect more profoundly the support of citizens for an established party: this occurs when that leader succeeds in *transforming that party's character and in particular its programme*; these are cases which come fairly close to the creation of a new party: indeed, some of the leaders who play such a part suggested, even stated, that the party was formally or at least informally a new one. One can justifiably assert on the basis of such a behaviour on the part of the leader that the leader has a more profound effect than in the previous case on the support of the citizenry because the leader is able to use his or her popularity with (a section of) the electorate to put pressure on the party. Such a situation occurs when the preoccupations of many citizens are changing or have changed, on the understanding that, if the party were to stick to its traditional line, it would decline, perhaps be in 'terminal' decline. The popularity of the leader in the population stems in part at least from the fact that he or she appears to have perceived these new preoccupations. By changing the programme or the main policies of the party, the leader shows that he or she has a strong power over the party; meanwhile the leader also transfers to the party part of the appeal which he or she has in the population. Putting it in another way, if the leader did not have a popular appeal, he or she would not convince the party that a change in the programme or in key policies had to take place; the fact that, subsequently, the party's support increases or is at least not

declining is evidence that the leader does contribute significantly to the support which the party enjoys.

Examples of this kind of situation are numerous in Western Europe since World War 2: they constitute about one in eight or one in seven of the total number of all prime ministers in the period. Two classical early post-World War 2 examples are those of Adenauer in Germany and of de Gasperi in Italy: the latter in effect created the Christian Democratic party and made it viable; the former saw to it that the CDU was to be a broad party of the centre-right and not, as the French MRP was to become, a party of the centre-left. Moreover, in Germany, although the main change in the SPD's policy occurred under Ollenhauer, it was Brandt who saw to it that the party became regarded as a party of government; Schmidt pursued the movement even further, but he encountered serious difficulties within the party without exercising marked influence in the population.

The role of Mitterrand in rebuilding the French Socialist party (formally a new party) was somewhat analogous to that of Adenauer in relation to the German CDU, as was to be that of Thatcher with the British Conservative party and of Blair with the British (New) Labour party. These leaders all used the appeal which they had in the nation to achieve at the same time a major change in the characteristics of their party which then owed to them to be successful at the polls. In Italy, at a lower level of electoral support, Craxi played a similar part in transforming the Italian Socialist party on the basis of the popular support which he enjoyed and which was transferred to the party. In the South of Europe, Soares in Portugal, Gonzales and Aznar in Spain, Papandreou senior, Karamanlis and Papandreou junior in Greece were all instrumental in changing fundamentally the characteristics of the party system in their country as a result of their own popularity; this enabled them to modify in a significant manner the support which their respective parties had in the electorate. In Eastern Europe, perhaps the clearest cases are those of Klaus in the Czech Republic and of Antall and Orban in Hungary. It does not seem right to go beyond these cases, in particular by taking into account the part played by leaders in the transformation of Communist parties into Social democratic organisations in these countries as this transformation does not seem to have been primarily due to the part played by leaders: it appeared to have been more designed, except perhaps in the case of Hungary, to save what could be saved of the party organisation than to change the programme of the party in order to satisfy the preoccupations of electors.

### **3.3 The rescue of existing marginal parties and the setting up of new parties**

Rescuing existing marginal parties has been attempted by a number of leaders of centre parties in particular, but typically without the leaders having any real appeal in the population which they could then transfer to the party. There have been some successes, but they have remained limited and have

occurred over a long period. The Liberal party in Britain and the Centre party in France have progressed, at any rate over the long term, but in neither case was there a popular leader, not even Giscard d'Estaing of France, who could be said to be at the root of the 'revival' of these parties. The one clear example of such a party rescue resulting from the action of a leader is that of the Austrian Freedom Party under Haider, where the 'regrowth' of the party resulted from the extremist position of the new leader, a position which was in tune with the preoccupations of a part of the citizens.

The creations of new parties with the strong help of a popular leader have been markedly more numerous, even if, by the first decade of the twenty-first century, these new parties, with three exceptions and one intermediate case have been mostly small and in the main marginal to the development of the political system. Moreover, not all new parties emerged in that way: some of them have not been based on the popular strength of a leader at all. This has especially been the case with Green parties.

The number of creations resulting from the activities of a leader appears to have increased in the course of the second half of the twentieth century, in part, admittedly, because the number of small parties which were created also increased during that period. There were seemingly only two cases of small parties started by a leader before 1965, those of the Uomo Qualunque in Italy and of the 'Poujadist' party in France; both these parties collapsed fairly rapidly, the Poujadist party as a result of the emergence of the Gaullist party, which will be examined shortly. There were also only two significant creations of new parties based on popular leaders between 1965 and 1985, both in Scandinavia, the Progress Party in Norway by Lage, who died in 1974, and the Progress Party by Glistrup in Denmark.

The bulk of the creations of significant parties based on popular leaders occurred in the 1980s and beyond. The main ones – and indeed those which obtained 10 percent of the votes at their peak - were those of the Progress Party in Norway, which was restarted by Hagen, the People's Party of Kjaersgaard in Denmark (but protest parties of the same kind did not succeed or collapsed rapidly in Sweden and Finland), Fortijn's party in the Netherlands, which did suffer a major setback, but after its leader had been assassinated, the Vlaams blok in Belgium, under Dewinter, which obtained major successes in Flanders, the Lega Nord of Bossi, which obtained over 10 percent of the votes in the part of the country in which it stood, and, above all, the National Front of Le Pen, which hovered around 15 percent of the votes in most if not all elections from the mid-1980s. There have been somewhat similar developments to that of the Lega Nord in Ticino, in Switzerland, while the more classical national Conservative Party in that country moved appreciably to the Right, indeed under a new leader, and made gains at the 2003 federal election, apparently on the basis of the fact that the other

three classical parties did not take into account the preoccupations of citizens with respect to immigration.

Similar developments occurred in Eastern Europe, but, given that multi-party systems emerged only in 1990 or 1991 in the area, it is somewhat difficult to distinguish 'old' parties from 'new' parties and even small or medium sized parties from large parties. This is partly because fluctuations have often been rapid, for instance in the Baltic States and Poland (as well as in Hungary, where Antall's Forum collapsed soon after the death of its original leader); this is also partly because in some of the countries where the president is directly elected, and especially in Lithuania and Poland, 'outsiders' succeeded in obtaining moderate successes but did not always set up a party. The most successful cases of personally-based intermediate-sized parties are those of Meciar in Slovakia and of Tudor in Romania, and, at the 2004 European election, of Lepper's Popular Party in Poland.

The parties which have been mentioned so far can be described as being small to medium-sized and, in general, marginal to the political system, though both Fortijn's party and the Danish People's Party did support governments of the Right and Haider's party joined the Austrian cabinet, while Meciar was twice prime minister of Slovakia at the head of a coalition. Yet there has also been in Europe what also may be regarded as an 'impossible' development, impossible at least in the context of the 'classical' theory, namely the creation of three parties based on the support of a leader with popular appeal which were not small, not even medium-sized, but large, and which in all three cases eroded and effectively replaced the parties of the Right and Centre-right which had previously ruled the country. These parties are those of De Gaulle in France, of Berlusconi in Italy and of the ex-King Simeon in Bulgaria, this last party having obtained a near absolute majority of seats at the 2000 general election. There is, moreover, at least one intermediate case as well, that of Convergencia I Unio of Pujol, which ruled Catalonia until the regional election of 2003, the Galician party of Fraga being rather similar, but much smaller in terms of its absolute size. It seems difficult to classify Pujol's party as 'small': in a sense, it did for Catalonia what De Gaulle's, Berlusconi's and Simeon's parties did for their respective countries, namely to replace the traditional Right. It should be noted that the Basque equivalent to the Catalan Party, the National Basque Party, has not been created by and does not depend markedly on a leader for its support.

The cases of the three (or four) parties which have replaced the Right and which have been based on their original leader merit particular attention in view of their exceptional character. Admittedly, the future and therefore the eventual stability of three of these four parties can be regarded as still being in balance. Given that Pujol retired in 2003 only and given that his party was regional and not national, it is not clear whether it will be able to last or whether it will merge with the rest of the Right (though the CSU in Bavaria – not a party based on a leader, despite the part played by Strauss originally - has

remained distinct from the CDU). As Berlusconi's and Simeon's parties were set up respectively in 1993 and 2000, one may maintain that both these organisations will shortly disappear and, in any case, not survive their leader. The same cannot be said of the Gaullist party, which did not only survive its leader but did survive splits and fratricidal clashes (at least one of these having been directly engineered by Chirac who, subsequently, tried but did not really succeed in putting the pieces together). As the Peronist party, the Gaullist party is the living proof that parties based on personalities can be maintained for a long time; but, unlike the Peronist party, De Gaulle's party has thrived or at least remained afloat in an 'advanced' liberal democracy, admittedly a liberal democracy which never had a solid party system even if the party system of that country is perhaps no longer markedly weaker than that of countries, such as the Scandinavian countries, which had been the textbook examples of strong, rock-like party systems.

It is therefore no exaggeration to state that parties based on their leaders are an important feature, even if a minority feature, of the landscape of European politics, East and West. Leaders play a part in strengthening parties which have long existed but seem in difficulty and they do so, in a number of cases, by means of forcing in effect these parties to adopt policies which seem to correspond to the new preoccupations of many citizens and are typically very different from, even opposed to the policies which these parties had hitherto followed. Leaders also play a part – and apparently an increasingly important one – in setting up parties which are at the margin of politics, typically on the Right and even Extreme-Right, parties of the Left, either those of a Marxist character, which are typically very small or the Greens, having eschewed, officially at least, having a strong personal leadership. The fact that new parties are set up around leaders is a further indication that the classical view of the development of parties based on cleavages is no longer valid. The traditional parties, still based on cleavages, tend to lose ground while the new parties, which extol the new preoccupations of electors tend to gain, even if sporadically. To this extent at least, the European picture has become markedly more complex, not just in terms of the number of parties, but in terms of their character. A new picture must therefore be gradually drawn.

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Much research still needs to be undertaken before one can begin to describe accurately the contours of the parties and party systems in Europe, East and West. We noted in several occasions that there is a manifest need to elaborate reliable and precise indicators of the involvement of leaders in political parties. There is a continuous range from no influence to total domination. There appear to be variations over time of the role of the same leader in a given party, a point which could not be

examined here, again because of the lack of precise indicators: yet these variations are surely sizeable and their measurement would be revealing about the ‘cycles’ of influence of leaders on parties. There is also, as was indicated, the part played by others than the leader of the party as such, either in conjunction with or in opposition to the leader. It is to be hoped that there will be a development of such indicators in the near future and that this will render the analysis of the role of personalities in European parties appreciably more realistic.

For it is the realism of the theory of parties that is in question. The analyses conducted in the 1950s and 1960s made it possible to understand what had happened previously: these analyses are simply unable to provide answers to what is happening currently. It is not just that the separation between Europe, on the one hand, and the rest of the world, on the other, in terms of parties and party systems is wholly unsatisfactory from a theoretical point of view and counterproductive from a practical point of view. It is also that the classical theory has made it impossible to take on board the political, social and cultural changes which have occurred in Europe in the course of the second half of the twentieth century. It is high time that a new model be set in train. The importance of parties in democracies is such that theory and models cannot be permitted to fail to account for what parties are becoming in the part of the world where parties were born.

**Table 2 Panorama of Party Systems in Europe**

*a) West*

	Stable	Some erosion	More erosion	Wholly different
North (7)	Ice, Fin	Irl, S, GB (elect. syst.)	N. DK	-
Original EEC (6)	Lux, F (elect.syst.)	D	B. NL	I
South (6)	GR, E, P, Malta	CH	A	-
TOTAL (19)	7	7	4	1

*b) East*

	Stable	Some erosion	More erosion	Wholly different
East-Central (8)	Slovenia	Czech, H, Slovakia	3 baltics	PL
Balkans (7)	Macedonia, Bos-Her, CY	Albania	Moldova	Rum, BG
TOTAL (15)	4	4	4	3

GRAND TOTAL (34)	11	11	8	3
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Note: Serbia and Croatia cannot still to be classified

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