

Maurer, Andreas; Parkes, Roderick

**Research Report**

## The British Conservatives in the European Parliament: Options for the Sixth (2004/09) and Seventh (2009/14) Parliaments

SWP Research Paper, No. RP 5/2006

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), German Institute for International and Security Affairs,  
Berlin

*Suggested Citation:* Maurer, Andreas; Parkes, Roderick (2006) : The British Conservatives in the European Parliament: Options for the Sixth (2004/09) and Seventh (2009/14) Parliaments, SWP Research Paper, No. RP 5/2006, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/253056>

**Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

**Terms of use:**

*Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.*

*You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.*

*If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.*

# SWP Research Paper

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik  
German Institute for International  
and Security Affairs

*Andreas Maurer / Roderick Parkes*

## The British Conservatives in the European Parliament

Options for the Sixth (2004/09) and  
Seventh (2009/14) Parliaments

RP 5  
May 2006  
Berlin

**All rights reserved.**

© Stiftung Wissenschaft und  
Politik, 2006

**SWP**

Stiftung Wissenschaft und  
Politik German Institute for  
International  
and Security Affairs

Ludwigkirchplatz 3-4  
10719 Berlin  
Germany  
Phone +49 30 880 07-0  
Fax +49 30 880 07-100  
[www.swp-berlin.org](http://www.swp-berlin.org)  
[swp@swp-berlin.org](mailto:swp@swp-berlin.org)

ISSN 1863-1053

# Table of Contents

5	<b>Problems and Findings</b>
7	<b>Conservative European Policy</b>
7	Conservative party structure
8	Conservative preferences towards European integration
12	<b>The British Conservatives in the Sixth European Parliament (2004–2009)</b>
12	The British Conservatives' evolving relationship with the PPE-DE
16	The hesitant withdrawalist: policy change under David Cameron
17	The PPE-DE's reaction
18	Four options for the Sixth Parliament (2004–2009)
22	<i>Option 1: Group formation</i>
22	<i>Option 2: Defection to another group</i>
25	<i>Option 3: Non-attached status</i>
25	<i>Option 4: Extra-parliamentary group formation</i>
26	Mr Cameron's growing control over policy change
28	<b>Perspectives for and Implications of Conservative Activity</b>
28	The British Conservatives in the Seventh Parliament (2009–2014)
30	Conclusion: Implications for the Sixth Parliament and beyond
	<b>Appendix</b>
33	Acronyms
34	Figures



**The British Conservatives in the  
European Parliament.  
Options for the Sixth (2004/09) and  
Seventh (2009/14) Parliaments**

Seeking to reinvigorate his flagging campaign for the leadership of the British Conservative party in 2005, David Cameron promised to remove Conservative MEPs from their relationship with the European People's Party-European Democrats (PPE-DE) in the European Parliament. Having successfully appealed to the party membership and to the formidable eurosceptic faction within the national parliamentary party, the new leader of the British Conservatives now confronts the challenge of making good his pledge. Efforts have thus far focussed on founding a new grouping with other parties in the European Parliament (EP). Pundits do not rate his chances very highly: the complexity of British Conservative preferences and the matter of timing, in the middle of the EP's current legislative term, essentially rule out a number of more moderate potential partners. This has led the British Conservatives to concentrate on more radical members of the EP, who in turn may prove politically embarrassing to them and ill-suited to the formation of a stable coalition. Withdrawal from the PPE-DE would also require the British Conservatives' to give up considerable 'material' benefits (access to political office and influence over policy in the European Parliament) arising from their relationship with the PPE-DE, and would elicit resistance from some of the party's MEPs. It is therefore generally understood that the formation of a new group would prove too costly in political terms for the Conservative Party, and that Mr Cameron will cut his losses and run.

It is here argued that the efforts to withdraw the British Conservatives from the PPE-DE are strongly affected by Mr Cameron's attempts to push the party's broader policies towards more socially liberal and (to a lesser extent) more economically interventionist positions. Broader policy change has formed the chief goal of Mr Cameron's short tenure as leader. Failure to remove British Conservative MEPs from their relationship with the PPE-DE could, however, prove a considerable block to the realisation of this goal: amongst British Conservative MPs, supporters of a eurosceptic European policy—of which withdrawal from the PPE-DE would be indicative—tend to support socially *conser-*

*vative* and economically *non-interventionist* policies. The maintenance of the relationship with the PPE-DE would entail a failure to satisfy this section of the party and would likely harden domestic intra-party resistance to broader policy change.

The level of resistance to broader policy change amongst British Conservative MPs, or rather the leadership's capacity and readiness to manage it, are therefore important factors influencing the leadership's moves to annul the PPE-DE relationship. Should Mr Cameron calculate that he is well able to manage this resistance, he will be less ready to consider 'costly' alternatives to PPE-DE membership. By contrast, a reduced capacity to manage resistance will likely lead Mr Cameron to consider even more costly alternatives to the PPE-DE relationship in order to safeguard the process of policy change. The costs that Mr Cameron must weigh up in withdrawing from the PPE-DE include: political embarrassment caused to the party by its partners in a new grouping; concessions to be offered to potential partners in order to induce coalition formation; a lack of ideological cohesion in a new grouping; resistance from British Conservative MEPs to their change of situation.

Establishing a new grouping is not the only alternative to maintaining the PPE-DE relationship. Should the group-formation option prove too costly—and domestic resistance to policy change persist—other options are available, namely: seeking to join another grouping, adopting non-attached status, or attempting to form an extra-parliamentary group.

This research paper explores the various options available to the Conservatives, loosely setting out their costs to the party. It suggests that the Conservatives are currently rather more likely than expected to succeed at group formation, because of the importance attached by the national leadership to accomplishing the goal of broader policy change, and the circum-spect approach that it has thus far adopted towards opponents of policy change: at this point, Mr Cameron is accordingly prepared to incur a relatively high price as regards the potential political embarrassment that partners may cause the party, the ideological stability of the new grouping, the concessions offered to partners and the level of resistance from its MEPs. The British Conservative leadership is thus keen to join forces with the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS), the Czech Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and even the Latvian Fatherland and Freedom Party (TB/LNNK), as well as with a number of smaller parties, in the European Parliament, and is prepared to offer significant

concessions to these parties (including the Presidency of the new group) in order to ensure their participation.

Yet the results of the May local elections in Britain were, generally speaking, positive for the British Conservative party, and this has permitted the leadership to assert itself *vis a vis* its opponents within the party. This may mark a watershed for the Conservative leadership in terms of its readiness to manage the resistance it faces in carrying out policy reform, and thus of the costs it is prepared to incur in withdrawing from the PPE-DE. Should this trend continue, the likelihood that the British Conservatives will withdraw from the PPE-DE within the life of this European Parliament should diminish. Present circumstances therefore lend broader significance to the timing and outcome of the Czech elections in June 2006: the participation of the Czech ODS in a new grouping in the European Parliament is in large part contingent upon the party's fortunes in the national elections. Should the ODS express support for the project in mid-June, this will add impetus to the efforts to set up a new grouping by September 2006. Should the reverse occur, it may be enough to kill the British Conservatives' efforts at withdrawal.

# Conservative European Policy

## Conservative party structure

An understanding of the interaction between party structure and actors' pursuit of their self-interest (in the case of MPs, this might include re-election, influence over policy and attainment of political office) sheds valuable light on the development of the Conservative Party's preferences as regards European integration, and in particular on the leadership's capacity to steer European policy. Of most importance to this study is the way that the party structure serves to collectivise individuals' interests. This is key to the existence of the party itself, and occurs through the use—usually by central bodies—of tools of party management, including incentives (allowing policy influence; career advancement) and sanctions (whip system of party discipline; candidate de-selection). Before examining actors' preferences, the following outlines the party structure, as well as the principal ways in which the various actors—the party leadership, MPs, MEPs and party membership—are empowered and constrained by it:

- ▶ Broadly speaking, power in the Conservative party is centralised around the national leadership. Ordinary members of the Conservative party (unlike those of the British Liberal Democratic party and, to a lesser extent, the Labour party) have only a limited formal role in policy-making, even after recent efforts to democratise the party. Conference decisions are non-binding.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Career advancement is controlled by the party leadership. If we understand politicians to be partly motivated by a desire both for influence over policy and for career advancement, the Westminster model simplifies analysis by essentially fusing the two. This is particularly clear in government, where influence is centred around cabinet.<sup>2</sup> This means

that attaining influence over policy usually requires either career advance or that actors place themselves in a position where they can exert leverage over the leadership. Bottom-up policy change has often proved a destabilising process for the party.

- ▶ The premium placed on party unity by the British electoral system<sup>3</sup> has caused a centralisation of party management and discipline. However, it should be noted that much of the larger parties' cohesion relies upon the general pressures created by the electoral system, rather than upon the tools available to party leaders (whip system of party discipline; control of career advancement, etc).

Despite this general centralisation of power in the British Conservative party, recent reforms have acted to decentralise various aspects of the party's structure:

- ▶ The leadership election rules adopted after 1998 democratised the election process.<sup>4</sup>

A Comparative Perspective on Backbench Dissent, Party Discipline, and Intra-Party Politics" (PhD thesis, Rochester University, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> In particular, the electoral system's basis on 'single member plurality' or 'first past the post' constrains MPs' opportunities to exit the party since the political landscape is dominated by a small number of large parties, and start-up costs for new parties are high. This creates a high demand amongst parliamentarians for party unity making the breakdown into factionalism particularly problematic for the party leadership. See: Francoise Boucek, "Managing factional conflict under severe constraints: John Major and British Conservatives 1992–97," PSA Conference, Leicester, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> A leadership election may be sparked by an incumbent's resignation, or by a no-confidence vote on the part of the Conservative Parliamentary Party. Leaderships do not enjoy the longevity associated with those systems where challenges can only be mounted at party conferences held at moderately lengthy intervals. If more than three candidates for the leadership stand, they must first be whittled down to two in a series of ballots by MPs. The two names are then put to a ballot of all party members. Prior to 1998, the process was dominated by MPs (which remains the case if only one candidate emerges). The enlargement of the Conservative 'selectorate' (those empowered to elect the leader) may bolster the leadership, making it harder for MPs to rebel against a leader and replace him/her with their preferred candidate. However, it may also undermine the level of acceptance that the leader

<sup>1</sup> For a comparison of practices in the three major British parties see: Justin Fisher, "Managing Political Parties," Report for the British Council, 2004. For an analysis of the 1998 reforms that also brought changes to party policy-making see: Jennifer Lees-Marshment and Stuart Quayle, "Empowering the Members or Marketing the Party? The Conservative Reforms of 1998," *The Political Quarterly*, 2001, pp. 204–212.

<sup>2</sup> See: Christopher Kam, "Parliaments, Parties and MPs:



- Following the 1998 reforms, Conservative candidate selection procedures for MPs have become even more decentralised, with a large degree of involvement from ordinary party members.<sup>5</sup>

The structural relationship between the national and European levels of the Party is also important. Numerous re-negotiations of their alliance with the PPE have ensured the British Conservatives an increasing degree of control over their own tools of party discipline and policy-making. In comparison with other parties formally bound to European level groups, the national level of the British Conservative party subsequently exercises a large degree of control over the activities of the party's MEPs.

Candidate selection procedures for MEPs are similar to those for MPs, however decentralisation of the processes for MEPs went even further after 1998 than for MPs: incumbent MEPs did not, for example, enjoy any safeguards regarding their re-selection as candidates for the 2004 European elections.<sup>6</sup>

For this analysis, perhaps the most relevant structural arrangements are those which empower actors to conclude or terminate agreements with European parties; this is decided by informal convention "jointly

enjoys amongst MPs, if they believe that the selectorate has chosen the 'wrong candidate'.

<sup>5</sup> It has typically been a process dominated by local party elites, but actively supervised by the central party body which vetted candidates and enjoyed a technical veto. (For a European comparison see: André Krouwel, "The Selection of Parliamentary Candidates in Western Europe: The Paradox of Democracy," ECPR Conference Paper, Mannheim, 1999, <http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/events/joints-essons/paperarchive/mannheim/w2/krouwel.pdf>). The 1998 reform paper "The Fresh Future" sought to democratise the party by involving more closely the party membership, and put forward the introduction of a system of "one member, one vote." Following these reforms, the procedure now requires that an initial list of candidates for election is drawn up by a central body, and is then put to regional members for selection and ordering. (See for example: UCL Constitution Unit, "Changed Voting, Changed Politics: Lessons of Britain's Experience of PR since 1997," Report, 2004.) Importantly, the kind of democratisation that occurred after 1998 may actually weaken the influence of party activists over the direction of policy thanks to the formal involvement of more passive members (See: Jonathan Hopkin, "Bringing the Members Back in? Democratizing Candidate Selection in Britain and Spain," *Party Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2001, pp. 343–361).

<sup>6</sup> For an EU-wide comparison see the website of the research project: "Electoral Reform, Parliamentary Representation and the British MEP," <http://www.meps.org.uk/candidateselection.htm>.

by the Leader of the Conservative Party and the Leader of the Conservatives in the European Parliament."<sup>7</sup> In the current Parliament, this convention has been somewhat constrained: the party manifesto stated that the Conservatives would remain in the PPE-DE until 2009.

## Conservative preferences towards European integration

Those Conservatives who had supported British accession to the European Community had argued that the EEC/EC constituted a robust structure through which to combat the Communist threat, and that European integration—as an essentially economic project—could be used to promote Conservative aims at home, without its encroaching on sensitive areas of national sovereignty. These arguments seemed increasingly out of place in the context of European integration during the Delors Commission (1985–1995), a fact compounded by the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. This situation necessitated a reassessment of Conservative attitudes towards Europe.

It is often presented as a given that the Conservative Party's preferences towards the EC/EU should have hardened in view of the course that European integration took from the mid-1980s/early 1990s, and the reconfiguration of international relations that accompanied this. Certainly European developments appeared at odds with traditional strands of British Conservative thinking. Whilst it would be foolish to disregard the ideological causes of recent Conservative opposition to European integration, it is arguable that—had the adoption of eurosceptic preferences not been conducive to party-actors' gaining policy influence, career advancement and (to a lesser extent) re-election; and had the party-management of actors' pursuit of these incentives for eurosceptic behaviour been more successful—Conservatives would have adopted more favourable preferences towards European integration than they have.

The Conservative Party, as a whole, has stood to gain from a hardening of its attitude in a number of ways:

- Firstly, there has been the potential electoral gain. Figure 4 below (p. 36) shows a sinking level of satis-

<sup>7</sup> James Elles MEP, "The Conservative MEPs' Deal with the PPE-DE Group," Briefing Paper, 1.12.2005.

faction with the EU amongst interviewees in the UK. (Nevertheless—and although the salience of the EU as an issue has grown markedly—it is important to remember that Europe is not a major issue for the electorate.<sup>8</sup> Opposition to Europe is neither so entrenched nor so widespread that it would be a significant vote winner, at least not in national elections. Most importantly, analysis of those who actually voted suggests that the median British voter in recent national elections has been at most mildly eurosceptic).<sup>9</sup>

- The second great aggregate opportunity is presented by the Labour Party's gradual embrace of European integration, which culminated in the years around the 1997 election. This gave the Conservatives an opportunity to profile themselves against a party that appeared to be adopting many traditional Conservative themes. In an electoral system which favours large parties, the need to gain profile against major competitors is clear.

The two incentives are related, especially given the overlap between eurosceptics within the electorate, and the 'Tory core voters': in a period of electoral decline, like that which has afflicted the Conservatives since the early 1990s, the perceived risks of losing core voters may be greater than those associated with seeking new supporters. Parties may therefore prefer to retain their appeal to their core voters.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile for many Conservative MPs, opposition to European integration appears to have been partly adopted as a defensive mechanism to safeguard their influence over policy and role in decision-making. This development relates to the loss of power amongst national parliaments that has accompanied European integration, and the perception that the EU has created a model to compete with the Westminster one.<sup>11</sup> In this respect, the position of Conservative

MEPs appeared for a long time to be at odds with that of their Westminster colleagues: MEPs' influence and role is in part dependent upon the level of European integration achieved. Conservative MEPs have thus encountered incentives to push both for a broadening of the range of policies dealt with at the European level and for the increased use of the 'Community method' in policy-making. The incentive structure attached to the party's allied membership of the federalist PPE group also meant that policy influence and access to political office were partly dependent on—at the very least—a tolerance of pro-European attitudes.

For Conservative MEPs, the gains arising from the adoption of a eurosceptic position—and the sanctions attached to not adopting one—are quite a recent phenomenon. The incentive structure associated with the Conservatives' relationship with the PPE-DE has been the subject of numerous renegotiations, giving the European level of the Conservative party more leeway to develop its own positions on questions of European integration. Conservative MEPs' continued influence over policy and their access to political office in the EP is no longer dependent upon their tolerance or adoption of pro-European preferences to the degree that it formerly was. At the same time, constraints on MEPs' pursuit of pro-European preferences have been reinforced by the reconfiguration of the relationship between the national and European levels of the party: MPs, worried about the loss of influence associated with European integration, have sought to extend their control over their European level colleagues, and to ensure that Conservative MEPs pursue policies that are not conducive to further integration. Meanwhile, it is not just because of the increased role of the eurosceptic party membership in candidate selection that overt support for European integration may be damaging to MEPs' re-election prospects: the success of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the 2004 European elections is indicated in figure 2 (p. 35).<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps most importantly amongst Conservative MPs, MEPs and candidates, the changed international/European situation has opened up political opportunities for ambitious groups and individuals to assert

<sup>8</sup> For an indication of this, see the MORI poll of the most important issues facing Britain: <http://www.mori.com/polls/trends/issues.shtml>.

<sup>9</sup> See Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski, "Why Parties Fail to Learn: Electoral Defeat, Selective Perception and British Party Politics," *Party Politics*, Vol. 10, 1, 2004, pp. 85–104; "The Iceberg and the Titanic: Electoral Defeat, Policy Moods, and Party Change," Center for Public Leadership, Working Paper, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970.

<sup>11</sup> See: Simon Usherwood, "Opposition to the European Union in the UK: The Dilemma of Public Opinion and Party Management," *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 37, 2, 2002, p. 214.

<sup>12</sup> This table gives a comparison between the 1999 and 2004 votes; the UK's seats in the Parliament were reduced in 2004 from 87 to 78 following enlargement. UKIP's success on an anti-European ticket was seen to come at the expense of the Conservatives, who would normally be expected to gain most during European elections as the largest opposition party.

themselves within the party. Particularly at times when the leadership seeks to contain euroscepticism within the party for reasons of government policy or electioneering, ambitious party-actors may be able to rely on the support of other actors pursuing eurosceptic preferences in order to gain influence and leverage *vis a vis* the leadership. Similarly, at times where the leadership seeks to effect broader policy change, the opponents of these changes may be able to exploit divisive opposition to European integration within the party as a means to gain purchase on the leadership; in return for softening their preferences towards European integration, opponents of policy change can extract concessions from the leadership in these broader areas (although to present this as some kind of formal transaction is of course simplistic). It is indicative of the way that European affairs have become associated with intra-party jostling for position and policy influence rather than re-election, that they have gained significance within the Party out of all proportion to their significance to the electorate.<sup>13</sup>

By contrast, once having attained the post, recent leaders of the Conservatives have usually had fewer incentives to pursue a eurosceptic agenda than other MPs. This was particularly the case when the Party was in government. Here the realities of European cooperation meant that out-and-out euroscepticism would have been unsuitable for effective government, workable relations with Britain's EU partners, and thus for the leader's standing.<sup>14</sup> However, even when outside government, leaders have often been keen to avoid committing themselves too firmly to a eurosceptic agenda: one reason is tied to the way that euroscepticism has become a vehicle for intra-party mobility on the part of ambitious individuals and groups. The leader of the Party is less interested in self-advancement within the Party, than with the consolidation of his/her position. This has involved keeping the resurgent eurosceptic groupings in

check.<sup>15</sup> The leader must also help the party achieve its collective interest. Whilst steering a strongly eurosceptic course may be necessary to consolidate votes from core Conservative voters, it is unlikely to bring wider electoral success. The radicalisation of European policy may also harm party unity in an electoral system where cohesion is important, and—of particular importance to the current leadership—it may interfere with attempts to effect broader policy change.

Frequently repeating the mantra that the EU should do less and do it better, official European policy under recent leaders of the Conservative Party has offered a vision of a future EU economically and administratively reformed.<sup>16</sup> Rather than expressing indiscriminate opposition to the current state of integration, Conservative European policy has focused on a number of aspects of European integration which clash with broader Conservative priorities and preferences: aspects of European political integration, particularly those that raise labour costs or reinforce the rights of trade unions, conflict with (non-interventionist) Conservative economic policy; some of the EU's socially liberal policies, the codification of human rights, and further integration in the area of Justice and Home Affairs have been deemed to constrain Britain's national capacity to deal with issues of law and order—a staple Conservative concern; British European policy under the Labour government has proved unsatisfactory because of a failure to take the 'Realist' view of British interests that the Conservatives have expounded.<sup>17</sup> Yet, despite this containment of official euroscepticism within the framework of traditional Conservative concerns, calls from within the party have frequently demanded a more radical solution to Britain's relationship with the EU than

<sup>13</sup> For an analysis of the salience of these issues see: Simon Usherwood, "Opposition to the European Union in the UK: The Dilemma of Public Opinion and Party Management," *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 37, 2, 2002, p. 214.

<sup>14</sup> For example, at times when a Europhile line was imperative for the realisation of government policy (Exchange Rate Mechanism; Maastricht Treaty) under Mr Major, eurosceptics' leverage within the party grew, altering their perception of the costs and benefits of party unity. Although the core of backbench opposition to government policy termed itself the 'suicide squad' it had very real incentives for behaving in this apparently self-destructive manner.

<sup>15</sup> During the Major years, the rigours of government constrained the leader's capacity to properly regulate MPs' career advancement, so that ambitious MPs sought other ways to gain career advancement/influence over policy. A younger generation of ambitious politicians used European issues to break open the cabinet in order to gain either career advancement or influence over policy. Ambitious eurosceptic members of Major's Cabinet, like Michael Portillo, felt able to disregard the principle of collegiality, assuming that their eventual dismissal would result in a party split. On this latter point, see: Martin Holmes, "The Conservative Party and Europe: From Major to Hague," *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 69, 2, 1998, pp. 133–140.

<sup>16</sup> Conservative Party, "Reversing the Drivers of Regulation: The European Union," Policy Paper, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> See: Conservative Party, "European Election Manifesto: In Europe, not Run by Europe," 1999; "European Election Manifesto: Putting Britain First," 2004.

that proposed by official policy; different Conservative party leaders have proved amenable to these demands in varying degrees.<sup>18</sup>

The adoption of these more radical positions on European integration is often indicative of the way that recent leaders of the British Conservative party have failed to use the tools of party management available to them to effectively control MPs' pursuit of the incentives for eurosceptic behaviour. Formerly characterised as a party of tendencies rather than factions, Conservative party statecraft was said to be built upon pragmatism and an acknowledgement of the need to win elections.<sup>19</sup> From the time of Mrs Thatcher's leadership onwards, these traits appear to have reversed, with the party becoming increasingly factional the longer it remained in power. The party can be divided at the national level along a eurosceptic/(shrinking) pro-European cleavage, and between the national and European levels thanks to Conservative MEPs' slightly more pro-European preferences.

For some leaders (e.g. John Major), the incapacity properly to manage European policy has been due to contextual factors such as the fact that the party was in government. These contextual factors have constrained the use of access to political office as a tool of party management<sup>20</sup>, permitted MPs to gain purchase on the leadership by opposing the leadership's European Policy<sup>21</sup>, or diminished the interest of MPs in one of the incentives under the leader's control.<sup>22</sup> Other leaders (e.g. Iain Duncan Smith<sup>23</sup>,

William Hague<sup>24</sup>) have been undermined by the weakness of their position or by their affiliation with a particular faction.

Under the current leader, David Cameron, the course of Conservative European Policy again depends heavily upon the leader's capacity to use the tools of party management at his disposal. However, since his election to the party leadership, Mr Cameron has been chiefly engaged in efforts to effect wide-ranging policy change, and it will be suggested below that the course of European policy is actually dependent upon his ability to manage this broader process of policy change. The issue of European policy currently at stake is the question of the party's relationship with the PPE-DE in the European Parliament.

**18** For example: BBC "On The Record—Broadcast: 19.3.2000," Transcript [http://www.bbc.co.uk/otr/intext/20000319\\_film\\_2.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/otr/intext/20000319_film_2.html); BBC News "Cabinet Ministers should run EU-Tories," 3.5.2001, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/uk\\_news/politics/1310584.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/uk_news/politics/1310584.stm); Roy Hattersley "The EU Dreams that Will Not Come True," *Guardian newspaper*, 16.6.2003, <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/eu/comment/0,9236,978204,00.html>; James Rogers and Matthew Jamison, "British External Policy: 2005 Elections – what do the parties promise," Henry Jackson Society.

**19** David Baker, Andrew Gamble and Steve Ludlam, "Mapping Conservative Fault Lines: Problems of Typology," in Patrick Dunleavy and Jeffrey Stayner (eds.), *Contemporary Political Studies 1994*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994.

**20** See footnote 15.

**21** See footnote 14.

**22** By 1997, the Labour Party's time outside government had sharpened its focus on re-election. (See for example: Richard Rose, "The New Labour Government: On the Crest of a Wave," in Pippa Norris and Neil Gavin, *Britain Votes 1997*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 242–248). In government, meanwhile, Conservative politicians had lately appeared less aware of the formidable task of being re-elected. The short-

term priorities of gaining party position and influence over policy had eclipsed the more fundamental necessity of gaining re-election. The leadership struggled to use the incentive of re-election as a management tool.

**23** Iain Duncan-Smith's status as an avowed eurosceptic and his weak position as leader meant that top positions were sometimes apportioned in such a way that they might stabilise his leadership, rather than in the broader interests of the party; this undermined the use of career advancement as a tool of party management, and had a centrifugal effect on the Party. It has also been suggested that the negative electoral opinion of the Conservative leader structurally strengthened the position of activists in the definition of the party's policies, consolidating the Party's eurosceptic position. (On this latter point see: Norman Schofield, "A Valence Model of Political Competition in Britain, 1992–1997," 2003, <http://schofield.wustl.edu/paper1.pdf>).

**24** In his first speech as leader of the opposition, William Hague apologised for the ERM crisis, thus undermining the position of senior politicians from the previous government. Appeals to euroscepticism became a tool in the consolidation of his position.

## The British Conservatives in the Sixth European Parliament (2004–2009)

### The British Conservatives' evolving relationship with the PPE-DE

The initial drive for the British Conservatives' accession to the European People's Party came largely from the Conservative side. Certainly the Conservative leadership was aware of the differences between British Conservative preferences and those of the Christian Democrats in the European Parliament; yet membership was attractive both in terms of the Conservative party's appeal in national elections and its influence within the EP.<sup>25</sup> The numerically superior Christian Democrats were, however, reluctant to admit the Conservatives to their group due to concerns about the compatibility of Rightist, secular Conservatism with Centrist, Christian Democracy. Only the German contingent showed any willingness to extend membership to the British.<sup>26</sup> The British Conservatives therefore remained in the European Conservative Group (ECG) which they had established at the time of the UK's accession to the European Community, and which became the European Democratic Group (DE) after the first direct European parliamentary elections in 1979, additionally gathering together Danish and, later, Spanish Conservatives.

From the mid-1980s onwards mutual compromise on the part of British Conservative MEPs and Christian Democrats in the EP as regards their preferences was encouraged by the enlargement of the European Community. Failure to compromise would have cost both the PPE and the British Conservatives a loss of influence over policy in Parliament, as the diversity of the parties in it grew and the Socialists maintained their position as the EP's largest grouping.

It was not until April 1992, though, that the British Conservatives and their sister parties in the DE gained

allied membership<sup>27</sup> of the PPE. The formalisation of their relationship with the PPE suited British Conservative MEPs not only because they were more pro-European than their national colleagues<sup>28</sup>: the accession of other Conservative parties to the PPE had shifted the group's preferences closer to those of the British Conservatives in left-right terms. Conservative MEPs also enjoyed the benefits of policy influence and political office associated with the PPE relationship.

By contrast, since the question of the party's affiliation within the European Parliament has been treated primarily as an issue of European policy at the national level—and a largely symbolic one at that—the PPE's federalist tendencies have proved a particular bone of contention for the party's increasingly eurosceptic MPs. The practical issue of whether British Conservative MEPs were in a position to pursue the party's left-right preferences, and the more 'material' issues concerning, for example, MEPs' attainment of political office, received less attention at the national level than the symbolic issue of their relationship with an overtly pro-European group.

The election in 1999 of a number of more eurosceptic Conservative MEPs uploaded this tension to the European level; however, because of the importance to them of broader practical and 'material' concerns, only a small number of eurosceptic MEPs supported

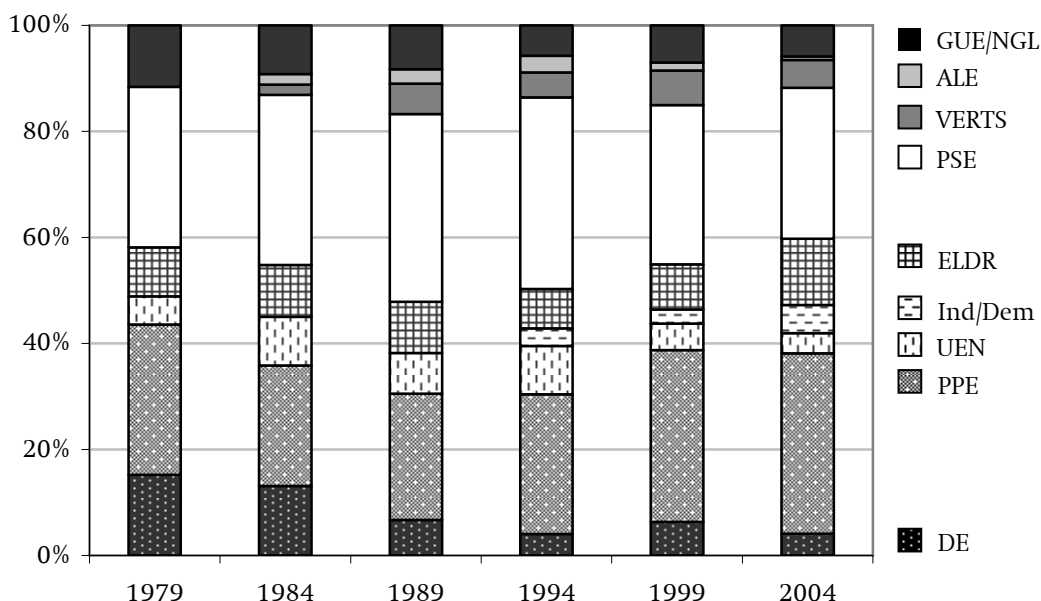
<sup>25</sup> See: Wojciech Gagattek, "British Conservative Party and the Group of the European People's Party – European Democrats in the European Parliament – an analysis of the history and present shape of difficult relationships," *Międzynarodowy Przegląd Polityczny*, <http://www.mpp.org.pl/06/ConsandEPPEngJan2004.doc>.

<sup>26</sup> See for example: Thomas Jansen, *The European People's Party. Origins and Development*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998.

<sup>27</sup> Allied members are required to accept the grouping's Basic Programme but not its more comprehensive Political Programme. This form of membership is usually renewed at the beginning of every Parliament.

<sup>28</sup> David Baker, Imogen Fountain, Andrew Gamble, Steve Ludlam, "The Blue Map of Europe: Conservative Parliamentarians and European Integration," *British Elections and Parties Yearbook* 1995, 1996.

### Election results for the European parliamentary groupings 1979–2004



**GUE/NGL** European United Left-Nordic Green Left; **ALE** European Free Alliance; **PSE** Socialist Group in the European Parliament; **ELDR** Liberal, Democratic and Reform Party; **Ind/Dem** Independence/Democracy; **UEN** Union for Europe of Nations; **PPE** European People's Party; **DE** European Democrats. (Only today's successor groups are shown.)

group withdrawal as fervently as their national counterparts.<sup>29</sup>

Disagreement about how to resolve the question of the British Conservatives' relationship with the PPE-DE does not, therefore, simply occur between pro-European and eurosceptic Conservatives. Even amongst

<sup>29</sup> Approximately seven of the current 27 British Conservative MEPs support the leadership's efforts at withdrawal from the PPE-DE. Amongst others, Roger Helmer, Christopher Heaton-Harris, Daniel Hannan, Martin Callanan ("Letter from Martin Callanan MEP," *Telegraph*, 14.12.2005) and Geoffrey Van Orden (EU Observer "New Centre-right Eurosceptic Group Plan Faces Hurdles," 1.2.2006) have declared their support for Mr Cameron's aims. David Sumberg and Nirj Deva are also said to be keen to move. Yet, some of those MEPs in favour of withdrawal are also motivated by a desire to exploit the opportunities the issue has created for career advance: support for European integration is in some ways a generational affair at the European level, and young or new MEPs often hold the most eurosceptic and Conservative views. The fact that these eurosceptic MEPs are often relatively junior means that they benefit comparatively little from the incentive structure attached to PPE-DE membership in term of access to political office. Christopher Heaton-Harris is also reportedly seeking to use the issue as a lever with which to dislodge his leader in the European Parliament, Timothy Kirkhope. Thus, although these MEPs share similar priorities to eurosceptic MPs as regards the desirable outcome of the question of group membership, it is arguable that their 'material' and practical considerations differ from those of their national colleagues.

eurosceptics, there is an important cleavage on the issue between the national and European levels of the party, which derives from the fact that 'material' and practical issues of group membership are of more import at the European level.

Since the late 1990s successive leaders of the British Conservatives have sought to strike a balance between these contradictory forces. In 1999 William Hague upheld the relationship with the PPE, but extracted a number of concessions from the group including a change of nomenclature—a largely symbolic gesture to appeal to eurosceptic MPs. More significantly, he ensured that British Conservative MEPs would be free to vote as they chose when their preferences differed from the group position.

British Conservative MEPs therefore enjoy a privileged position in the PPE-DE. Renegotiations of their relationship with the PPE have seen them being afforded a comparatively large degree of influence over policy.<sup>30</sup> According to the terms of their agreement with the group, they are able to influence the direction of the group as equal members without being bound by the positions adopted.<sup>31</sup> The group's

<sup>30</sup> Recent examples of (British) Conservative influence within the PPE-DE include the group's position on the Services and Sunshine Directives.

<sup>31</sup> These freedoms have proved *de facto* somewhat restricted by Conservative MEPs' need to maintain a workable alliance

Rules of Procedure specifically state that allied members “have the right to promote and develop their distinct views on constitutional and institutional issues in relation to the future of Europe.”<sup>32</sup>

Renegotiations of the party’s relationship with the PPE-DE also appear to have brought ‘material’ gains for Conservative MEPs. Considering that they make up just 3.7% of the MEPs in the EP, Conservative parliamentarians are remarkably well represented in the Parliament’s political offices. The Conservative Party provides one of the Parliament’s 14 vice-presidents (Edward McMillan-Scott), a chairman of one of the Parliament’s 20 Committees (Giles Chichester of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy) and two Committee vice-chairmen. Four Conservative MEPs are group coordinators for the PPE-DE (Robert Atkins, John Bowis, Robert Sturdy, Malcolm Harbour). The Conservatives as a whole also provide a slightly disproportionate number of Committee members (4.4% of the total).

These practical and material changes appear to have reconciled some eurosceptic Conservative MEPs to continued membership of the PPE-DE. Yet, despite these changes and the tinkering made to the group’s nomenclature, the renegotiations have done little—even on a symbolic level—to satisfy eurosceptic MPs. The cleavage between the national and European levels of the party on the question of group membership may therefore have widened thanks to these renegotiations.

It is a situation compounded by the recent enlargement of the EU. The 2004 enlargement considerably increased the diversity of the parties in the European Parliament.<sup>33</sup> Enlargement has introduced a number

with the PPE. Moreover, MEPs’ voting patterns are unlikely to have much effect on their eventual re-election: the electorate has little idea of how British Conservative MEPs actually vote, but rather greater awareness of their alliance with a clearly pro-European grouping. For a small number of MEPs, the electoral competition from the UK Independence Party and the increased role of a eurosceptic party membership in candidate selection mean that their interest in influencing policy is overshadowed by their interest in re-election

32 See: PPE-DE “Rules of Procedure of the Group of the European People’s Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats in the European Parliament,” March 2004.

33 This was a development that William Hague’s successor, Iain Duncan-Smith, unsuccessfully tried to take pre-emptive advantage of in 2003 when he met with the Czech ODS and Polish PiS. Mr Duncan-Smith travelled to Prague to set out his beliefs on Europe. This was reportedly a prelude to formal efforts to establish a new group. Mr Duncan-Smith was shortly afterwards replaced as leader by Michael Howard,

of parties, which sit either in the PPE-DE<sup>34</sup> or within the Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN) and Independence/Democracy (Ind/Dem) groupings, that more closely share the British Conservatives’ attitudes towards European integration, social and economic reform, and foreign policy than do many of the more established PPE-DE members. Thus, whilst enlargement has again been instrumental in reducing the British Conservatives’ weighting within the Parliament, this has not necessarily reinforced the pressure for them to compromise on their preferences. It is important to note, though, that few of the ‘new’ parties in the European Parliament support a euro-sceptic position *as well as* the Conservatives’ social, economic and broader foreign policy preferences<sup>35</sup>:

who did not continue his efforts. See Lee Rotherham, “The Corpse Bride: Addressing the EPP Misalliance”, Bruges Group, 2005, <http://www.brugesgroup.com/forms/EPPMisalliancePaper.pdf>; Wojciech Gagatsek, “British Conservative Party and the Group of the European People’s Party – European Democrats in the European Parliament – an analysis of the history and present shape of difficult relationships,” *Międzynarodowy Przegląd Polityczny*, <http://www.mpp.org.pl/06/ConsandEPPengJan2004.doc>.

34 Post-enlargement analysis of the voting patterns in the PPE-DE suggests that, although the grouping has maintained its numerical superiority in this Parliament in part thanks to the electoral success of members from the new member states, the accession of these new members has not undermined group cohesion. See for example: Simon Hix and Abdel Noury, “After Enlargement: Voting Behaviour in the Sixth European Parliament,” paper presented at the Federal Trust Conference “The European Parliament and the European Political Space”, 30.3.2006.

35 Whilst the PPE-DE still contains 26 parties, with around 200 MEPs, from the old member states, the 2004 enlargement has expanded the PPE-DE by 19 parties and over 60 MEPs from the new member states. Few of the PPE-DE’s new members share the British Conservatives’ preferences on questions of European integration—the three exceptions being the Czech ODS (9), the Polish Peasants’ Party (1) and the Hungarian *Fidesz* (13). However, following enlargement, a number of parties from the new member states, which broadly share the British Conservatives’ social, economic and foreign policy priorities, have joined the grouping. The Czech ODS has even consciously modelled some of its policies on those of the British Conservatives. Prior to enlargement, only *Forza Italia* (16), the Spanish *Partido Popular* (24), and to a lesser extent the Portuguese *Partido Popular* (2) and Danish Conservative People’s Party (1) could be said to have shared these preferences in any significant way. Although many of the new member parties are Christian Democrat, contain Christian Democratic fractions or have adopted a wide range of preferences drawn from the Christian Democratic tradition (this description applies to at least 8 new member parties, with 26 MEPs between them), they are often more favourably

the 'new' right-wing parties which pursue eurosceptic policies are mostly grouped outside the PPE-DE, and hold social policy preferences that are more conservative than those advocated by the British Conservatives, or oppose the free market economic policies espoused by British Conservatives; by contrast, those 'new' parties that have joined the PPE-DE, and do more closely support the British Conservatives' social and economic preferences, are mainly pro-European.

As a result of enlargement, those in the Conservative party who privilege (symbolic) issues of European policy when considering the question of the party's positioning in the EP (principally eurosceptics at the national level) now see exit from the PPE-DE as an even more realistic option. Those who take more account of practical issues concerning the representation of the party's left-right preferences (i.e. mainly those at the European level) may see continued membership of the PPE-DE as the most desirable option thanks to enlargement. Many of this latter group of Conservatives would also argue that the practical promotion of eurosceptic priorities within the EP would be best served by continued membership of the PPE-DE since this allows Conservative MEPs formal influence over the group's policy, but also the possibility of siding with the eurosceptic parties outside the PPE-DE during votes on European integration.

MEPs' positions on withdrawal from the PPE-DE are not set in stone. Some MEPs are opposed to withdrawal because they see no desirable alternative to the current agreement. This leaves a window for conciliation if the national leadership can put together a practically and 'materially' viable option. Yet, for many

disposed to questions of economic reform than the 10 parties (75 MEPs) from the old member states that fit this description. Moreover, the foreign policy preferences of many of the PPE-DE's new members, particularly those from Poland and the Baltic countries, are broadly Atlanticist. The Conservatives' Atlanticist foreign policy orientation had proved a point of difference between it and some of the Conservative parties from the old member states (notably the French *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*). Meanwhile, outside the PPE-DE, a cohort of eurosceptic parties has joined the UEN and Ind/Dem groupings. They include the Latvian For Fatherland and Freedom Party (4, UEN), the Polish Law and Justice Party (7, UEN), the three members of the Polish Peasants' Party who left the PPE-DE to join the UEN, as well as the members of the League of Polish Families (7, Ind/Dem). For the most part, these parties do not share the British Conservatives' social and economic preferences, adopting instead strongly socially conservative positions, and opposing free market economic policies.

MPs, MEPs' sensibilities are of little concern.<sup>36</sup> MPs can afford to adopt a radical position on this issue.

Questions of the funding that a new grouping might receive, the allotment of speaking time or political office within the Parliament, and even those broader questions of Conservatives' policy influence at the European level are of little direct significance to MPs. The fact that the drive for withdrawal is of a radical eurosceptic nature means that many MPs' principal concern is to see the British Conservatives establish a eurosceptic group, whereas the practical question of whether there is likely to be coherence in a new group's outlook on other (left-right) issues receives less attention. Ironically, the lack of attention paid at the national level to these practical and 'material' matters has meant that even the question of whether the representation of eurosceptic preferences within the EP would actually be reinforced by a repositioning of Conservative MEPs has been marginalised.

Should the national leadership seek to satisfy the drive for withdrawal emanating from the national level, it would be likely to pursue options that were unattractive for British Conservative MEPs, and would thus have to resort to less conciliatory means to persuade many Conservative MEPs to leave the PPE-DE group.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> As was noted above, for many Conservative MPs, opposition to European integration appears to have been adopted as a defensive mechanism to safeguard their influence over policy and role in decision-making. This attitude relates to the loss of power amongst national parliaments that has accompanied European integration, and the perception that the EU has created a model to compete with the Westminster one. It is an attitude which is sometimes directed at their party colleagues sitting in the EP, whose position is considered by some Conservative MPs to be illegitimate. See: Simon Usherwood, "Opposition to the European Union in the UK: The Dilemma of Public Opinion and Party Management," *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 37, 2, 2002, p. 214; Wojciech Gagalek, "British Conservative Party and the Group of the European People's Party – European Democrats in the European Parliament – an analysis of the history and present shape of difficult relationships," *Międzynarodowy Przegląd Polityczny*, <http://www.mpp.org.pl/06/ConsandEPPEngJan2004.doc>.

<sup>37</sup> As many as 20 Conservative MEPs are opposed to the plan to withdraw. Although a small fraction of these 20 do favour eventual withdrawal, they prefer to wait until after the next European elections. A small number of MEPs is said to be undecided: Robert Sturdy; Neil Parish; Philip Bradbourn. Meanwhile, Philip Bushell-Matthews, Struan Stevenson, Christopher Beazley (citing a potential "breach of Parliament's rules on the independence of elected members"), Caroline Jackson (because of a lack of alternatives) and



## The hesitant withdrawalist: policy change under David Cameron

Rather than reflecting deeply held beliefs on Europe, David Cameron's promise to remove the British Conservatives from their relationship with the PPE-DE was in large part an act of political expediency aimed at revitalising his flagging leadership campaign: he found himself running against a broadly eurosceptic field and—following the 1998 changes to the leadership election processes which empowered the party membership—appealing to a notably eurosceptic membership for support. His rival, Liam Fox, had pledged to withdraw the British Conservatives even before Mr Cameron had officially begun his campaign.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, fearful of losing support from euro-enthusiasts within the party, David Davis, the then-frontrunner, refused to match this pledge.<sup>39</sup> Thus there were clear incentives for adopting a strongly eurosceptic position on the question of group membership, whilst the difficulties entailed in realising this promise were at that stage rather distant. Even the former Chancellor Kenneth Clarke, a candidate noted for his pro-European views, distanced himself from his earlier euro-enthusiasm.<sup>40</sup>

Following his election to the leadership, Mr Cameron has primarily been engaged in tactical efforts to make the British Conservatives' domestic and foreign policy positions more electorally appealing.<sup>41</sup> In many

Jonathan Evans (on a matter of principle) have signalled their readiness to defy Mr Cameron. The total number of those prepared to defy their national leader is estimated at seven and is largely confined to those approaching the end of their parliamentary careers, or those who fear that the new 'consistency' in Conservative European policy spells their deselection regardless.

<sup>38</sup> See for example: "Cameron and Davis enter British Conservative contest," *Epolitix.com*, 29.9.2005, <http://www.epolitix.com/EN/News/200509/28d7888e-3ffb-47f4-8eb5-02fb56a40849.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> See for example: "Cameron in Danger over 'Cloud Cuckoo-land' Euro Policy," *Telegraph*, 1.11.2005 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,17129-1852095,00.html>.

<sup>40</sup> See for example: "Clarke Cools Support for EU to Woo British Conservative Right," *Guardian*, 24.8.2005.

<sup>41</sup> See for example: "Cameron Defies his Right Wing on Tax Cuts," *Telegraph*, 24.1.2006 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/01/24/ncam24.xml>; "Cameron Urges British Conservatives to Back Him against Right," *Guardian*, 28.2.2006, <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/conservatives/sBritishConservative/0,,1719773,00.html>: Thus far, concrete policy proposals concerning core issues have been thin on the ground though.

ways these attempts run contrary to his efforts to remove the British Conservatives from the PPE-DE: the eurosceptic line which underpins the proposed removal is nationalistic and based on a narrow analysis of the national costs and benefits of international action; it thus sits uneasily with the less Realist foreign policy that Mr Cameron is apparently seeking to forge.<sup>42</sup> It also draws upon an opposition to economically interventionist and socially liberal policies; this opposition characterises many of the party's policy positions that Mr Cameron is now looking to leave behind. Moreover, commentators have drawn attention to the incongruity between Mr Cameron's efforts to draw the party into the political mainstream at the national level, and the apparent shift to the right of the political spectrum and even towards isolationism at the European level.<sup>43</sup>

It is precisely because of these incongruities that Mr Cameron's efforts to withdraw British Conservative MEPs from their relationship with the PPE-DE attain a broader significance at the national level: MPs supporting a eurosceptic policy—of which PPE-DE withdrawal is a key aspect—tend to favour economically non-interventionist and socially conservative positions<sup>44</sup> that are at odds with the new direction of Conservative policy. Failure to remove the British Conservatives from their relationship with the PPE-DE would likely harden resistance amongst MPs to broader social and economic policy change.

Following his election to the leadership there was therefore speculation that Mr Cameron would adopt a strongly eurosceptic policy in order to ensure the progress of broader policy change<sup>45</sup>: since European

<sup>42</sup> See: David Cameron, "Speech to the Foreign Policy Centre," 24.8.2005

<sup>43</sup> See for example: "Kennedy 'Not Worried by Cameron'," *BBC News*, 8.12.2005, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/4508336.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/4508336.stm); "World Tonight," *BBC Radio 4*, 21.3.2006.

<sup>44</sup> A topology of Conservative Party attitudes in the period from 1992 to 1997 indicates divisions within the party between those favouring more/less state intervention in economic policy; those accepting/resisting the pooling of sovereignty in European integration; those who are socially liberal/socially conservative. It indicates that by far the largest group was in favour of limited economic intervention, a eurosceptic line, and social conservatism. The mapping also reveals a strong correlation between those who were in favour of less economic interventionism + euroscepticism, as well as those favouring pro-Europeanism + economic interventionism. See: Timothy Heppell, "The Ideological Composition of the Parliamentary Conservative Party 1992–1997," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 4, 2, 2002, pp. 299–324.

<sup>45</sup> Interview 1 RP.

issues are of disproportionately more salience to Conservative MPs than they are to the electorate<sup>46</sup>, a calculating Mr Cameron would be able to effect a wide-ranging change in social and economic policy, having bought the goodwill of recalcitrant MPs by concessions in a policy area of secondary importance to the British electorate. This would prevent the progress of broader policy change becoming reactive to developments in European policy, and thus the situation where opponents of policy change might win concessions from the leadership in return for softening their attitude towards the EU. This tactic of 'buying off' reluctant MPs would principally involve immediate withdrawal from the PPE-DE, and the leadership would be prepared to take on considerable 'costs' (e.g. potential political embarrassment from partners in a new group; concessions granted to new partners; reduced capacity to pursue party preferences in the EP; resistance from MEPs towards their change of situation) in order to ensure that this occurred.

Instead, developments subsequent to his election indicate that Mr Cameron has adopted a more subtle tactic, and is keen to ensure that European policy remains responsive to other policy changes<sup>47</sup>, or—more particularly—to Conservative MPs' reactions to these changes. In other words, rather than formulating a hard-line eurosceptic policy before social and economic policy change has been accomplished, Mr Cameron prefers to depoliticise European policy so that it does not interfere with his broader efforts, and is likely to adopt a eurosceptic position only in response to MPs' resistance to his broader policy agenda. Although his hard-line position on the party's relationship with the PPE-DE was largely defined prior to his leadership, Mr Cameron has sought to pursue a similar approach on this issue too. He is aware, however, that the issue will have to be resolved at some point soon, as he comes under pressure from un-

settled Conservative MEPs, eurosceptic MPs and even opportunist opposition politicians not afraid to raise questions of European integration that may prove divisive for their own party.

The leadership's current approach to MPs' resistance to policy change is a cautious one, and it is thus prepared to accept relatively high costs in its efforts to withdraw from the PPE-DE.<sup>48</sup> Should resistance to policy change grow, the leadership will likely become still readier to ensure that withdrawal occurs, even if this withdrawal is particularly costly. By contrast, should staunch resistance to broader policy change fail to materialise or become manageable by other means, the leadership will probably become more open to the possibility of continued PPE-DE membership. The leadership's readiness to manage resistance to policy change is therefore an important factor influencing the outcome of British Conservative efforts at withdrawal.

## The PPE-DE's reaction

It might be expected that the attempts of the PPE-DE leadership to maintain the relationship with the Conservatives would also act as an important factor influencing the outcome of their efforts at withdrawal. This would, however, be to assume that the group's leadership were in a position to significantly increase the costs of withdrawal for the Conservatives. In fact, any concessions made by the PPE-DE's leadership in favour of British Conservative MEPs (or indeed other member parties interested in setting up with the Conservatives) might alienate parties in the PPE-DE at a time when the British Conservatives are seeking to exploit divisions within the group.

Various considerations also constrain the PPE-DE leadership's scope for manoeuvre in this regard, and explain why its efforts to retain the British Conservatives as formal partners, particularly via the creation of incentives, have been muted: some PPE-DE members calculate that the British Conservatives are unlikely to form a party group that will seriously endanger the PPE-DE's dominant position in Parliament either in the short- or the long-term, and that any new group will be inherently unstable if based more on euroscepticism than on left-right cohesion. Others view the PPE-DE without the British Conservatives as forming a more stable minimum-connected-coalition, which can

<sup>46</sup> See Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski, "Why Parties Fail to Learn: Electoral Defeat, Selective Perception and British Party Politics," *Party Politics*, Vol. 10, 1, 2004, pp. 85–104; "The Iceberg and the Titanic: Electoral Defeat, Policy Moods, and Party Change," Center for Public Leadership, Working Paper, 2005; Simon Usherwood, "Opposition to the European Union in the UK: The Dilemma of Public Opinion and Party Management," *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 37, 2, 2002, p. 214.

<sup>47</sup> This responsiveness is indicated by the structure of the working groups that Mr Cameron has set up to elaborate policies. There is no group dealing specifically with European policy (they deal with competition, globalisation, 'quality of life, security) meaning that European policy is reactive to other policy developments. Interview 3 RP.

<sup>48</sup> Interview 2 RP.

be enlarged to include a new Conservative-dominated group for individual votes where this proves necessary or desirable. They thus oppose concessions being made to Conservative MEPs.

PPE-DE efforts directed at British Conservative MEPs would in any case be ineffective: the drive for withdrawal, as well as the control over the necessary process, lies more with Conservative MPs than MEPs.<sup>49</sup> To be successful, PPE-DE activity would have to concentrate on the national level. Yet the issue is treated in such a way by MPs that reasoned argument citing the benefits to British Conservative MEPs of the current relationship, or the influence that this brings to Conservative views in the European Parliament, is likely to win few converts. Further, the PPE-DE has recourse to little leverage and few arguments that appeal directly to MPs' interests. (One such argument might be that if the British Conservative MEPs become the linchpin of a new grouping, this would likely result in a shift of power to the European level for the British Conservatives, weakening MPs' influence over their colleagues).

Interjections from Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy have nevertheless sought to create disincentives for withdrawal, and have focussed on Mr Cameron and MPs. They draw attention to the fact that Mr Cameron's policy might prove regrettable should the British Conservatives be elected to government. Although publicly stating that the two politicians look forward to cooperating with the Conservatives, their messages have been interpreted to infer that the British Conservatives' relations with at least two continental Centre-Right parties will suffer should the Tory MEPs withdraw.<sup>50</sup> They thus highlight the point that Mr Cameron's leadership election pledge should not now be allowed to damage the British Conservatives' capacity to govern in the event that the Conservatives are successful at the next general election. Nevertheless, the British Conservative party leadership and MPs reason that the actors making

these public—and more forceful, private<sup>51</sup>—intimations will have to take a more pragmatic attitude, especially if the British Conservatives should be elected to power in Britain.<sup>52</sup>

All this is not to discount the possibility that the PPE-DE leadership or its members could considerably raise the costs to the British Conservatives of *maintaining* their relationship with the group. This might involve members of the PPE-DE publicly asserting the group's federalising mission in the EU. In an extreme situation it might even involve the expulsion of the British Conservatives from the group, thus removing continued membership as an option altogether. However, although in some quarters of the PPE-DE there is resistance to the continued Conservative membership of the group, it is hard to imagine what incentives there would be for such steps.

It appears therefore that PPE-DE activity is a factor of only limited importance in the outcome of the Conservatives' withdrawal efforts. Instead, as will be suggested below, the result of the Czech elections should be accorded a certain importance in any calculations concerning the likelihood of the British Conservative withdrawal within the course of the Sixth Parliament.

#### Four options for the Sixth Parliament (2004–2009)

The relatively weak connection between government and parliament at the European level helps explain why there is no stable 'winning coalition' in the European Parliament, and why no party grouping has a majority.<sup>53</sup> Different winning coalitions form around

<sup>49</sup> Although "by convention, the question of which political group our MEPs sit in is decided jointly by the Leader of the Conservative Party and the Leader of the Conservatives in the European Parliament" (James Elles, 2005), David Cameron pledged to remove the British Conservatives from their relationship with the PPE-DE without consulting MEPs if necessary.

<sup>50</sup> "Merkel tells British Conservative leader to stick with EPP partners," *Times*, 16.12.2005, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,13509-1934239,00.html>; "Merkel Warns Cameron over MEP Plans," *Guardian*, 5.12.2005 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/eu/story/0,,1668250,00.html>.

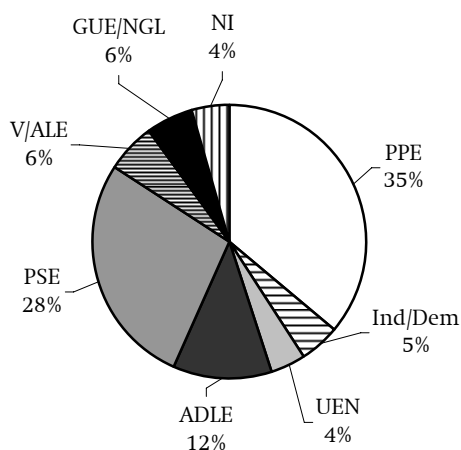
<sup>51</sup> "H-Block Rules OK! Or a Gift to the Liberals and UKIP?," *EU Reporter*, 16.1.2006.

<sup>52</sup> Interview 2 RP.

<sup>53</sup> The choice of what kind of coalition to form in order to realise interests depends in large part upon the kind of institution in which actors operate. It is possible to distinguish between 'winning coalitions', 'minimum winning coalitions', 'connected winning coalitions' and 'minimum connected winning coalitions'. There is no restriction on the size of a simple 'winning coalition', however such coalitions are confined to environments where there is a strong incentive to proceed consensually and there are few Offices to distribute (typically international organizations). Minimum winning coalitions are restricted in size to the numbers needed to achieve action, and usually form in non-ideological settings where there is little pressure to proceed consensually. Connected winning coalitions are joined by ideology, and may therefore include more members than are strictly necessary

different issues, the two principal cleavages being a traditional left/right division, and a pro-/anti-European one. The European Parliament votes by a majority of votes cast except where the EC Treaty expressly demands otherwise. For certain procedures (votes of no-confidence against the Commission; budgetary decisions) a precise quorum is required (2/3 of votes cast in the case of a no-confidence vote).<sup>54</sup> For decisions requiring a majority of members—and this is particularly the case in its legislative work—the Parliament in fact always needs more than 50% of the votes cast: given the attendance rates of MEPs the threshold in the last Parliament actually rose to c.68%.<sup>55</sup>

#### Group weighting in the current European Parliament, 1.5.2006



It is against the background of this unusual set-up that the British Conservatives' attempts to reconfigure their political relationships within the Parliament must be seen: the British Conservatives might be able to exert influence in Parliament if they withdrew from the PPE-DE and exploited the growing trend towards

left-right political competition.<sup>56</sup> They could thus agree to join the PPE-DE in *ad hoc* winning coalitions in return for certain concessions from the larger grouping. Beyond policy influence, certain 'material benefits' regarding funding, political office or speaking time are also at stake, depending upon the British Conservatives' positioning within the EP. Although these 'material' and practical concerns are principally of interest to Conservative MEPs, questions of policy influence and political office must of course be taken into account by the national leadership especially as they may be key to MEPs' willingness to leave the PPE-DE. Other 'cost/benefit' considerations fall to be taken into account, including for example the political embarrassment that potential partners (or indeed isolation in the Parliament) might cause the party.

In case of withdrawal from their current relationship with the PPE-DE, the British Conservatives face three basic options: the establishment of a new grouping; accession to an existing grouping; the splendid isolation of non-attached status.<sup>57</sup> A fourth option—that of extra-parliamentary group formation—is also available. The first is the option that British Conservatives are concentrating on.

#### Option 1: Group formation

The option of group formation is principally attractive to the Conservative leadership because, of the three basic options available, it offers the greatest potential for the leadership to combine the more radical preferences of eurosceptic MPs with the practical and 'material' interests of British Conservative MEPs. The aim, then, is to create a grouping that would reflect MPs' eurosceptic attitudes, but would also cohere closely to British Conservative preferences in broader (left-right) terms. The aim would also be to maximise the benefits to Conservative MEPs in terms

to achieve action. In reality, the number of members is usually kept within bounds by the desire to share the benefits of Office with as few as possible. Thus minimum connected winning coalitions are restricted both by ideology and material considerations. See for example: Simon Hix, Abdul Noury, Gerard Roland, "Power to the Parties: Cohesion and Competition in the European Parliament, 1979–2001," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 35, 2, 2005, pp. 209–234.

<sup>54</sup> For an overview see: "Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament," <http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/o10000.htm>.

<sup>55</sup> See: Amie Kreppel, "Rules, Ideology and Coalition Formation in the European Parliament: Past Present and Future," EPRG Working Paper, No. 4/1999.

<sup>56</sup> Since neither of the large party groups possesses a majority (see table 3, p. 24) the PPE-DE and PSE require the partnership of at least two or three further groupings respectively, if they do not wish to vote as a "grand left-right coalition." The larger groupings' propensity to form a grand coalition actually fell in 1999–2004 when compared with the previous Parliament: in the 1994–1999 Parliament the PPE had voted in 74.6% of cases with the PSE and/or ELDR, whereas already in the second half of 1999 the PPE and PSE voted together in only 60% of cases.

<sup>57</sup> See: Markus Wagner, "To Leave or Not to Leave? The Conservatives and the European People's Party in the European Parliament," Policy Brief, Federal Trust, 2006.

of funding, speaking time, access to political office and influence over policy. A new grouping dominated by the British Conservatives might, for example, provide a British member of the influential Conference of Presidents.<sup>58</sup>

Amongst PPE-DE parties, the British Conservatives have focussed their attention principally upon the parties from the 'new' member states; these parties are seen as less embedded either in the parliamentary grouping or its transnational mother party, as well as being closer to the British Conservatives on questions of European integration, foreign policy and/or socio-economic concerns. From the PPE-DE, only the Czech Civic Democratic Party (ODS, 9) has openly expressed its willingness to join a new grouping. However, for tactical reasons it has decided to postpone a decision until the national general elections have taken place in June 2006: it has detected a more favourable attitude towards European integration amongst the electorate, and besides, as a newly-elected party of government, may wish to remain in the PPE-DE.<sup>59</sup>

Amongst the members of the other groupings, the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS, 7)—as a party of government—is unhappy at its position in the radical UEN; however, it remains officially uncommitted as to its future political affiliation. Beyond PiS, which has already caused the Conservative leader a degree of

political embarrassment<sup>60</sup>, the British Conservatives have been talking to a number of non-mainstream parties such as the Latvian For Fatherland and Freedom party (TB/LNNK, UEN 4), *Mouvement pour la France* (MPF, Ind/Dem, 3), and the Dutch Christian Union (2, Ind/Dem).

That the British Conservatives should be struggling to form a new grouping of mainstream parties is perhaps surprising given the comparatively low formal hurdles that they have to clear. Party-group formation in the EP is comparatively simple: to be recognised as a party-group, the number of members must be 19 or more, and the membership must be drawn from 5 member states (or, more precisely, 1/5 of the member states).<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the rules make it relatively easy to attract parties to a new group: formal group change for prospective partners is facilitated by the fact that members usually retain their parliamentary office even if they leave the grouping they belonged to when they gained the post.<sup>62</sup>

It was also noted above that the enlargement of the EU has increased the diversity of the parties that the Parliament contains. This affords the 27-strong British Conservative delegation a number of potential partners on the right of the political spectrum in its efforts to form a 'decentralist, Atlanticist and free market' grouping. Further, cursory analysis suggests that if the British Conservatives succeeded in drawing away moderate members of the UEN and Ind/Dem parties, the formation of more stable Centre-right coalitions between the Liberals, PPE and a mainstream new Rightist group could be facilitated. This creates incentives for more mainstream rightist parties, which are currently sidelined in the Parliament because of their affiliation to a more radical grouping, to break away.

There are a number of interrelated reasons why the British Conservatives appear to be struggling in their efforts to establish a (mainstream) new group, and why they will have to take on high costs if they wish to

<sup>58</sup> Each Group's share of the EP's budget (and that of the non attached members) is determined by a complex formula: 12.5% in fixed ratios (1 point for every 40 members in a Group, the total divided by 2 and increased by one), 45.5% proportionally to the number of members of each group, but with its size augmented by an additional 5% for each language the Group uses, and 42% proportionally to the number of members of each group with no further adjustment. Apart from the possibility of taking advantage of the 'language-bonus', there is little proportional financial benefit to belonging to a large political group. As regards election to parliamentary office, nominations for the President of the Parliament can be put forward by a party group or 37 members; the President is then elected by secret ballot by an absolute majority. After the election of the President, Vice-Presidencies are divided between the groups—and the national sub-groups that constitute them—according to their political strength. These are then elected by absolute majority. The President of each political group is a member of the influential Conference of Presidents, which shape the overall direction of Parliament as well as Committee membership.

<sup>59</sup> All the same, the chairman of the national party, Mirek Topolánek, is said to be less opposed to the move than was previously the case. Czech President Vaclav Klaus, and the leader of the ODS in the European Parliament, Jan Zahradil are reported to be enthusiastic for the move.

<sup>60</sup> "Cameron's British Conservatives May Line Up with Homophobic Polish Party in Europe," *Guardian*, 1.2.2006 <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/conservatives/sBritishConservative/0,,1699251,00.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Corbett, Francis Jacobs, Michael Shackleton, *The European Parliament*, London: John Harper, 2003, p. 70.

<sup>62</sup> Only if the MEP in question is a substitute in a Committee, will he or she lose that position; exceptionally, if the balance of a Committee's representation of political views is unsettled by an MEP's defection to another group, there is the possibility that the Committee membership be revised.

Table 1

**Alternative coalitions for the PPE and PSE in the European Parliament 2004–2009 predicated on the existence of a small breakaway Conservative grouping (Cons)\***

<i>“Centre-Left Coalition”</i>	<i>Strength of coalition reached through addition of the cells</i>	<i>“Centre-Right Coalition”</i>	<i>Strength of coalition reached through addition of the cells</i>
PSE	27%	PPE	31%
+ V/ALE	33%	+ ADLE	43%
+ ADLE	45%		
<i>Threshold of 50% or more</i>			
+ GUE/NGL	51%	+ Cons	50%
		+ Ind/Dem	54%
		or	
+ NI	55%	+ UEN	53%
or		or	
+ Ind/Dem	55%	+ NI	54%
or			
UEN	54%		
or		or	
Cons	57%	+ V/ALE	56%

\* In these calculations, the breakaway group consists of the Conservatives (26 + 1), Ulster Unionist Party (1), the ODS (9), PiS (7), For Fatherland and Freedom (4) and Kathy Sinnott. This group would make up approx. 7% of MEPs. For comparison with the actual situation in the current Parliament see Table 3 below (p. 24).

succeed in establishing even a non-cohesive, radical group:

Many of these reasons are circumstantial, relating to the timing of the British Conservatives' efforts: mid-term, relations between parties and their groups tend to be far less fluid than at the beginning of a new Parliament. Although smaller parties may move between groups with comparative ease, for many of them, an alternative dominated by a single large party is unattractive. Under such conditions, the number of actors involved, and these actors' reticence to make their position clear, lends considerable uncertainty to the enterprise; interested parties are unwilling to damage their relationship with their current group by openly declaring an interest in breaking away. This uncertainty is reinforced by some parties' (ODS, PiS) previous experience of failed coalition formation with the British Conservatives.<sup>63</sup> Mid-term, the British Conservatives are finding it difficult to entice parties

out of formal relationships with existing party groups without being able to present a more or less concrete alternative.

Moreover, a small new group could hardly offer certainty that it would exist beyond the current Parliament. The relative immaturity of the political systems in the new member states (towards whose parties the British Conservatives have focussed their efforts) means that partners may shrink in size or disappear altogether in the Seventh Parliament. The electoral success of the For Fatherland and Freedom Party was, for example, highly dependent upon conjunctural factors relating to Latvia's relations with Russia. The Czech Vladimír Zelezný (Ind/Dem) may be an equally transient presence in the European Parliament. All this means that parties, especially current members of the PPE-DE, would be expected to withdraw from a well-established group in favour of a potentially short-lived (2006–2009) and unstable one.

Yet, some of the reasons that the Conservatives are struggling are more fundamental: the complexity of the political landscape (which is divided along left/right, national<sup>64</sup> and integrationist/non-

<sup>63</sup> Wojciech Gagatsek, "British Conservative Party and the Group of the European People's Party – European Democrats in the European Parliament – an analysis of the history and present shape of difficult relationships," *Międzynarodowy Przegląd Polityczny*, <http://www.mpp.org.pl/06/ConsandEPPEngJan2004.doc>.

<sup>64</sup> National divisions affect not only parties' voting prefer-

integrationist lines) when combined with the specificity of British Conservative preferences is not conducive to stable group formation. Although the label “free-market, decentralist, Atlanticist” presents a relatively broad ground upon which to build a stable coalition, the eurosceptic drive which motivates British Conservative withdrawal from the PPE-DE narrows the range of their potential partners. The impetus for British Conservative withdrawal comes only secondarily from a general clash between Conservative and Christian Democratic values within the PPE-DE, which might encourage other Conservative parties to seek exit. In the PPE-DE there are few Conservative parties that share a eurosceptic disposition even approaching that of the British Conservatives. This is true of *Forza Italia* and the Spanish *Partido Popular*, which might be expected to share many of the British Conservatives’ other priorities. The Slovakian Christian Democratic Movement (3) is, meanwhile, one of the few PPE-DE parties to adopt a eurosceptic position, but it does so on the basis of its opposition to the EU’s secularism.

This eurosceptic drive therefore pushes the British Conservatives towards the more nationalistic parties in the Parliament that would be happy to join a new Conservative group but which might prove politically embarrassing to the British Conservatives themselves. Moreover, these parties, while sharing a eurosceptic position, may be antagonistic to one or more of the claimed core values of the new group; this, for example, is the case for *Mouvement pour la France* (opposed to Atlanticism and free market policies) and PiS (opposed to free market policies).

Nevertheless, at present, the British Conservative leadership appears keen to pursue this costly option, which entails the risk of political embarrassment, and the establishment of an ideologically non-cohesive group in return for a large number of concessions to member parties (Mr Cameron is reportedly prepared to offer the Presidency of the new group to another

member party<sup>65</sup>), in order to ensure the domestic progress of policy change.<sup>66</sup> The British Conservative leadership would currently aim to announce the establishment of a new group in June 2006 or—should the ODS express its support for the move, but seek to postpone it whilst it deals with national level affairs—in September. A group consisting of the British Conservatives (26 + 1), the Ulster Unionist Party (1), the ODS (9), PiS (7), For Fatherland and Freedom (4), as well as a number of smaller parties or individuals, would apparently be within the ‘pain barrier’ for the national leadership as regards possible political embarrassment. Yet, the more that the national leadership privileges national eurosceptic concerns over the ‘material’ and practical interests of its MEPs, the harder it will become to persuade MEPs to move.

British Conservative MEPs feel the practical and ‘material’ aspects of group activity more keenly than do their national level counterparts. A costly option adopted in response to national level resistance to policy change will therefore elicit a large degree of disgruntlement amongst British Conservative MEPs. The British Conservatives’ current position within the PPE-DE is that of awkward partner to whom benefits are disproportionately afforded. This privileged position would change were the leadership to found the group set out above. Even in a small group which they numerically dominated, the British Conservatives would have to distribute access to political office and influence over policy disproportionately amongst the smaller member parties in order to persuade them that they were not joining a mere vehicle for the pursuit of British Conservative preferences. Having expended the ‘positive’ tools of group management (the incentives of access to political office and policy influence) in enticing other parties to join a new group, the leadership would likely have to revert to less conciliatory means (the sanction of candidate deselection) to persuade British Conservative MEPs to comply with its plans.

## Option 2: Defection to another group

As regards the second basic option, two groups are candidates for British Conservative accession—the Independence and Democracy Group (Ind/Dem) and

ences, but also their group formation. In the context of the British Conservatives’ efforts at group formation, parties may object to cooperating with a national competitor at the European level (PiS and the Polish Civic Platform, for example). Historical national concerns preclude the British Conservatives from setting up a group with some Irish parties, no matter how close their other preferences are. Further, the British Conservatives are focussing their efforts on nationalist parties from the new member states of Eastern Europe, which might find their electoral interests damaged by joining a group with parties from another new member state given the complicated history of the region.

<sup>65</sup> See: “The Hague Connection,” [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk), 5.1.2006.

<sup>66</sup> Interview 2 RP.

the Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN). Ind/Dem coheres principally around its members' common opposition to European integration, whilst left/right issues are of secondary importance. Members' attitudes to social issues may generally be characterised as right wing and 'traditionalist'. However, the group contains a number of parties such as the Greek Popular Orthodox Rally, the Danish June Movement and the Swedish June List which are hard to categorise as belonging either to the left or the right of the political spectrum. The Irish human rights campaigner, Kathy Sinnott, remains something of a misfit in the group having campaigned primarily on a traditional left-wing platform, and only secondarily on a eurosceptic agenda.

Accession to Ind/Dem might be appealing for Conservative MPs and MEPs whose desire for withdrawal from the PPE-DE is largely motivated by eurosceptic concern about issues of European integration, rather than a desire to maximise Conservative influence within Parliament. Yet even for this faction, the costs of accession would be too prohibitive on account of the presence of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in the group.<sup>67</sup> Any attempt to accede to a group to which the British Conservatives' domestic electoral competitors belong, would be politically damaging—not least because Mr Cameron recently called them "fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists."<sup>68</sup> Although UKIP might be expected to gain in the short-term from the British Conservatives' 'capitulation', this would hardly be the case in the long-term, and they have signalled that they would oppose British Conservative membership. Accession to Ind/Dem would therefore require the British Conservatives to offer a large number of concessions to existing members like UKIP. Even in the case of persistent domestic resistance to policy change, this option can be ruled out as too costly for the leadership.

UEN, meanwhile, groups together nationalist parties from across Europe, forming part of the broader transnational group Alliance for Europe of the Nations (AEN), which exists outside the European Parliament in a similar way to the PPE.<sup>69</sup> Although the group can be described as broadly eurosceptic, it is by

no means uniformly so; nor do its members consistently hold a strong right wing position. The Irish are again the misfits in this group. Ireland's governing party *Fianna Fail* (FF) has encountered criticism at the national level because of its membership of a group whose other parties are both more nationalistic and more right-wing than it is.

In terms of policy influence, there is some evidence that if the British Conservatives joined the UEN they would not entirely marginalise themselves in the Parliament. The one-dimensional tables below (p. 24) suggest that, in purely numerical terms, it has become easier in the current Parliament for the PPE-DE to form an *ad hoc* centre-right coalition involving the UEN; this is confirmed by analysis of voting patterns during the first 18 months of the new Parliament. The Liberals have shifted to the Right with the accession of the Italian *Margherita* and French UDF, and have subsequently formed coalitions with the PPE-DE and UEN more frequently than in the last Parliament.<sup>70</sup>

Such considerations, though, are largely academic. The presence in the UEN of the 'post-fascist' *Alleanza Nazionale* has already caused the British Conservatives political embarrassment at home during former leader William Hague's efforts to form a new parliamentary group in 1999; accession would be politically costly and is unlikely to be pursued by the British Conservatives whilst other options remain. Moreover, if they were to pursue this relatively unattractive option, the Conservatives would have to offer incentives to current members of the UEN to persuade them to admit them: given *Fianna Fail*'s genesis in the aftermath of the Anglo-Irish War and the domestic political competition that FF currently faces from *Sinn Féin*, it seems highly likely that they

<sup>70</sup> See: Simon Hix and Abdel Noury, "After Enlargement: Voting Behaviour in the Sixth European Parliament", paper presented at the Federal Trust Conference "The European Parliament and the European Political Space," 30.3.2006. Despite the PPE-DE's numerical advantage in Parliament, the left-liberal (PSE+GUE+V/ALE+ELDR) coalitions had a far greater success rate (29.6%) than did the centre-right ones (PPE-DE+ELDR+UEN at 10.2%). This could be put down in large part to the British Conservatives' voting behaviour and to the PPE-DE's failure to compensate for it by finding alternative partners. The ideological distance between the PPE-DE/ELDR and the smaller right-wing groupings precluded the formation of winning centre-right coalitions during that Parliament: although the PPE's policy of pursuing size over ideological coherence had ensured its numerical advantage in Parliament, it meant that it lacked potential partners outside the grouping.

<sup>67</sup> Other 'problematic' members from a British Conservative perspective include the League of Polish Families.

<sup>68</sup> See: "UKIP demands apology from Cameron," *BBC News*, 4.4.2006, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/4875026.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/4875026.stm).

<sup>69</sup> Again 'allied membership' might be all that the British Conservatives could hope for.



**Table 2**

**Alternative coalitions for the PPE and PSE in the European Parliament 1999–2004**

<i>“Centre-Left Coalition”</i>	<i>Strength of coalition reached through addition of the cells</i>	<i>“Centre-Right Coalition”</i>	<i>Strength of coalition reached through addition of the cells</i>
PSE	29%	PPE-DE	36%
+ V/ALE	37%	+ ELDR	44%
+ ELDR	45%	+ UEN	47%
<i>Threshold of 50% or more</i>			
+ GUE/NGL	52%	+ NI or + TDI	50%
+ EDD	55%	+ EDD	53%
or		or	
+ NI		+ NI	53%
or		or	
+ TDI		+ TDI	53%
		or	
		+ V/ALE	58%

Source: Andreas Maurer, *Parlamentarische Demokratie in Europa*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2002.

**Table 3**

**Alternative coalitions for the PPE and PSE in the European Parliament 2004–2009**

<i>“Centre-Left Coalition”</i>	<i>Strength of coalition reached through addition of the cells</i>	<i>“Centre-Right Coalition”</i>	<i>Strength of coalition reached through addition of the cells</i>
PSE	27%	PPE-DE	36%
+ V/ALE	33%	+ ADLE	48%
+ ADLE	45%		
<i>Threshold of 50% or more</i>			
+ GUE/NGL	51%	+ UEN or + NI or + Ind/Dem	53%
+ NI		+ Ind/Dem	57%
or	Each	or	
+ Ind/Dem		+ UEN	57%
	55%	or	
		+ NI	57%
or		or	
UEN		+ V/ALE	58%

would object even to allied membership of the UEN for the British Conservatives.

In sum, because of the composition of these two groups, it is exceedingly unlikely that their current members will allow entry to the British Conservatives, despite the moderate ‘material’ gains that would arise through expanded membership. For the same reasons of composition, it is improbable that the British Conservatives will seek to join an existing group in this Parliament, despite the current willingness to consider costly options in order to ensure national level policy change.

### Option 3: Non-attached status

A basic third option remains: non-attached status. In ‘material’ and practical terms this option is exceedingly unattractive for British Conservative MEPs. As regards their policy influence, they would at best hope to act as an element in a broader Centre-Right coalition, exercising influence disproportionate to their size because of the necessity of their participation for the coalition to achieve the necessary threshold; however, given their numbers within the Parliament (British Conservatives make up c.4% of the EP) the chances of their regularly playing this key role would be comparatively small. Although it is true that the rules governing speaking time<sup>71</sup> do not significantly disadvantage non-attached members, and that *non-inscrits* are able to nominate for committee membership, this would be cold comfort to Conservative MEPs given the practical and ‘material’ benefits of their current relationship with the PPE-DE. Funding rules also favour groups over non-attached parties.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Rule 142 of the Parliament’s rules of procedure states that: “Speaking time shall be allocated in accordance with the following criteria:

- (a) a first fraction of speaking time shall be divided equally among all the political groups;
- (b) a further fraction shall be divided among the political groups in proportion to the total number of their members;
- (c) the Non-attached Members shall be allocated an overall speaking time based on the fractions allocated to each political group under subparagraphs (a) and (b).

<sup>72</sup> Each grouping’s share (and that of the non attached members) is determined by a complex formula: 12.5% in fixed ratios (1 point for every 40 members in a Group, the total divided by 2 and increased by one), 45.5% proportionally to the number of members of each group, but with its size augmented by an additional 5% for each language the Group uses, and 42% proportionally to the number of members each

Non-attached status would permit British Conservative MEPs a kind of ideological consistency that would be impossible in a formal coalition; however the price of this consistency would be an almost complete loss of influence. Despite the slight ideological mismatch between the national and European levels of the Conservative party as regards questions of European integration, this solution is attractive to eurosceptic MPs because of its symbolic appeal. Moreover, although this option would excite a large degree of resistance from Conservative MEPs on ‘material’ and practical grounds, it is technically the simplest of the three options to realise, requiring a minimum of interaction with other parties in the EP. It is true that the same kind of political embarrassments that would attend membership of the UEN or Ind/Dem groups pertain to isolation within the Parliament<sup>73</sup>, but should group formation prove too costly, and domestic resistance to policy change grow, the national leadership appears more likely to pursue this option than the possibility of defecting to another group.

### Option 4: Extra-parliamentary group formation

A fourth option, which has received little attention at the national level, presents itself. This requires the British Conservatives to ‘think outside the box’, and involves the founding of a transnational group outside the European Parliament as a preliminary measure to group formation within the EP.<sup>74</sup> This initial group might gather together some of the current members of the European Democrats (Czech Civic Democratic Party; Italian Pensioners’ Party; Ulster Unionist Party);

group with no further adjustment.

<sup>73</sup> Non-attached status would not only be considered an indictment of the British Conservatives’ political attractiveness, it would also place them in the same category as the French *Front National* and the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*.

<sup>74</sup> Should the Conservatives seek to establish this group as a ‘Euro-party’ they would have to clear a number of formal hurdles. Whilst the establishment of a group within the EP requires that parties from 1/5 of the member states are represented, the establishment of a Euro-party sets the bar higher at 1/5 of member states. Parties represented at the national or regional level, but not in the EP, are however included in this equation, so long as certain conditions are met. See: Regulation (EC) No 2004/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 November 2003 on the regulations governing political parties at European level and the rules regarding their funding.

in order to give it substance, it might also seek links with Conservative parties represented in national and regional Parliaments, but not at the EU-level, and with parties of non-EU states, including Turkey, and Romania (the Romanian Democratic Party is not yet a member of the European People's Party). Importantly, the group would forge links with the US Republican Party, thus helping establish it, not as a group based on opposition to the EU, but rather one cohering around an "Atlanticist, decentralist and free-market" position. Following the next round of enlargement or in the subsequent Parliament, this transnational organisation might form a basis for the establishment of a group in the EP that would be more attractive to the Parliament's other Conservative parties, because it would not be viewed as a mere vehicle for British Conservative euroscepticism.

In this longer-term strategy the leadership would seek to satisfy the concerns of national-level eurosceptics as well as MEPs worried by the practical and material issues of withdrawal from the PPE-DE. Although this option might pose formal and informal difficulties for the current relationship between the British Conservatives and the PPE-DE, it is certainly less costly than the options of defection to another group or splendid isolation. Should Option 1, group formation, prove too costly for the British Conservative leadership to realise (due perhaps to the non-participation of the ODS), it is likely that it would cast around for longer-term approaches like this, rather than seeking to accede to another group or attaining non-attached status. Whether this fourth option would be enough to placate eurosceptic MPs is questionable.

### Mr Cameron's growing control over policy change

The British Conservative party leadership has proved circumspect in its dealings with opponents of policy change. This helps explain its current readiness to incur relatively high costs in its efforts at PPE-DE withdrawal. Yet Mr Cameron's chances of accomplishing the difficult feat of broader policy change without having to make concessions on European policy depend to a large degree upon his effective use of the tools of party management at his disposal<sup>75</sup>, and here the omens look relatively good.

<sup>75</sup> These include carrots like granting access to policy

Unlike former leader Iain Duncan-Smith, who was deemed to have been foisted on the parliamentary party following his election by the party membership, the mode of Mr Cameron's election actually appears to have bolstered his standing in the party and thus his capacity to manage it. Moreover, in contrast to his recent predecessors, Mr Cameron's parliamentary career has been exceedingly short. His political tendencies cannot be categorised so easily as those of his three predecessors, who were all perceived to support principles of economic non-intervention, social conservatism and euroscepticism. In a party divided (to varying degrees) along these three axes<sup>76</sup>, his predecessors' affiliation with particular groups reduced their capacity to steer the Party away from its factionalist inclination, and to render policies more appealing to the broader electorate. Although his brief experience as an MP leaves him open to attack from MPs who feel that he has ascended the career ladder too quickly, Mr Cameron's non-affiliation and his comparatively high standing within the party permit the new leader greater flexibility in making appointments to the shadow cabinet and choosing the course for the party to steer. The perception that he is popular amongst the broader electorate also cuts down the influence that the (eurosceptic) party membership has over policy—something which does not appear to have been the case under Mr Duncan-Smith.<sup>77</sup>

The resistance that Mr Cameron will face may also be muted. Although Mr Cameron is seeking to effect wide-ranging changes to Conservative policy, MPs are likely to be relatively disciplined since:

- ▶ the party is not in power, so factions cannot gain pivotal positions by opposing government policy,
- ▶ the number of Conservative MPs rose only slightly by 33 to 198 at the last election, implying that competition for career advancement has not substantially grown, and nor has the breadth of opinion which must be accommodated within the party, and

influence; career advancement, and sticks like the whip system of party discipline; candidate de-selection.

<sup>76</sup> See: Timothy Heppell, "The Ideological Composition of the Parliamentary Conservative Party 1992–1997," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 4, 2, 2002, pp. 299–324.

<sup>77</sup> For an analysis of recent leaders' attempts to bring Conservative policy towards the 'electoral mean' see: Norman Schofield, "A Valence Model of Political Competition in Britain, 1992–1997," 2003, <http://schofield.wustl.edu/paper1.pdf>.

- ▶ the party has recently undergone its third consecutive electoral defeat, so that those MPs who have stood as candidates since 1997, have a considerable stake in ensuring future electoral success.

Most importantly, Mr Cameron appears to have adopted a course that will bring a degree of electoral success for Conservative MPs. Given the justification for policy change (that the party must render itself electorally more appealing), the British Conservatives' positive results in the recent English local elections have subdued resistance from within the party,<sup>78</sup> and the leadership has apparently become more assertive in the process of policy change.<sup>79</sup> This situation may mark a watershed for Mr Cameron's readiness to tackle opposition to policy change. In such a case, the leadership will probably become more reluctant to take on too high costs in its efforts to withdraw from the PPE-DE.

At this juncture, much therefore depends upon the outcome of the Czech elections and the immediate activities of the ODS party, which may give the British Conservatives a decisive push in one direction or the other. Although British Conservatives involved in the process of group formation claim to have more partners than they need<sup>80</sup>, the participation of the ODS is nevertheless key to their success, not just because of the number of members that it would bring to a new group, but also because its preferences are comparatively close to those of the British Conservatives, and due to its status as a mainstream party.

<sup>78</sup> See for example: "Cameron Buoyant But Northern Doubts Remain," *Guardian*, 6.5.2006, <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/localelections2006/sBritishConservative/0,,1769033,00.html>.

<sup>79</sup> See for example: "Tory Leader in Touch with Mainstream Britain, Shock!", *Financial Times*, 15.5.2006.

<sup>80</sup> Interview 2 RP.

## Perspectives for and Implications of Conservative Activity

### The British Conservatives in the Seventh Parliament (2009–2014)

In light of the party leadership's apparently growing capacity to manage policy change, it is becoming more likely that the British Conservatives will remain in the PPE-DE for the duration of the current Parliament. In such a case, the tensions in the relationship between British Conservative MEPs and other members of the PPE-DE are unlikely to be resolved. At the European level, Conservative supporters of withdrawal would likely feel their indiscipline *vis a vis* the PPE-DE to be in some way legitimised by Mr Cameron's actions, and reckon that their longer-term career interests belong outside the group. Various issues on the political agenda are also likely to multiply tensions between the British Conservatives and some, or even all, of the other parties in the PPE-DE over the course of the current Parliament.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, given the democratisation of the British Conservatives' candidate selection procedures after 1998—and especially if incumbent MEPs continue to be denied special safeguards in the candidate selection processes<sup>82</sup>—a predominantly eurosceptic Conservative membership is likely to facilitate the return of a more eurosceptic cohort of MEPs in the next Parliament.

Such developments are relevant in terms of MEPs' resistance to PPE-DE withdrawal, and thus to the costs that the national leadership may incur in possible

efforts to reposition the party within the EP during the next Parliament. Control over this decision nevertheless remains weighted towards the national level, so that developments in Westminster should be the focus of attention. A certain amount depends upon not only the result but also the timing of the next British general election. Should the election be held before, or indeed in, June 2009 (to coincide with the next European elections) and bring success for the British Conservatives, they may be persuaded that, as a party of government with European commitments, withdrawal from the PPE-DE would be undesirable.<sup>83</sup>

The PPE-DE may, however raise the costs of the British Conservatives' maintaining their relationship with the group in the next Parliament. One of the reasons that the British Conservatives have had little success in forging a new group with the PPE-DE's other Conservative parties (*Forza Italia*; the Spanish *Partido Popular*; Swedish Moderate Party) is that these parties have been generously accommodated within the PPE-DE, to the extent that the Conservative parties have succeeded in inserting their particular concerns into the PPE-DE's agenda<sup>84</sup> (indeed the British Conservatives' current attempts at group-formation are to a degree a victim of the party's success in shifting the PPE-DE's agenda). This shift has, however, elicited an adverse reaction from many of the PPE-DE's original Christian Democrat member parties, which have objected to the German-influenced policy of pursuing group-growth over ideological cohesion. Some consider that the expansion of the group has been driven by a German desire for the highest political

<sup>81</sup> The passage of the Services Directive is indicative of the way that economic reform and liberalisation can pit the parties of the old member states against those of the new, but with the British Conservatives siding with the latter. These questions are unlikely to slip from the EU's agenda. Meanwhile, some issues—beyond those concerning further integration—leave the British Conservatives relatively isolated within the group: the British Conservatives' amenability to Turkish accession is not unique (*Nea Demokratia*) but is certainly far from the norm. There is also a certain resistance to British Conservative input into the PPE-DE's position on Economic and Monetary Union, arising partly from Britain's decision not to participate in the single currency. This is a further potential source of conflict.

<sup>82</sup> For an EU-wide comparison of candidate selection procedures see the website of the research project: "Electoral Reform, Parliamentary Representation and the British MEP," <http://www.meps.org.uk/candidateselection.htm>.

<sup>83</sup> In all likelihood, though, those opposed to policy change would not be pacified by national electoral victory, especially as they would probably not be picked for government. As developments during the Major government indicate, (eurosceptic) groups within a governing party can gain leverage by opposing government policy. For these reasons, there would likely be a continued degree of bottom-up pressure to remove the British Conservatives from the PPE-DE.

<sup>84</sup> See for example: Wojciech Gagattek, "British Conservative Party and the Group of the European People's Party – European Democrats in the European Parliament – an analysis of the history and present shape of difficult relationships," *Międzynarodowy Przegląd Polityczny*, <http://www.mpp.org.pl/06/ConsandEPPEngJan2004.doc>.

posts in the Parliament, which the numerical superiority of the Centre-Right group (and German dominance of the group) bring. The most concrete sign of the desire to safeguard the group's founding Christian Democratic values was the establishment in 2000 by PPE-members of the 50-strong Schuman Group, which sought to pursue more Centrist, Christian Democratic values. The aggressive euroscepticism of some of the Conservative MEPs (the so-called 'H-block' of Daniel Hannan, Roger Helmer, Christopher Heaton-Harris), and the British Conservatives' most recent attempts at withdrawal, have reinforced this resentment, and increased criticism of the group's enlargement policy. Should the PPE-DE be faced with the challenge of integrating a large number of Conservatives (from current or prospective member parties) in the next Parliament, the exclusion of the British Conservatives or the reassessment of the British Conservatives' relationship with the group may become a necessary compromise for those in favour of expansion.<sup>85</sup> Patience with the British Conservatives amongst even those in the PPE-DE who have previously favoured an expansionary policy is wearing thin.

At the beginning of a new Parliament, inter-party and group relations are comparatively fluid, privileging group-reorganisation. If the British Conservatives failed to establish a new group in the 2004–2009 Parliament and chose to try again at the beginning of the 2009–2014 Parliament, it is likely that they would again focus their efforts principally on those parties from the new member states, which are not yet embedded in a particular group and share a sceptical attitude towards European integration. This may endanger the UEN as a political group: current members of the UEN, PiS (currently 7), TB/LNNK (currently 4) and the Polish Peasants Party (currently 3 + 1 member outside the UEN) are seen as potential group partners for the British Conservatives. The UEN group, which now contains 30 members, may also be deprived of *Fianna Fail* (4) in the next Parliament.

Should the accession of Romania and Bulgaria occur later than currently foreseen, parties from the two states will likely be less embedded in group structures in the EP in 2009 than would otherwise be the case; delay might even cause Romanian and Bulgarian parties' attitude towards European

integration to harden a little. All the same, the political landscape in these countries would appear rather barren for British Conservatives engaged in efforts at group formation. The only party of note that can be categorised as a 'soft eurosceptic' party is the Greater Romania Party (see figure 5, p. 37), but its strongly nationalist preferences make it in no way a suitable partner for the British Conservatives. The principal Centre-Right parties in these two countries are already attached to the PPE as associate members (Bulgarian Union of Democratic Forces, Democratic Party, Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union—People's Union; Romanian Christian Democratic People's Party, Evangelical People's Party) or observers (Romanian Democratic Party). Thus, although the 'circumstantial' blocks to group-formation that the British Conservatives are currently facing may be largely absent at the beginning of a new Parliament, the 'fundamental' ones will likely remain.

As regards the option of acceding to an existing group, *Fianna Fail*'s likely exit from the UEN (should it still exist) after 2009 is the only possible change of note.<sup>86</sup> Should the Irish party chose to leave the group, resistance on the part of the UEN's membership to British Conservative accession to the group would probably fall away. Nevertheless, *Fianna Fail*'s exit would do little to make accession to the UEN more attractive for the British Conservatives: assuming that its parties' membership of the transnational AEN gives rise to a certain continuity in the composition of the UEN, the continued presence of the *Alleanza Nazionale* would make Conservative accession to the group improbable.

Meanwhile, the next round of enlargement, and the reduction in the number of seats allocated to Britain which is likely to follow, will probably confirm non-attached status as an unattractive option for all but the most eurosceptic British Conservatives.<sup>87</sup> A non-attached British Conservative Party excluded from the PPE-DE, as well as from the other groups, would

<sup>85</sup> It is worth noting, though, that the principal resistance to the accession of the Romanian ruling Democratic Party is actually likely to come from the German contingent in the PPE-DE. Sections of the CDU/CSU object to President Basescu's foreign policy (the Bucharest–London–Washington axis).

<sup>86</sup> The MEP Brian Crowley negotiated his party's membership of the group in 2004, against the wishes of the party headquarters, which preferred an alliance with the ADLE. Crowley and others within the party were concerned about the Liberals' position on issues like gay marriage and abortion. *Fianna Fail* finds itself undergoing considerable tension at the national level, where there are attempts to shift it back to a more liberal position. The party's membership of the broadly right-wing UEN may become a key issue in this national level manoeuvring.

<sup>87</sup> See footnote 35.

therefore be a highly destabilising element within the Parliament as it sought possible partners.

Against the background of these rather unpromising developments, the possibility remains that the British Conservatives will fail satisfactorily to resolve the problem of their position within the EP during the course even of the next Parliament. The question arises whether a stable and lasting solution is actually attainable at all. This concern is based on the observation that the drive for, and control of the process of, withdrawal from the PPE-DE lie primarily at the national level of the British Conservative party, where actors' 'material' and practical concerns are rather different from those of their European-level colleagues. The national-level politicisation of the issue of group membership privileges priorities which have little to do with the repositioning of the British Conservative MEPs in a way that would suit their practical or 'material' concerns. Only if the political landscape in the European Parliament alters to allow a reconciliation of most MPs' symbolic, eurosceptic priorities with the more practical and material concerns of most MEPs does a stable solution appear attainable.

### **Conclusion: Implications for the Sixth Parliament and beyond**

It is not just the growing role of the European Parliament in the political process, but also the EU's forthcoming political agenda that lends importance to the position of the British Conservatives in the European Parliament. The possibility that a Conservative group may detach itself from a Christian Democratic one gains particular significance thanks to the salience of the economic and administrative reform of the EU, and of Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs policies on the political agenda. It would be a platitude to point out that the reorganisation of eurosceptic parties within the Parliament could also affect the shape of European integration at a time when the EU's political elites are engaged in explicit efforts to define the EU's future. The future geographical definition of the European Union could be affected too: the positioning of this small but (currently) weighty group of British parliamentarians in the EP has implications for the enlargement of the EU, as well as for the assertion of other 'British preferences' in the political process. The influence of the EP is not of course confined to the legislative or budgetary processes, nor would the

effects of a reorganisation of the EP's party political landscape likely be restricted to the current Parliament. Since the entry into force of the Nice Treaty the choice of the Commission President has been tied more closely to the political makeup of the European Parliament. In a context of growing political competition between the groups in the EP, there is both formal and informal normative pressure on the Heads of State and Government of the member states to take account of the weighting of the groups in the Parliament when making their choice.<sup>88</sup>

In the eventuality that the British Conservatives failed to withdraw from the PPE-DE within the life of the Sixth Parliament, most of the immediate effects would be limited to the national level where Mr Cameron's leadership would probably be weakened. Having made withdrawal one of the few concrete pledges of his campaign for the leadership, the resolution of this 'totemic' issue has become personally associated with his leadership.<sup>89</sup> In case of failure, Mr Cameron would probably not be able to show that he had wrested further concessions from the PPE-DE as regards (British) Conservative MEPs' position in the group.

The degree to which this failure would affect the leadership's authority (and its capacity to steer domestic policy change) rather depends on the reasons for failure. Failure to withdraw might result from Mr Cameron's assumption that his position within the party was strong and that he was well able to manage resistance to broader policy change. In such an outcome, and assuming that Mr Cameron's calculations were accurate, the effects of failure on the leadership's authority would probably be relatively minor. By contrast, the national leadership might be impelled to consider ever more costly options at the European level, in part because of its incapacity to steer policy change at the national level. Since such costly options are unattractive for most Conservative MEPs, the chances are large that the leadership would fail to realise them because of staunch resistance from the European level of the party. In this case, failure to withdraw from the PPE-DE would further damage the leadership's already shaky management of policy change.

It is unlikely that failure to withdraw British Conservative MEPs from the PPE-DE would stabilise their

<sup>88</sup> Simon Hix, "Possibilities for European Parties: 2004 and Beyond," LSE Working Paper, 2004, p. 4.

<sup>89</sup> Interview 4 RP.

relations with the group. Reckoning that their longer term career interests belong outside the PPE-DE, eurosceptic Conservative MEPs would probably become more undisciplined *vis à vis* the group and the party's own European-level political leadership. Efforts at group formation, whether formal (Option 4) or informal, would probably continue even after the failure to withdraw the Conservatives from the PPE-DE had been acknowledged. These moves would seek to exploit any rifts that appeared within the PPE-DE. Recent arguments within the group concerning the Services Directive show that there is a new "East-West" division, to complement existing left-right/Conservative-Christian Democrat/pro-European-anti-European divisions within the PPE-DE.

In an alternative scenario in which the British Conservatives did succeed in founding a small party group (UUP, ODS, PiS, TB/LNNK *et al.*) within the life of this Parliament, the initial effects on the European Parliament would also be fairly minor. The current groups would have to readjust to the changes in their membership. Within the UEN and Ind/Dem, the gap in preferences between the remaining mainstream parties (e.g. FF) and the other members would likely grow, if the Conservatives succeeded in enticing away comparatively moderate members of the two groups. As for the PPE-DE: whilst the group's voting patterns would almost certainly become more cohesive, the East-West division within the group could well become more apparent without the British Conservatives. The British Conservatives' failure to set up a group that offered a really viable alternative to PPE-DE membership would probably not destabilise the larger group though. The likelihood of other Conservative parties joining a group still dominated by the Tories remains relatively slim, especially whilst Conservative parties remain influential within the PPE-DE and the Conservative ideological element within a new group remained secondary to the eurosceptic.

Significantly, the PPE-DE's current leadership might be weakened, not so much by the establishment of an alternative party group as by the withdrawal itself. The current leadership of the PPE in the European Parliament has pursued a policy of size over ideological cohesion: it has sought to ensure that the centre-right group remains dominant in Parliament, even at the expense of the PPE's Christian Democratic roots. Many of the (founding) Christian Democratic parties, which have opposed this policy, would see British Conservative withdrawal as indicative of its failure.

The political landscape within the Parliament would also alter, although only slightly. Apart from the ODS and British Conservatives, it is unlikely that a new group would consist of any other large parties from the PPE-DE. The PPE-DE would therefore be likely to maintain its dominant position in Parliament. In a Parliament of 732, the PPE-DE currently has 264 members, whilst the Tories have 26 (plus the whipless Roger Helmer) and the ODS 9. The loss of around 35 members would still leave the PPE-DE ahead of the Socialists' 200 members, and the Liberals' 90.

The possible withdrawal of parties from the PPE-DE has already given rise to a number of rather prosaic implications: during the Sixth Parliament, the PPE-DE's Hans-Gert Pöttering is due to take over the presidency of the EP mid-term in 2007. In this, he depends upon the PSE members honouring the agreement to support him. However, when the PPE-DE and PSE agreed to alternate the presidency of the European Parliament between them in 1989/1992—during a period of greater left-right consensus within Parliament—candidates from other party groups nevertheless received a large number of votes in the secret ballot, presumably from members of the PPE or PSE voting irrespective of any agreement. In light of this precedent, the withdrawal of around 35 members from the PPE-DE may prove a source of concern for the group's current leadership. Yet even with its reduced numbers, it is unlikely that the PPE-DE would fail to provide the next President of the EP.

More importantly, the exit of 35 PPE-DE members and the creation of a new group would somewhat affect the legislative behaviour of the Parliament as a whole. The creation of a small new group would bring together disparate parties from outside the current PPE-DE. Table 1 (p. 21) shows that a Centre-Right coalition of the (now somewhat smaller) PPE-DE, the ADLE and the new group would contain approximately 50% of MEPs. From this perspective it is possible to imagine that centre-right coalition-building would in some ways be simplified. Yet, by drawing relatively moderate members of the UEN or Ind/Dem groupings into a new group, the preferences of the rump of these two groupings may shift, making *ad hoc* coalition formation more difficult.

By withdrawing, the British Conservatives would give up their formal influence over PPE-DE policy-making. Those parties within the PPE-DE that have sought to maintain the group's original Christian Democratic mission would likely draw the PPE-DE towards more Centrist positions on socioeconomic



questions, seeking to ally with the Liberals and Socialists rather than the new group in votes on such issues. This shift would however be mitigated by resistance from Spanish, Italian and new-member-state Conservative parties in the PPE-DE, as well as by Christian Democratic parties that have proved comparatively amenable to the Conservative agenda (CDU/CSU). Meanwhile, the removal of the eurosceptic British Conservative and ODS influence would be unlikely to exacerbate tensions within the PPE-DE on questions of European integration. Withdrawal would broadly neutralise euroscepticism in the group and reinforce the preference for grand coalition formation in the EP on issues of European integration, thus sidelining eurosceptic forces in the Parliament.

The establishment of a group comprising the TB/LNNK, PiS, ODS and a number of smaller parties persuaded to join by a range of concessions would be a costly option for the Conservative party, and would reflect a concern for MPs' rather than MEPs' interests. The defection to this new group would meet a degree of resistance amongst Conservative MEPs. A small number of MEPs such as Caroline Jackson—for whom the threat of de-selection holds little weight or interest—would likely put up spirited resistance to the move.

In the third scenario, non-attached status, this resistance would be considerably larger. Such an option would have privileged national level priorities to a considerable degree. If the second scenario entailed a general marginalisation of Conservative and eurosceptic preferences within the European Parliament, the third scenario would see a more substantial neutralisation of specific British Conservative interests.

# Appendix

## Acronyms

ADLE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
AEN	Alliance for a European of the Nations
ALE	European Free Alliance
ARE	European Radical Alliance
DE	European Democrats
ECG	European Conservative Group
EDD	Europe of Democracies and Diversities (predecessor of Ind/Dem)
ELDR	Liberal, Democratic and Reform Party
EP	European Parliament
ERM	Exchange Rate Mechanism
FF	<i>Fianna Fail</i> (Ire)
FPÖ	Austrian Freedom Party
GUE/NGL	European United Left—Nordic Green Left
HZDS	Movement for a Democratic Slovakia
Ind/Dem	Independence/Democracy (formerly EDD)
LPR	League of Polish Families
MPF	Movement for France
NI	Non-Attached
ODS	Civic Democratic Party (Cz)
PiS	Law and Justice Party (Pol)
PPE-DE	European People's Party-European Democrats
PSE	Socialist Group in the European Parliament
TB/LNNK	For Fatherland and Freedom (Lat)
TDI	Technical Group of Independent Members
UDF	Union for French Democracy
UEN	Union for a Europe of the Nations
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UMP	Union for a Popular Movement (Fr)
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
V/ALE	Greens/European Free Alliance

## Figures

**Figure 1**  
**Potential founding members of a European Conservative Party**

The following are frequently mentioned as potential partners for the British Conservatives:

British Conservative Party	(26 + 1, PPE-DE + NI)
Civic Democratic Party (ODS)	(Czech, 9, PPE-DE)
Law and Justice (PiS)	(Polish, 7, UEN)
Ulster Unionist Party	(1, PPE-DE)
Fatherland and Freedom (TB/LNNK)	(Latvian, 4, UEN)
Kathy Sinnott	(Irish, Ind/Dem)
Pensioners' Party	(Italian, 1, PPE-DE)
June List	(Swedish, 3, Ind/Dem)
Moderate Rally	(Swedish, 4, PPE-DE)
Civic Platform	(Polish, 15, PPE-DE)
Polish Peasants Party	(3 + 1, UEN + PPE-DE)
Movement for France (MPF)	(French, 3, Ind/Dem)
Christian Union	(Dutch, 2, Ind/Dem)
Popular Party-Social Centre Democrats	(Portuguese, 2 members, PPE-DE)*

\* The Portuguese have reportedly distanced themselves from the Conservatives' plans, seeking to withdraw from the ED and attain full membership of the PPE. See the earlier report: EU Reporter "Portuguese Conservatives Stand Behind EPP," 16.1.2006, <http://www.eureporter.co.uk/showarticle.php?newsid=2127>.

The following parties have been ruled out by the British Conservatives as potential partners:

Front National (NI)  
 Alleanza Nazionale (UEN)  
 United Kingdom Independence Party (Ind/Dem)

**Figure 2**  
**European Election Results 2004: UK**

<i>Party</i>	<i>Votes</i>			<i>MEPs</i>	
	<i>%</i>	<i>+/- %</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>+/-*</i>	<i>Total</i>
Conservative	26.7	-9.0	4397090	-8	27
Labour	22.6	-5.4	3718683	-6	19
UK Independence Party	16.1	9.2	2650768	10	12
Liberal Democrat	14.9	2.3	2452327	2	12
Green	6.3	0.0	1028283	2	2
British National Party	4.9	3.9	808200	0	0
Respect – The Unity Coalition	1.5	1.5	252216	0	0
Scottish National Party	1.4	-1.3	231505	0	2
Plaid Cymru	1.0	-0.9	159888	0	1

\* Seat change is adjusted to allow a direct comparison with the results from the 1999 election.

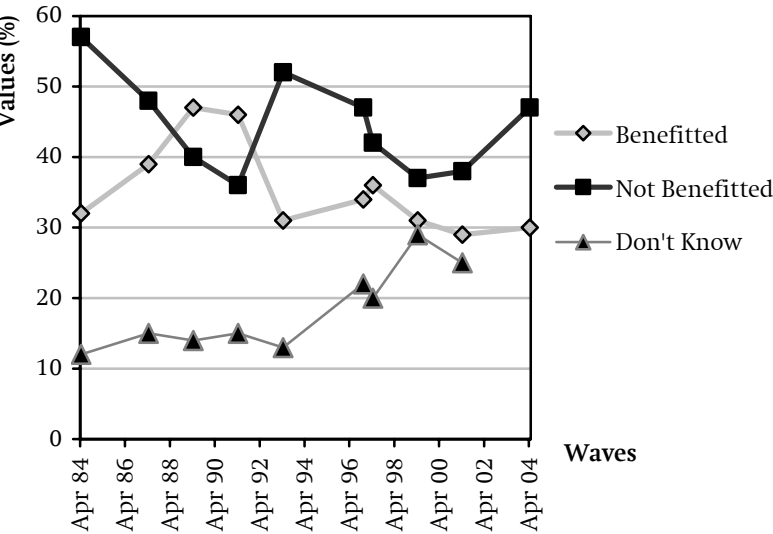
Source: BBC news online, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/vote2004/euro\\_uk/html/front.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/vote2004/euro_uk/html/front.stm).

**Figure 3**  
**Selected Local Election Results, May 2006**

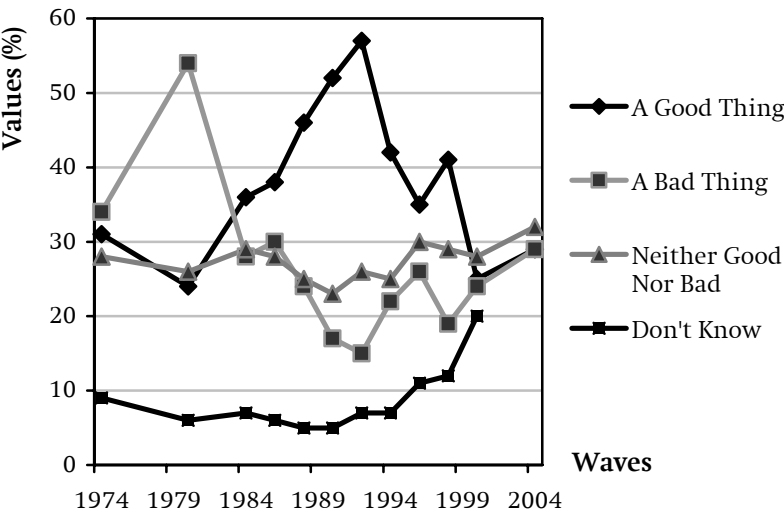
<i>Party</i>	<i>Councils</i>		<i>Councillors</i>	
	<i>Net +/-</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Net +/-</i>	<i>Total</i>
Conservative	11	<b>68</b>	316	<b>1830</b>
Labour	-18	<b>29</b>	-319	<b>1439</b>
Liberal Democrat	1	<b>13</b>	2	<b>909</b>
British National Party	0	<b>0</b>	27	<b>32</b>
UK Independence Party	0	<b>0</b>	0	<b>1</b>

Source: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/vote2006/locals/html/region\\_99999.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/vote2006/locals/html/region_99999.stm).

Figure 4  
Public Opinion towards the European Union  
a. Benefits of EU Membership: UK



b. Opinion of EU Membership: UK



**Figure 5**  
**Contemporary Political Parties with Hard and Soft Euroscepticism in the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe**

	<i>Hard</i>	<i>Soft</i>
Czech Republic	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (GUE/NGL)	Civic Democratic Party (PPE-DE)
Estonia		Centre Party (ELDR)
Hungary		Fidesz (PPE-DE)
Latvia		TB/LNNK (UEN)
Poland	Samoobrona (PSE/NL) League of Polish Families (Ind/Dem)	PiS (UEN) Peasants' Party (UEN)
Romania		Greater Romania Party
Slovakia		Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (NI) Christian Democratic Movement (PPE-DE)

Source: Partly based upon: Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, "Parties, Positions and Europe: Euroscepticism in the EU Candidate States of Central and Eastern Europe," SEI Working Paper, 2001.