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## Article Two: Individual Membership in Europarties. Evidence from the European Greens<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction<sup>2</sup>

'Political parties at European level' (Europarties) are a recent phenomenon in European politics. This official category was introduced in 1992 by the Treaty of Maastricht, which stipulates: 'Political parties at the European level are important as a factor for integration within the Union. They contribute to forming a European awareness and to expressing the political will of the citizens of the Union.' (Treaty of the European Union (TEU) 1992, Article 138a). These organisations are offered an official legal status and a financial assistance since 2004 (European Commission 2003). Since 2008 Europarties are also strengthened by affiliated political foundations (Gagatek and Van Hecke 2014). According to the EU regulation concerning these organizations from 2014, 'truly transnational European political parties and their affiliated European political foundations have a key role to play in articulating the voices of citizens at European level by bridging the gap between politics at national level and at Union level'<sup>3</sup>, and therefore should be encouraged and assisted, notably by a strengthened legal status.

The development of Europarties and party politics dynamics at the EU-level is often considered a necessary development towards the democratisation of the EU political system in view of the shift of political power from the state-level to the EU level (Schmidt 2006; Follesdal and Hix 2006; Mair 2007; Hooghe and Marks 2008; Crum 2013). The traditional core function of political parties is narrowing the gap between ordinary citizens and the political institutions in a given polity (Manin 1995, Muller and Strom 1999). Hence, in theory, Europarties may be the 'missing link' or the mediators between citizens across the EU and politics at the EU-level (Bartolini 2005; Hix 2008; Bardi et al. 2010; K ulahci and Lightfoot 2014).

How Europarties reach out to EU citizens? Given that in the elections to the European Parliament (EP) citizens are invited to choose between different national lists and not transnational ones, Europarties, unlike national parties, cannot ask EU citizens to vote for them. However, similar to national parties, Europarties can offer individual citizens across the EU some form of membership in the organisation (Speht 2005). How and to which extent Europarties develop schemes of

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2 Previous versions of this article were presented in the Swedish Network for European Studies (SNES) conference, Brussels, 7-9 April 2014; PADEMIA (Parliamentary Democracy in Europe) annual conference, Brussels, 12-13 June 2014; THESEUS PhD workshop, Centre d'Etudes Europ ennes (CEE), Sciences-Po, Paris, 16-17 October 2014. I especially thank Jan Rovny, Olivier Rozenberg, Alfredo Joignant, Ben Crum and Niilo Kauppi for their useful comments on the previous versions of this chapter.

3 See Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 1141/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations (2014), OJ L 317/1; See also the corresponding European Parliament resolution of 16 April 2014 on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations and the EU.

individual membership? This article examines the development of individual membership schemes in Europarties by an in-depth case-study of the European Green Party (EGP), analysing its policy of individual membership via its Individual Supporters' Network (ISN). This research is based on a political sociology approach to EU studies (see Kauppi 2005; Saurugger 2008; Kauppi and Madsen, 2008; Mérand and Saurugger 2010; Rowell and Mangenot 2010; Zimmermann and Favell 2011; Georgakakis 2012). The focus of this sociological approach is less on the EU's formal institutional arrangements but rather on how actors actually use these arrangements in practice.

Empirically, the article is based on three different methods: ethnographic fieldwork, interviews and a survey, the combination of which provides me with unique data on the underline mechanisms of individual membership in Europarties. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the EGP between November 2011 to November 2013 using qualitative sociological methods. Participant observations *in situ* in the EGP were conducted, which involved major EGP meetings like the EGP congress in Paris (November 2011) and three consecutive EGP councils: in Athens (November 2012), Madrid (May 2013) and Brussels (November 2013). With particular regard to the topic of this article, participant observation also took place at several meetings of the coordination team of the ISN: a few physical meetings in Brussels and during the EGP councils as well as several on-line. In addition, participant observation was conducted during email correspondences of the ISN coordination team. As a complement to this EU-level perspective, I also participated at the French Greens' summer university in Marseille, in August 2013. These participant observations were complemented by 28 in-depth interviews with actors within the EGP, numerous informal discussions, and consultation of EGP official documents such as the statutes and EGP council resolutions related to the individual membership option. In addition to ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, I also conducted a survey among all Green parties in Europe that are members of the EGP, collecting data on their positions towards the EGP individual membership option in general as well as on their practices towards the ISN in particular. I have collected answers from 32 Green parties (out of a total of 45 EGP member parties), a response rate of approximately 70% (for more information on the survey administration see the appendix of this article).

This article is structured as follows. First, I present the scientific debate on Europarties. The next section offers an introduction to European party membership in general and a short comparison of the major Europarties' schemes of individual membership. I then introduce the case of the EGP as a 'most-likely' case to evaluate the Europarties' capacity to link with citizens. The actual analysis then turns to the EGP scheme of individual membership, its emergence and its implementation in practice. Explanations of the limited success of the EGP's individual membership follow, before moving to some concluding remarks.

## **Europarties between optimistic and pessimistic approaches**

Current empirical research of Europarties mainly focus on their parliamentary component, the political groups in the EP (EP groups). Scholars testify of the EP groups' process of consolidation and institutionalisation over time (Raunio 1997; Hix and Lord 1997; Bell and Lord 1998; Bardi 2002; Hix et al. 2007; Hanley 2008; Sozzi 2013; Bressanelli 2014). However, this process is observable only within the institutional environment of the EP. The consolidation of the EP groups tells us little of the linkage function of Europarties since the day-to-day parliamentary activities of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are largely ignored by their national parties organizations (Poguntke et al. 2007; Miklin and Crum 2011), including the parties' national parliamentarians (Raunio 2002; Crum and Fossum 2013), not to speak of rank and file party members or ordinary citizens (Costa 2009; Priestly 2010; Gattermann and Vasilopoulou 2014). The extra-parliamentary component of Europarties, often referred to as the 'transnational party federations', has gained much less scholarly attention so far (but see Delwit et al. 2004; Gagatsek 2009; Van Hecke 2010; Hertner 2011; Bartolini 2012; Timus and Lightfoot 2014; Day 2014).

The debate on Europarties' extra-parliamentary component can be divided between optimistic and pessimistic approaches. Some scholars are optimistic, analysing Europarties as new transnational political parties in a long-term process of institutionalization, professionalisation and consolidation, slowly developing from loose and weak federations of national parties, 'parties of parties', into genuine political parties, fulfilling the different classical functions of political parties in an emerging transnational party system at the EU-level (See Bardi et al. 2010). Optimistic scholars tend to treat Europarties as a project in the making, wondering if they are already 'fully developed' into 'parties in their own right' (Hertner 2011); are they already 'real parties' (Leinen and Pescher 2014) or 'truly transnational parties' (Day 2014). For instance, Luciano Bardi (1994, 1996, 2002, 2004) argues that Europarties are transnational political parties in an embryonic phase, *on their way* to becoming fully fledged parties. These scholars' approach is to analyse these organisations as new political parties, and not as alliances or federations of national parties, hence following their formal definition in the EU law.

While the optimistic approach to Europarties sees them in a process of steadily becoming fully fledged parties, the pessimistic approach to Europarties refers to these organisations merely as federations of national parties, loose umbrella organisations of parties of the same party 'family' (Van Hecke 2010). Even scholars who argue that the Europarties have significant influence on policy-making still consider them merely as umbrella organisations of national political parties (Johansson 2002). Scholars highlight these organisations' weaknesses and dependence on the institutional environment of the EP (Delwit et al. 2004; Bartolini 2012). For instance, Stefano

Bartolini (2012: 326) highlights the artificial nature of Europarties as top-down constructions, 'the product of the institutional environment of the EU which have no hope of survival outside it'. According to this critical approach, 'the Council and the Commission offered support and institutional recognition of the Europarties in exchange for indirect popular legitimacy' (Bartolini 2012: 162). Other scholars of this approach also do not analyse these organisations as political parties in an embryonic phase but are rather interested in the organisations' process of institutionalisation and official recognition by the EU institutions (Johansson and Raunio 2005, Roa Bastos 2012) analysing how they use the label 'party', or 'party-like' features, as a mean of legitimisation (Delwit 1998).<sup>4</sup>

A certain longitudinal assumption is underpinning the scientific debate on Europarties' development, namely that they are eventually bound to become fully functioning parties in the future. This longitudinal assumption is also the main justification given by EU practitioners to their decisions to further strengthen these organizations through legal and financial arrangements despite their limited development so far (Leinen and Schönlau 2003; Priestley 2010; Schmidt-Jevtic 2012; Leinen and Pescher 2014). The analysis of Europarties in terms of a longitudinal process gives us only limited insights into their actual practices, what they are already doing right now, and to which extent the Europarties' limited performance of party functions may be changed by certain institutional reforms, strengthening them further legally and financially, and to which extent these organisations' difficulties are structural and are here to stay. The study of Europarties' schemes of individual membership, attempting to reach out directly to EU citizens, provides empirical evidence into the debate between optimistic and pessimistic approaches.

### **Individual membership in Europarties.**

The scientific literature affirms a strong decline in party membership in Western European democracies (Scarrow 2000; Mair and Van Biezen 2001; Whiteley 2011; Van Biezen et al. 2012). Today's professional parties may well continue to seek members, but these members' role in the parties is very different from the one in the 'mass party' model (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010). Enrolled members are not so crucial as in the past for the parties' organization and electoral success and their main function today is to provide their party with some symbolic popular legitimacy. Despite the general decline of party membership in Western democracies and the limited need of parties to establish mass membership, Europarties have introduced various initiatives to link directly with individual citizens (see table 2.1).

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the current EGP logo from 2004 with the text 'European Green Party', is to be replaced in 2016 by a new logo, with the text 'European Greens'. Hence, the 'party' label is to be omitted in the new communication strategy. See EGP Technical Revision to the EGP Statutes, 'Proposed refreshed logo European Green Party', EGP Council, Glasgow, 2-4 December 2016.

**Table 2.1: Europarties and individual membership**

EU-party	Name of members	Conditions to membership	Number of individuals
EPP	Supporting members	Members of the EP group (MEPs)	217
PES	Activists	Members of national party only	60000
ALDE	Individual members	Open to all citizens	1900
EGP	Supporters	Members of national party only	1100
EL	Individual Members	Open to all citizens	120

Source: information from Europarties' officials, by email to the author, updated April 2015.

Due to the large variety of schemes of individual membership among Europarties and the lack of systematic research on this question it is unclear what these official policies actually mean in practice. For instance, the individual members of the European People's Party (EPP) are its EP group's 217 MEPs<sup>5</sup> (Dietz 2000). This individual membership policy of the largest Europarty to date is a rather exclusive interpretation of the definition of individual membership in Europarties, very different in comparison to the individual membership policy of the second largest Europarty, the Party of European Socialists (PES). A rather vague provision in the PES' statutes indicates that 'all members of PES member parties are automatically members of the PES. Those who wish to be active in the PES can register as PES activists'.<sup>6</sup> There are currently almost 60,000 such 'PES activists' who may be organised in city groups across the EU.<sup>7</sup> However, empirical research on the PES activists scheme in practice indicates that the scope of their activity is small while the policy is inherent with tensions (see Hertner 2011, 2012, 2014; K ulahci and Lighfoot 2014). For instance, the SPD leadership regards the PES activists with suspicion and does not integrate the PES activists into the party structure, worrying about parallel structures outside the party organisation, while the British Labour Party only tolerates a loose cooperation with the PES activists in the UK (Hertner 2011: 340). Moreover, the geographic spread of the PES activists is very uneven across EU countries, as the majority of the PES activists are from France, Romania, Sweden and Portugal (Hertner 2014).

An interesting case is the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party's individual members.<sup>8</sup> According to the ALDE Party statutes, individual members' delegates take

5 According to the statutes of the EPP, 'all members of the EPP group in the European Parliament elected on a list of a member party are also members ex officio of the association (hereinafter referred to as "individual members")'. See EPP statutes as approved by the EPP congress on 21 October 2015 in Madrid, article 5 on admission and full members.

6 See PES statutes as adopted by the PES congress on 12 June 2015, article 18.

7 See 'the operating rules for PES activists' adopted by the PES Presidency on 18 February 2013.

8 See ALDE party statutes as amended on 21 November 2015, article 5.

part in the meetings of the organisation, have the right to voice their opinion and to vote. The creation in 2014 of a 'steering committee of individual members' of ALDE Party<sup>9</sup>, composed of five members who were elected in November 2015, as well as the specific provisions related to the exact numbers of delegates allocated to individual members in the Congress and the Council<sup>10</sup> indicate that the individual membership option in the case of ALDE party seems to have a certain existence in practice beyond just a vague formal provision in the organisation's statutes<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, individual membership in the case of the Party of the European Left (EL) seems to exist on paper only. While the statutes of the EL includes a vague provision of individual membership<sup>12</sup>, in practice the EL has only 120 individual members, coming from 24 different countries.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly to the case of ALDE party, the European Green Party (EGP) also has its own centralised structure, the Individual Supporters Network (ISN), which formally coordinates the EGP's approximately 1100 supporters across Europe. However, beyond these formal provisions and numbers, the reality is slightly different.

### **The case of the European Greens and its Individual Supporters Network**

The political family of the Greens may be considered a most likely case in order to study the ability of Europarties to link with citizens mainly due to the Greens' particular attachment to grassroots democracy (*Basisdemokratie*). Historically, Green parties emerged in several Western European countries around the same period, late 1970s, out of pan-European social and protest movements (Kitschelt 1986). Because of these historical origins, the Green parties are especially attached to grassroots democracy and have a strong linkage with civil society (Richardson and Rootes 1995; Frankland et al. 2008). Moreover, also due to the Greens' focus on environmental issues, which is particularly apt for the EU-level of governance, the Greens perform rather well in EP elections (Curtice 1989). As for the Greens' specific political agenda, across Western Europe, Green parties promote a new political cleavage, ecology/economy, or nature/market, which can be considered an emerging pan-European cleavage (Seiler 2005).

All these elements suggest that there are relatively good conditions to a possible development of a pan-European Green party organisation which tries to reach out to individual citizens across Europe, as is also illustrated in the following quote of EGP Co-Chair, MEP Reinhardt Bütikofer:

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9 See <http://www.aldeparty.eu/en/steering-committee-individual-members> (accessed 10 March 2016).

10 See ALDE party internal regulation as modified by the Party Council meeting in Budapest, 19 November 2015.

11 Arguably, the main function of the ALDE Party individual membership scheme is to provide a political platform for individuals in EU countries in which there is no liberal political party.

12 Statute of the EL, article 6, alinea 7.

13 Email from EL staff, March 12, 2015.

My idea of a strong EGP is not Brussels-focused, but is built on cooperation and networking. The European Union is a union of member states as well as a union of citizens. The EGP should work on both dimensions. In our European cooperation, we must not forget to provide political added value for Greens on the ground, in movements, in municipalities and in regions. This includes further developing the individual membership option, to offer European Green activists a greater scope for active involvement.<sup>14</sup>

The Greens' federal structure at the EU-level has gone through a similar process of institutionalisation and professionalisation as the other EU-level partisan organizations (Dietz 1997, 2000; Van De Walle 2001). The EGP was officially founded in February 2004. As such, it succeeded the European Federation of Green Parties (EFGP), founded in 1993, which was an institutionalisation of the European Green Coordination (EGC), founded ten years earlier. At the moment of writing, the EGP is composed of 45 member parties. Unlike other Europarties, EGP membership is not limited to EU countries only. As all Europarties, the EGP is financially dependent on the EP annual grants.<sup>15</sup>

The EGP's Individual Supporters Network (ISN) started as a tiny local, bottom-up cross-border initiative of a few Green activists living in the cross-border triangle region of the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany.<sup>16</sup> In January 2002 a few members of the Dutch Green party *GroenLinks* and a few members of the Green parties from Germany and Belgium had a joint meeting in the town of Heerlen, the Netherlands, close to the border. This small group of Green activists established the 'Heerlen Group', a cross-border coordination team, mainly from the Netherlands and the Aachen region of Germany. The main activities of this group were holding annual meetings. Later, this unofficial group got an official statute as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), which enabled it to obtain some financial resources for its activities, mainly through financial support from Dutch Green MEPs. The 'Heerlen Group' officially joined the EGP in 2009, becoming the EGP's 'Individual Supporters Network' (ISN). Since then, the organisation has obtained financial aid directly from the EGP budget and technical and administrative assistance from the EGP office in Brussels.

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14 EGP Co-Chair, Reinhardt Bütikofer, statement of motivation for re-election for a second mandate in the Lyon Council, November 2015.

15 The EP annual grants to the EGP have grown from around 0.5 million euros in 2005 to almost two million euros in 2014. In the EP, Green parties are in a joint parliamentary group together with regional parties of the European Free Alliance (EFA). Following the 2014 elections, Greens/EFA is composed of 50 MEPs from 17 EU countries and 25 different political parties.

16 Based on interviews 6, 7, 8 and 10. Also see: <http://isn.europeangreens.eu/about-us-2/about-us/history> (last accessed 26 January 2013).



The official recognition of individual members in the EGP rule book gives us a first impression of the importance these individual members have in the EGP organisational structure in comparison to membership of national parties. The EGP rule book, a 63-page document, begins with ten pages on membership of national parties (EGP 2011). In fact, the EGP has four different categories of membership for national parties: full members, candidate members, associate members and special members. The EGP rule book has detailed articles on national parties' membership criteria, members' rights and obligations according to the different categories, the procedure for admitting new members, possible sanctions, as well as a detailed table with membership fees and reimbursement guidelines for participation in EGP activities. A party's membership category has practical effects on the reimbursement rules applicable to it, for instance, to which extent the EGP covers the costs related to the party's delegates' participation in EGP councils (interview 9). On page 28 of the EGP rule book, under section 12, which deals with the EGP's working groups and networks, we find article 33, entitled 'The European Green Party and individuals', which stipulates:

33.1 The European Green Party has a delegated structure. Members are represented in the EGP through their delegates. The European Green Party therefore is not open for individual membership. However having outreach to green minded European citizens as one of its main legal objectives, individuals are welcome to participate within the EGP and, if they are members of an EGP Member Party, in the Individual Supporters Network.

33.2 Participation in the decision making process is exclusively held for Full Members of the European Green Party. Individuals who wish to participate in the decision making process can do this via the democratic representation of the Full Members in the European Green Party structures.

In the candid words of EGP co-chair, Reinhard Bütikofer, 'the ISN definition in the rulebook is so perfectly vague that it includes everything and nothing'.<sup>17</sup> Besides their general vagueness, there is clearly a tension in these provisions. On the one hand, the EGP is a federation of national parties, not open for individual membership. Individuals who wish to participate in the decision-making process of the EGP are invited to do so via their national parties' delegates of the federation. In principle, members of national parties have access to certain channels to be involved in EU politics via their national party structures. For instance, party members can join their national parties' working groups on EU issues and thus be informed on the EU-level activities of their parties.

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17 Participant observation, an ISN meeting in an EGP Council, Lyon, 13 November 2015.

Eventually, party members can become the official EGP delegates of their party and be directly involved in the EGP activities.

Nevertheless, the EGP leaves open the possibility for individuals to participate directly in the EGP via the ISN, which has some formal inroads into the EGP decision-making process. It is important to note that individual membership in the EGP is not open to all EU citizens but only to enrolled members of national parties which are EGP members. Thus, individual membership in the EGP is rather a secondary party membership, in addition to the primary membership in the national party.

### **The implementation of the EGP individual membership**

The first EGP Council after its official establishment in 2004 took place in Dublin following the EP elections, in November of that year. This Council adopted a resolution entitled 'supportership implementation':

An individual living in a European country where a member or observer party exists, can only become a supporter through that party. The admission criteria and practicalities regarding registration, collection of the supportership fee etc. shall be decided and managed by the respective national or regional party. [...] No more than every two months, but at least every six months, EGP member and observer parties shall provide the EGP secretariat with the data regarding the individual supporters. [...] The parties have to collect the fees and send this money plus the email address of each supporter to the EGP.<sup>18</sup>

According to this EGP resolution, individuals are to be enrolled in the EGP in two stages. First, national parties enrol the 'EGP supporters' among their members and administrate their contact details and annual fees. Then, the national parties are to transfer to the EGP the contact details of the 'EGP supporters' among their party members as well as their additional annual fees. After this second stage, the ISN manages these individuals directly in a centralised manner with technical assistance from the EGP office.

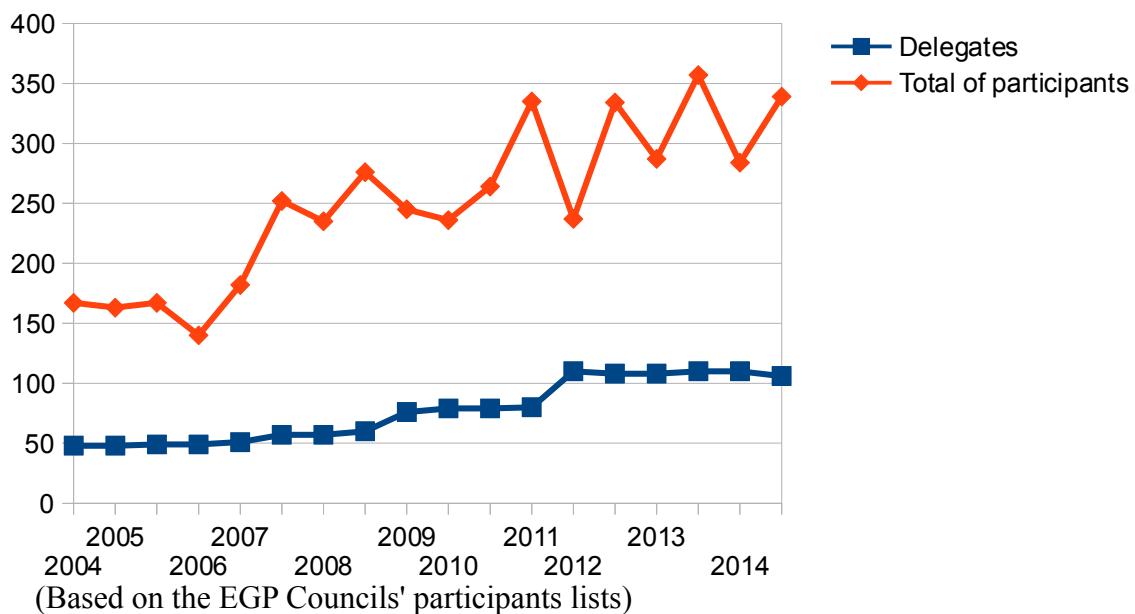
Formally, the ISN central organisation has its own budget coming from the supporters' annual fees and possible additional funding from the EGP for specific activities. The ISN also has a transnational coordination team, composed of twelve members: eight individual supporters, three members nominated by the EGP committee, and one nominated by the EP group. The ISN has some agenda-setting powers in the EGP since it 'has the right to table resolutions and amendments in

<sup>18</sup> <http://isn.europeangreens.eu/about-us-2/about-us/register-as-an-egp-supporter/supportership-implementation-resolution> (accessed 24 February 2014).

council on subjects of relevance to it' (EGP 2011: 28), but it does not have voting rights in the EGP councils.

However, since its creation in 2004 the development of the ISN remained limited in practice. Despite the formal agenda-setting powers of the ISN in EGP decision-making, in practice, the network never uses any of these formal rights. According to an EGP official, 'the ISN has a prominent place in the EGP rule book but a marginal one in Council and party members' (interview 16). In many respects, the EGP councils twice a year are the only moments in time where the EGP actually exists outside its office in Brussels. It is in the EGP councils that the main decisions on the EGP are officially approved by votes of the national parties' delegates. One way to evaluate the participation of individual citizens in the EGP is by looking at the turnout of EGP councils. A close observation of the number of participants of these EGP meetings gives us a good overview on how many individuals who are not parties' delegates actually take part in these meetings, notably in comparison to national parties' official delegates.

**Figure 2.1: Number of participants in EGP councils (2004-2014).**



In absolute numbers, the number of participants in EGP councils doubled between 2004 and 2014, from approximately 170 in 2004 to around 350 in 2014. The number of the parties' official delegates grew from 48 in 2004 to 106 in 2014. This entails that the number of participants who were not official party delegates more than doubled as well as it grew from around 120 in 2004 to approximately 300 in 2014. Once in five years, EGP meetings are congresses, which attract around 500 participants. The turnout in these events also show similar trend of steady growth. This indicates a growing interest in the EGP, also among individuals who are not the parties' official

delegates. Nevertheless, a closer look at the participation lists indicate that very few of these individuals actually took part in the Council in the capacity of 'EGP individual supporters' or 'ISN members'. Rather, these individuals are part of their national party delegation but without being officially nominated as delegates, or they take part in the EGP council in another capacity, mostly as invited speaker, as staffers of the Green Group in the EP (GGEP), or as part of another organisation in the Green party 'family' such as the Green European Foundation (GEF), the Federation of the Young European Greens (FYEG), the Global Greens (GG), etc.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, while the ISN has annual meetings in different cities across Europe, there are often very few individuals attending these meetings besides the ISN team itself, which organizes the event, in addition to the invited speakers (interview 16). For instance, at the ISN annual meeting of 2010 in Amsterdam, there were around 50 participants, almost all of them Dutch (interview 20). A new ISN member from Germany, who came for the first time to an ISN activity, was surprised since he expected a bigger and a more international event. Instead, he found a small Dutch public with a few external speakers and organisers. According to a parliamentary assistant of a Green MEP, the ISN is not doing anything useful besides 'paying its members nice holidays in nice places in Europe' (interview 21). Leaving the ISN, this person explained his decision in these words: 'The main idea behind the ISN is to bring individuals closer to the EGP. [...] we have been addressing council members and people that are already involved in the Greens at the international level. In my perspective they are not our main group of people to address. [...] I will take a break from our structure in which I don't see much sense anymore' (interview 22).

The ISN also has difficulties to coordinate its already few activities with the national parties. For instance, in 2012 the ISN decided to organise its annual conference in Vienna, Austria, with the idea to attract Green activists from the neighbouring Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries (interview 28). However, during the preparation of the conference it was revealed that, despite previous oral understandings, the Viennese Greens decided not to cooperate with the ISN, not to let the ISN use their local in the city, 'the Greenhouse', as the conference venue, and were not ready to ask their party members to host participants coming to their city from CEE countries. Despite organisational efforts and a preparatory visit to Vienna of three ISN members in February 2012, the conference, which was originally scheduled to take place in April 2012, was first postponed, and was eventually cancelled all together. An EGP staff suggested that the Viennese Greens refused to cooperate since they see the ISN as a Brussels-based organization with substantive financial means which tries to use the local Greens in order to organize its own events (interview 28). Another ISN member explained the lack of willingness from the Austrian Greens by their own strength: 'the Greens in Vienna do not need the ISN to organise a conference. They are strong enough.' (interview

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<sup>19</sup> The participant observations conducted in a few EGP councils indicate that the numbers of individuals and their official title which appear in the participation lists are relatively accurate data.

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The overall state of affairs is thus that the ISN activities in practice remain small in number and rather party-internal and elite-oriented. With almost no external activities, the ISN is mainly focused on internal meetings, internal documents and discussions - on the organisation's official name, goal, strategy, structure and some update of its website (interviews 7, 10, 19), a 'closed shop' of a few individuals (interview 16). Despite its low level of external activity, the ISN is still officially present in the EGP councils. For instance, during the EGP council in Lyon, in November 2015, the ISN had a meeting under the title 'Restart' with the participation of 16 people<sup>20</sup>, most of them parties' delegates and official representatives.

### **Explaining the ISN's limited success (I): The ambiguous interests of national parties**

Much of the limited effects of the EGP's policy of individual membership can be accounted for by the lack of interest of national parties. The integration of the 'Heerlen Group' into the EGP, becoming the ISN, was a difficult and long process, which took almost three years of discussions, mainly because of skepticism and reluctance from national parties to the idea to invite individuals inside the EGP structure. In the ISN's own words on the process:

Some EGP member parties turned out to have serious doubts about the idea, fearing that individuals might undermine their position within the EGP, or that political enemies might join *en masse* through the European door and harm their position back home. Others were afraid that energy put into European action would sap forces needed for their own program. And yet others, the majority, were simply not interested or put the issue at the bottom of their priority list.<sup>21</sup>

The tension between a certain ambition to develop EGP individual membership and the reluctance of EGP member parties towards such an option is also clear in the following quote of the EGP Secretary General from 2009 to 2014, Jacqueline Cremers, which reveals the disagreements within the EGP on the idea of individual membership and the reluctance of national parties to adhere to this policy:

We have a delegate function as European Green party. That's good. We agreed to stay that way and we won't have individual members who adhere to the European Green party. So, there is a broad agreement among all of us. Maybe with the exception of me. Because I

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20 Participant observation, Lyon, 13 November 2015.

21 <http://isn.europeangreens.eu/about-us-2/about-us/history> (accessed 22 February 2014).

think we should have individual members. But the rest of the family agrees (Laughs).

They are afraid of this individual network. (EGP secretary General, Jacqueline Cremers, cited in Heusquin, 2013: 94).

Hence, the vague and somewhat contradictory provisions on individual membership in the EGP and the limited implementation of the individual membership scheme in practice can be explained, to a large extent, by hesitations and concerns among national Green parties' towards the idea of individual membership of the EGP. As Luciano Bardi (2002) argued, Europarties are in potential competition with their national counterparts. An analysis of the findings of the survey among Green parties reveal the scope of this potential competition.

The Green parties' general attitudes towards the idea of individual membership in the EGP vary widely (see table 2). Half of the parties which took part in the survey express a clearly positive position towards the idea, while 40% of the parties express a generally positive opinion towards the idea in principle but immediately add some concerns or conditions in regards to this scheme and its implementation in practice. While only three Green parties express clear opposition in principle towards the very idea of individual membership in the EGP, two of these parties are particularly strong Green parties, the Swedish and the Austrian. Finally, officials of the relatively strong Green Party of England and Wales (GPEW) reply that the party does not have any elaborated position on this issue.

**Table 2.2: EGP member parties' appreciation of the ISN-scheme**

<b>Position</b>	<b>N (%)</b>
Outright positive	15 (47%)
Positive with caveat	13 (40%)
Negative	3 (10%)
No position	1 (3%)
Total	32 (100%)

The Green parties with clearly positive positions towards EGP individual membership mainly mention the possible benefits for their own national structures and for the EGP, arguing that the ISN may be an additional resource of volunteers for the EP elections' campaign. The parties which express a generally positive position but also express their reluctance mainly indicate that individual membership in the EGP risks to compete with their own party organisation over resources such as membership fees. Some parties also mentioned concern that the ISN may be a group of 'disgruntled former members of national political parties that bring their grievances from national to European level'. As for the parties which express opposition in principle to the idea of EGP individual membership policy, the Austrian Greens reply that they are very skeptical about the idea and do not see the possible advantages of this additional organisation while the Swedish Greens simply reply that 'the EGP should be a party of parties and not of individuals'.<sup>22</sup>

A large variety is found among Green parties' preferences towards the practicalities of the ISN-scheme (see table 3). While the slight majority of Green parties answer that EGP individual membership should be open to all citizens, a large minority of the parties answer that EGP membership should be conditioned by membership in one of the national parties. Some parties express concern of losing control over EGP individual members from their country. For instance, Austrian Greens are worried of possible 'conflicts concerning people having different viewpoints than the national parties'.

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22 International secretary, *Miljöpartiet de Gröna*, Email exchange, 23 January 2015.

**Table 2.3: EGP member parties' preferences with regard to the ISN-scheme**

	<b>In favour</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>No position</b>	<b>Total</b>
Membership open to all citizens (including non-members of national parties)	18 (56%)	12 (37%)	2 (7%)	32 (100%)
Members should have participation rights in national candidate selection procedures for EP elections	12 (37%)	18 (56%)	2 (7%)	32 (100%)
Centralised membership structure	21 (65%)	9 (28%)	2 (7%)	32 (100%)
Active information policy on ISN	6 (19%)	26 (81%)	-	32 (100%)

As for the individual members' rights, the majority of Green parties does not esteem that EGP individual members should have any particular role in the selection process of their candidates to the EP elections, while a substantial minority of parties answer positively. When we look more closely at the parties' preferences we find that among the 12 Green parties which have seats in the EP, ten answer negatively on this issue. Notably, the two largest Green parties, the German and the French, oppose the idea. On the other hand, among the 20 Green parties which do not have any seat in the EP, ten parties answer positively, eight answer negatively and two more have no position. This result indicates that the well established Green parties are more reluctant to concede rights to EGP individual members than the weaker parties, which arguably do not have much to lose anyways.

With regard to the organisation of the individual membership scheme, the large majority of Green parties prefers a centralised membership structure under the EGP office, including members' annual fees and email contacts, while only nine parties prefer the organisational structure to remain at the national level. An interesting reply comes from the Luxembourg Greens, in favour of centralised organisation but highlight the need for a transparent flow of information from the member parties: 'Everything else will not work, as is shown by the actual situation in the Netherlands and in Germany where the ISN is applied but the EGP does not get any information and mostly no money either, and if EGP got part of the money in the past, it was without any proof or numbers or names, contacts'<sup>23</sup>. This answer sheds light on the scope of technical and financial difficulties involved in the implementation of Europarties' individual membership scheme which every national party seems to implement in its own way and according to its own interests.

The survey's findings indicate that the generally positive position towards the ISN in

<sup>23</sup> EGP staffers confirmed in informal discussions that the EGP request to obtain from these national parties the contact lists of the 'EGP supporters' among their members were not successful.



principle, expressed by the parties' officials, is not necessarily accompanied by any meaningful attempt to actually implement this policy in practice, to endorse it or to advertise it among party members. In fact, national Green parties do not implement the EGP resolution from 2004 on the practical aspects of individual membership in the EGP and do not inform their party members on the ISN. While all 32 party representatives who took part in the survey (100% of respondents) answered that they know about the existence of EGP individual membership scheme, the ISN<sup>24</sup>, Green parties do not inform their party members of the ISN and do not give them the possibility to join it. In the survey, the large majority of the parties' officials replied that their party does not inform its members on the ISN.<sup>25</sup>

All in all, the positive position towards the ISN in principle, expressed by many Green parties' officials, is not accompanied by much genuine interest in seeing the ISN develop or by any genuine acceptance of the possibility that EGP individual members may have a say on the parties' selection procedures of candidates for EP elections. While the parties accept the idea of the individual membership option in principle, they express concerns about losing the control over their own flow of resources and individual party members. Indeed, a substantial number of national parties sees the EGP as an attempt to reach out to citizens, as a potential competition with their own organisational structures, and are not interested in the effective development of the ISN (interview 12). While some parties' representatives show a reluctance and even a certain opposition to the idea, in general, though, national Green parties simply show a general lack of interest in the entire initiative and often have no particularly elaborated position on it. Some Green parties' officials explained in their responses to the survey that their party invests its limited resources in domestic politics and that the ISN is simply not a priority for them.

### **Explaining the ISN's limited success (II): Party members' lack of interest**

National parties' lack of interest vis-a-vis the individual membership policy of the Europarty they are affiliated with is only one part of the story. The second explanation for the limited development of the individual membership in Europarties is the actual lack of interest among party members. Even when the ISN manages to reach out directly to party members, they show little interest to

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24 However, some party members who were present in the EGP council in Lyon and answered the survey declared not being aware of the ISN.

25 In the survey, six (out of 32) of the parties' officials answered that they do inform their members about the ISN. It is plausible that these parties' officials were careful in their answers to the survey since they suspected the information they provided in their written replies may be eventually available to the EGP office. This is particularly plausible since the printed survey was handed out in during an EGP Council. Among the six parties which declared to inform their party members on the ISN five are small Green parties - from Italy, Greece, Romania, Serbia and Russia - which might be worried of critics from the EGP. However, German Greens also declared informing their members of the ISN. This may not be surprising, though, considering the party's usage in practice of the ISN as part of its own internal party structure, keeping the ISN members' fees and email addresses within the national party structure.

enrol as EGP supporters. For instance, the ISN was present, together with the EGP, at the summer university of the French Greens, *Europe-Ecologie-Les-Verts* (EELV) in 2013. Many EELV members had never heard about the EGP before and did not understand what it means that a pan-European party exists in the first place.<sup>26</sup> EELV members who were aware of the existence of the EGP saw it as a federation of national parties, of which EELV is a full member, and did not see much sense in individual membership in such a federal structure as they considered themselves already members of the EGP via their national party. Other EELV members thought that the EGP is a brand new party in French politics. As one EGP staffer explains: 'this is nothing new with the people in France. It already happened to us a year ago and two years ago [at the EELV summer university]. They think it is a new French party which competes with EELV' (interview 13). During this summer university, the presentation of the EGP to EELV members, represented personally by EGP Secretary General, Jaqueline Cremers, took place at the same time as the main plenary of the summer university with speeches by the party's two ministers. The meeting of the EGP attracted only eight party members, all of them already knew about the EGP and were present in EGP councils in the past<sup>27</sup>.

In Spain, approximately 210 members of the Spanish Green party, EQUO, attended the EGP council in Madrid in May 2013, besides the parties' official delegates from all over Europe.<sup>28</sup> However, these rank and file party members mainly participated in the debates which were organised by EQUO on the most nationally salient issue of the financial crisis and youth unemployment in Spain. The party members' interaction with the EGP was extremely incidental, and only one member of EQUO, a member of the party executive office, actually joined the ISN in the EGP council. This individual organised a workshop of the ISN at the EQUO summer university in Murcia in September 2013 in order to present the ISN to rank and file party members. The ISN had sent two Spanish-speaking individuals of Latin origin to this event, one from the Netherlands and one from Switzerland. The participants of the workshop had many basic questions on the EGP itself and how it functions, had difficulties to imagine concrete actions related to an organisation they were not familiar with, and no individuals joined the ISN following this event (interview 15). A former ISN member explains that the ISN mainly attracted 'desperate individuals who are isolated in their national party' (interview 10). This explanation resonates with some national parties' concerns discussed earlier in relation to opening the EGP to individual members.

At the time of writing, December 2016, the ISN is to be replaced by a virtual platform of activists called 'ACT'.<sup>29</sup> The party-like logic of individual members (called 'supporters'), paying membership fees, is to be replaced by individual registration to an online platform, becoming part

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<sup>26</sup> Interviews 11, 12, 13, and participant observation, Marseille, 22-24 August 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Participant observation, Marseille, 22 August, 2013. Of the eight individuals who were present in that meeting, at least said they are of foreign origin (Spain, Greece, Turkey) or were not living in France.

<sup>28</sup> Based on official participation list of the EGP Council and participant observation, Madrid, 10-12 May, 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Draft EGP resolution, 'Proposal for ACT Network', EGP Council, Glasgow, 2-4 December 2016.

of a network of activists, monitored by the EGP office. Similarly to the ISN provisions in the EGP rulebook, the EGP draft resolution on the ACT network is inherent with tensions between a centralised EGP instrument and member parties' control over it, stating that 'the EGP will develop a governance structure of the ACT network together with the member parties and the ISN coordinators'<sup>30</sup> and that 'the ACT network will not get involved in activities regarding issues of national or regional scope, nor will it get involved with activities in a member state unless member party concerned explicitly welcomes that'.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the Dutch Green party, Groenlinks, had tabled three amendments to the original draft of the EGP committee, requesting more party control over the future network:<sup>32</sup> One of these amendments aimed to restrict the network to party members only, explaining that 'it is undesirable that individual people can be a members of the network without being connected to one of the member parties'.<sup>33</sup> However, this amendment was not accepted.<sup>34</sup> A second amendment was to add to the draft resolution that 'the network is not intended as a tool for fundraising'. After negotiations in the EGP council in Glasgow, a more nuanced sentence was added, saying that 'the network should not crowd out fundraising and other activities by member parties'.<sup>35</sup> Finally, the third amendment of Groenlinks, requesting the EGP committee to present to the next Council 'a transparent structure of how the network is organised and how responsibilities are defined' was accepted as tabled.

## Conclusions

The transformation of Europarties from weak federal structures into genuine fully fledged political parties at the EU-level may have the potential to enhance EU democracy and to link citizens to EU politics. Arguably, the development of individual membership in the Europarty can be seen to entail its possible transformation from a loose federal structure of national parties towards a genuine transnational political party at the European level. This article examined empirically to what extent Europarties are able to develop individual membership by an in-depth analysis of the case of the EGP and its Individual Supporters' Network (ISN). I observed vague and contradictory provisions of EGP individual membership scheme as well as limited implementation of it in practice.

Two major explanations were identified to account for these findings. The main explanation is the lack of interest among national parties or even a certain reluctance to cooperate with their

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30 Idem, page 2, lines 65-66.

31 Idem, page 1, lines 30-32.

32 Amendments submitted to Draft resolution "proposal for ACT network", EGP Council in Glasgow, 2-4 December 2016.

33 Groenlinks, Explanation/Comment to amendment no. 1, Amendments submitted to Draft resolution "proposal for ACT network", EGP Council in Glasgow, 2-4 December 2016.

34 EGP resolution on ACT Network, as adopted, 25<sup>th</sup> EGP Council, Glasgow, 2-4 December 2016.

35 EGP resolution on ACT Network, as adopted, 25<sup>th</sup> EGP Council, Glasgow, 2-4 December 2016.

affiliated Europarty on the individual membership option, as was revealed by the parties' attitudes and practices. National parties have their own interests in retaining their monopoly on linkage with citizens. Since party membership is in decline in general, members become more difficult to obtain, to keep and to mobilise in campaigns. Yet, these fewer party members still offer political parties important resources, such as membership fees, volunteering time and symbolic legitimacy.

By trying to reach out directly to individual citizens across Europe, Europarties threaten to enter in direct competition with national parties over their own actual party members or potential ones in civil society. Therefore, national parties have an institutional self-interest against the genuine development of individual membership in Europarties. Hence, the Europarties' attempts to develop individual membership are accompanied by tensions between the Europarty's central structure and the national parties affiliated with it. Since national parties are the gatekeepers of their affiliated Europarty, controlling its decision-making process via their official party delegates, they can water down the policy proposals on individual membership, drag their feet in the implementation phase of the formal policy decided upon or eventually ignore the policy all together. Furthermore, national parties may also make usage of their affiliated Europarty individual membership scheme as a means to obtain additional resources from its own members, with limited benefit for the Europarty's organisational structure. The conclusion is that, in order to establish an effective policy of individual membership, Europarties need to bypass their own federal structure and hence the national parties which compose them. This is quite unlikely to happen.

The second explanation for the limited development of Europarties' individual membership is the lack of interest among individual party members in such an option. Party members are busy with their own priorities in domestic politics and lack genuine knowledge of and interest in the organisation and activities of the Europarty their national party is affiliated with. As a consequence, Europarties' individual membership scheme seem to consist of a top-down offer without much demand for it at the bottom. As long as the national parties do not actively diffuse information on the Europarty they are affiliated with among their members, supporters and voters, these individuals have little chances to be informed on the political dynamics at the EU-level and to get interested in contributing to the Europarty organisation. Therefore, the two explanations of the limited development of individual membership in Europarties - the limited interest of national parties and the limited interest of individual party members - are interconnected. Hence, under the current conditions, it is difficult to see how individual membership in Europarties is to develop in practice, and even more difficult to regard it as a stepping-stone towards a genuinely self-standing party structure at the European level.

## List of interviews

Interviewee no.	Role	Place	Date
1	ISN member	Athens	11 <sup>th</sup> November 2012
2	MEP	Madrid	10 <sup>th</sup> May 2012
3	EGP staff	Madrid	10 <sup>th</sup> May 2012
4	Party delegate	Paris	11 <sup>th</sup> September 2011
5	MEP assistant	Strasbourg	14 <sup>th</sup> June 2013
6	ISN member	Brussels	22 <sup>th</sup> January 2012
7	ISN member	Strasbourg	12 <sup>th</sup> June 2013
8	ISN member	Brussels	11 <sup>th</sup> November 2013
9	EGP staff	Athens	10 <sup>th</sup> November 2012
10	EGP official	Brussels	21 <sup>th</sup> January 2012
11	EELV member	Marseille	23 <sup>rd</sup> August 2013
12	EGP staff	Marseille	23 <sup>rd</sup> August 2013
13	EGP staff	Marseille	24 <sup>th</sup> August 2013
14	EGP staff	Skype	9 <sup>th</sup> September 2013
15	ISN member	Skype	9 <sup>th</sup> September 2013
16	EGP official	Brussels	28 <sup>th</sup> June 2013
17	Party official	Brussels	10 <sup>th</sup> November 2013
18	EGP official	Brussels	21 <sup>th</sup> June 2012 ; 12 <sup>th</sup> December 2012
19	ISN member	Madrid	10 <sup>th</sup> May 2012
20	ISN members	Brussels	8 <sup>th</sup> March 2012
21	MEP assistant	Madrid	9 <sup>th</sup> May 2013
22	ISN member	Email exchange	11 <sup>th</sup> May 2013
23	ISN members	Brussels	28 <sup>th</sup> June 2013
24	ISN members	Email exchange	24 <sup>th</sup> July 2012
25	Party delegate	Brussels	11 <sup>th</sup> November 2013
26	Party members	Athens	10 <sup>th</sup> November 2013
27	ISN members	By telephone	17 <sup>th</sup> October 2013
28	EGP staff	Brussels	8 <sup>th</sup> March 2012

### Appendix 2.1: Administration of the survey among EGP member parties

The survey among Green parties was conducted in two parts. The first part of the survey was in January and February 2015, during which I sent personal emails containing seven questions (here at the bottom) to the Green parties' officials in charge of EU or international affairs, according to the list of personal contacts in the various EGP member parties which I had received from the EGP office in Brussels. These party officials were mainly the parties' international secretaries in charge of EU affaires or secretary generals. In the end of three relaunch rounds, representatives of 17 Green parties replied to this email survey. Green parties from northern Europe were somehow over-represented in the email survey. The lower level of response rate in other regions of Europe may be explained by lack of resources of the small Green parties in many countries and by the lower relevance of the issue of the EGP individual membership for these parties, notably those outside the

EU. In addition, the two largest Green parties in Europe, the German Greens and the French Greens, did not answer to the email survey.

Therefore, I conducted a second phase of data collection. During the EGP council in Lyon, France, in the weekend of 13 to 15 November 2015, I distributed a questionnaire containing the same questions which were previously sent by email, to which I obtained answers from official representatives of additional 15 Green parties. The respondents were again mainly the parties' international secretariats and EGP delegates who took part in the EGP council. All in all, the survey included 24 parties from EU countries as well as eight parties from countries outside the EU (Switzerland, Norway, Turkey, Serbia, Russia, Georgia, Moldova and Albania). Among the 24 Green parties from EU countries, the survey population includes thirteen Green parties from eleven Western Europe (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK), six parties from CEE countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovenia) and five parties from Southern Europe (Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Malta).

## Appendix 2.2: Response overview of the survey among EGP member parties

		Population	Sample	Missing Cases
Green parties in EU	Green parties in the European Parliament	17 (38%)	12 (70%): Austria Belgium (ecolo) Denmark Finland France Germany Luxembourg Spain (ICV) Spain (EQUO) Sweden UK (GPEW) Estonia	5 (30%): Belgium (Flanders) Hungary (LMP) NL (GL) Lithuania Croatia
	EU Green Parties not in the European Parliament	16 (35%)	12 (75%): Bulgaria Cyprus Greece Hungary (ZB) Ireland Italy Malta NL (Greonen) Poland Romania Slovenia UK (Scotland)	4 (25%): CZ Latvia Portugal Slovakia
Green parties outside EU		12 (27%)	8 (67%): Switzerland Norway Turkey Serbia Russia Georgia Moldova Albania	4 (33%): Andorra Azerbaijan Belarus Ukraine
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>45 (100%)</b>	<b>32 (70%)</b>	<b>13 (30%)</b>

## Appendix 2.3: The questions included in the survey among EGP member parties

1. Are you aware of the actual EGP individual membership policy, the Individual Supporters Network (ISN)?
2. What is the party's position towards this policy and organization?
3. Does your party inform party members of the ISN and gives them the possibility to join it?
4. Does your party support the idea of direct individual membership of the EGP?
5. Should EGP individual membership be conditioned by membership in one of the national parties which are EGP members, or be open to all citizens?
6. Should the organizational structure of the individual members of the EGP be centralized at the EU-level, including members' annual fees and Email contacts, or should these remain in the national parties?
7. Should EGP individual supporters across the EU take part in the selection process of the national parties' candidates to the European Parliament elections?