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Ideologising Europe and europeanising ideology: Political party ideologies and the European Union

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Ideologising Europe and Europeanising Ideology: Political Party Ideologies and the European Union

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Ideologising Europe and Europeanising Ideology: Political Party Ideologies and The European Union

Marta Lorimer*

Abstract

There is a persistent narrative in European Union politics that presents the EU as 'non-ideological'. A closer look, however, reveals that EU integration has been (and still is) the source of multiple ideological struggles, especially for political parties. However, we still know little about how parties interpret European integration through ideological lenses and how this in turn affects (if at all) their existing ideological commitments. This paper sets itself the task of conceptualising the relationship between political party ideology and the process of European integration. It argues that there are two ways to study this relationship. The first is to focus on the 'ideologisation' of Europe and bring attention to how parties interpret European integration in light of their existing beliefs. The second approach looks at how these adaptations affect parties' existing commitments, leading to a 'Europeanisation' of ideology. Both processes generate tensions parties must navigate and opportunities they can take advantage of.

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Ideologising Europe and Europeanising Ideology: Political Party Ideologies and The European Union

1. Introduction

EU studies is rich with persistent, but sometimes misleading, narratives. One of them pertains to the supposedly non-ideological character of European integration. Definitions of the EU as a 'regulatory state' (Majone, 1998), of EU politics as dominated by government-opposition dynamics (Taggart, 1998; Sitter, 2001), or of the EU as an institution possessing 'output' rather than 'input' legitimacy (Scharpf, 2003), all speak to a conceptualisation of the EU as a body that is somehow devoid of politics – let alone ideology.

A closer look, however, reveals that the European Union is in fact a body that 'invites ideological intervention' (Flood and Soborski, 2018, p. 36). As Chris Flood and Rafal Soborski note, the complexity of the process of European integration, and the difficulty in envisaging alternatives to it, make it impossible to develop views on the EU solely based on cost-benefit analyses. Instead, political actors of various kinds will have to interpret the process of EU integration and their relationship to it through ideological lenses. The last three decades of European integration have also laid bare the growing role of political and ideological conflict in the European Union. The growing politicisation of EU issues at the national level (Hooghe and Marks, 2009), the involvement of the EU in redistributive issues (Freudlsperger and Weinrich, 2024), and the rise of Euroscepticism (Leconte, 2010; De Vries, 2018) suggest that it is high time to reconsider the role of ideology in EU politics.

In this paper, I look specifically at political party ideology and the European Union as one of the dimensions through which ideology interacts with European integration. European integration has often been a challenging issue for political parties to navigate. While it demands some form of ideological adaptation because it requires

parties to develop positions on EU topics (Ladrech, 2002), its nature as a 'wedge' issue with no clear ideological answer (van de Wardt, De Vries and Hobolt, 2014) has meant this adaptation has been sometimes complex. European integration has been the source of intra-party splits and divisions (Lynch and Whitaker, 2012), as well as U-turns from support to opposition and vice-versa (Wolkenstein, 2020; Lorimer, 2022).

Although a literature on political parties and the EU exists (Gaffney, 1996; Hix, 1997; Poguntke, 2007; Almeida, 2012; Hertner, 2018; Pittoors, 2024; Pittoors and Gheyle, 2024), the ideological dimension has been less prominent. Most noticeably, works on political party ideology and the EU have tended to adopt a narrow definition of ideology, looking at it principally through the lens of positioning on a given axis of political competition such as the left/right cleavage or variations of a transnational cleavage (Hix, 1997; Hellström, 2008; Hooghe and Marks, 2018; Schäfer et al., 2021), rather than as a complex constellation of political ideas reflecting key principles and policy commitments aimed at actualising those principles. While the narrower approach used in existing research is more amenable to quantitative measurement, with positive implications in terms of comparability and generalisability, collapsing ideology to its measurable aspects has also limited the kinds of questions that can be asked about how parties approach EU integration from an ideological perspective. For example, even though it has made it possible to identify common patterns concerning what determines positions on EU integration (Prosser, 2015), this reduction says little about the processes through which positions on EU integration are developed and articulated, how parties navigate them, and how this affects their operation.

Questions pertaining to understandings and processes are the hallmarks of interpretive research (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Bevir and Rhodes, 2015), a kind of research that is underrepresented in the field of European studies and which can help develop new insights into parties' ideological approach to EU integration. Understanding the more fine-grained aspects of party positioning on the EU, as interpretive research would allow, may have some predictive value to the extent that it reveals what dynamics parties are dealing with when they approach EU issues and

how they might approach new problems as they arise. Studying these dynamics is also essential if we are to fully gauge how European integration matters for political parties, and how it affects their role and place in democratic politics – particularly in a polity whose democratic nature remains contested. As ‘more (party) politics’ has been suggested as one solution for the EU’s notorious ‘democratic deficit’ (Follesdal and Hix, 2006), studying the ideological dimension of EU integration beyond positioning on certain issues can help gauge political parties’ role as democratic agents in EU integration and their potential to contribute to its democratic functioning.

To show how an interpretive approach to the study of party ideologies and the EU could contribute to our understanding of the ideological dimension of EU integration, I adopt a definition of ideology developed in the field of political theory and consider how ideology so conceived comes into play in the process of European integration. I then sketch out an agenda for research on political party ideologies and the EU. I conclude with a practical illustration based on existing work I have published on the far right’s ‘ideology of Europe.’ The paper’s contribution is two-fold: conceptually, it clarifies the relationship between ideologies and the EU and between political party ideologies and the EU. Empirically, it provides a concrete illustration of how a broader approach to ideology can yield new findings.

2. The ideological dimension(s) of European integration

Even though it rarely appears in studies of the European Union, ideology is a familiar and enduring category of political analysis. For the purposes of this paper, political ideologies are defined as ‘systems of political thinking, loose or rigid, deliberate or unintended, through which individuals and groups construct an understanding of the political world they, or those who preoccupy their thoughts, inhabit, and then act on that understanding’ (Freeden, 1998). Political ideologies have, in this sense, two aspects: an interpretive aspect that shapes how individuals and groups see the political world, and an action-oriented or ‘programmatic’ one, which informs how they act based on the first aspect.

Ideology manifests itself in various forms in the process of European integration. At the most basic level, we may want to think about the EU as a 'producer' of ideological discourse (Flood and Soborski, 2018). As a body that produces laws, the EU is clearly involved in developing and implementing a 'programme for action' of some kind. What is more, many of the EU's laws (but also, its promotional materials and other forms of public and internal communication) reflect a certain understanding of itself and of the world surrounding it. The so-called Copenhagen Criteria offer a good example of an ideological product of the European Union. These are three conditions and principles to which countries wishing to join the EU must conform, namely, a set of stable democratic institutions; a functioning market economy; and the ability to meet the demands of EU membership. The Copenhagen Criteria are ideological criteria in that they reflect a view of what a 'good (European) society' is (Sainsbury, 1980) and, for all intents and purposes, underpin the kinds of laws that the EU passes. These ideological discourses that the EU produces and reproduces can be used by it for several purposes, including the regulation of domestic and EU politics and also the EU's own legitimisation as a political project. Kalypso Nicolaidis (2020), for example, analysed how the use of three particular European 'isms' – cosmopolitanism, federalism, and constitutionalism – constitute part of an ideology that could serve a project of legitimisation of the EU as some 'third way' between statism and cosmopolitanism.

Second, we may want to look at the EU as an ideological construction itself, and specifically, as a body that is the result of several ideological projects and compromises – the result of someone else's 'programme for action'. If looking at the EU as a producer of ideological discourse tells us something about how the EU 'perpetuates' certain ideological traditions, looking at it as the result of ideological struggles tells us something about where the ideas it pushes forward come from. Views of the EU as a body that is the reflection of a specific ideology are not unheard of (Marks and Steenbergen, 2004). On the far right, for example, one will often find the claim that the EU is some sort of ideological project reflecting the preferences and ideas of a 'globalist' elite (Startin, 2018). In a less polemic vein, the view of the EU as the reflection

of certain ideological traditions has been explored in literature on how different ideological traditions contributed to shaping the contemporary form of the EU (White, 2020; Ferrera, 2024). In these works, particular attention has been paid to how Christian Democrats shaped the EU (Kalyvas, 1996; Kaiser, 2007; Kalyvas and Van Kersbergen, 2010; Müller, 2013) and how Christian Democratic concepts and categories manifest themselves in the contemporary institutional framework of the EU (Invernizzi Accetti, 2019, 2020). What these works highlight is that certain people and parties from different ideological traditions developed ideas on how the EU should look, and those ideas are, today, part of the make of the European Union.

Looking at the EU through these approaches brings attention to a third (and understudied) aspect of ideologies and the EU, namely, that of the EU as a body that needs to be interpreted from an ideological perspective. This step both precedes and succeeds the previous two: it precedes them when setting a direction for European integration because it leads to the establishment of ideas concerning what the EU should be. Because the process of EU integration is a continuing one, it also succeeds them when it comes to consistently rethinking and interpreting what the EU looks like. In this sense, the EU is not just a construction that reflects ideology, or produces it. It is also a construction that one responds to ideologically.

The final process of interpreting the EU ideologically is the one that interests us here. Although studies of the EU as the result of ideological conflicts or as a producer of ideological discourse also bear clear links with party ideology, the focus is more on the effects of ideology on the EU itself. The analysis of the EU as a body that needs to be made sense of ideologically, conversely, brings more attention to how political parties are affected by EU integration. The EU is a body that they must make sense of through ideological lenses, a process which can be dubbed as 'ideologisation'. The ideologisation of Europe is also likely to be accompanied by a parallel and reverse movement of Europeanisation of ideology, whereby making Europe an object of ideological contestation affects the interpreting ideology in turn. As Ladrech (2002) has pointed out in his own work on the Europeanisation of political parties, the process

of participating in European integration introduces a series of adaptive pressures for political parties, including the modification of party programmes and the integration of European issues into them. Beyond strictly programmatic adaptation, however, it may also lead to a reshaping of other fundamental concepts or ideas in a party's ideology. In the longer run, these adaptive pressures may even have more radical effects, such as displacing the national framework, or even the state, as the key reference point for political parties, although for now this does not seem to be the case (Flood and Soborski, 2018). I expand upon these dynamics in the following sections.

3. Ideologising Europe and Europeanising ideologies:

Political party ideology and the EU

What questions might a research agenda on political party ideology and the EU ask? In the section below, I sketch out the questions one might ask under the headings of 'Ideologisation' and 'Europeanisation' of ideology, and add a third area that pertains to both processes but is separate from them: that of the effects of these processes. The questions that I advance here are primarily interpretive in nature, as they are both better aligned with the definition of ideology advanced above, and the ones that have received less attention. I do, however, try to explain how they might complement existing works on political party ideology and the EU.

3.1 Ideologising Europe

'Ideologising' Europe, as I presented it before, consists of the process of interpreting the process of European integration through ideological lenses. It touches upon how political parties make European integration an object of ideological contestation.

This question can be approached from both a conceptual and a practical angle. On the conceptual level, an analysis of the process of ideologisation of Europe would have to analyse how Europe becomes part of a political ideology, or how it is articulated in ideological terms. One way to do so is to study the concepts and ideas that political parties use to define the process of European integration and determine their own

positions on the EU: what notions do they associate with European integration, what kind of project do they think the EU is, and how do views on these questions shape whether they support it or oppose it (or which parts of it they support/oppose)? Relating these concepts to a party's broader ideological commitments would also help establish how the concepts and ideas they use to interpret the EU ideologically are shaped by their existing commitments and the place that the EU takes within a broader ideological framework. Finally, this kind of analysis might also bring attention to the processes and debates that animate the process of ideologisation of Europe: what conflicts emerge, what competing definitions of Europe fight it out, and which ones 'win'? Historical work on political parties' engagement with EU integration usually offers useful perspectives on these questions. For example, Alex May's (1998) work on Britain's relationship with Europe retraces well how divisions within both the Labour and Conservative parties reflected the different ideas and priorities of their leaders. Fabio Wolkenstein's (2020) work on how parties of the Left in Great Britain, Sweden, and Denmark positioned themselves on EU issues also offers a good practical illustration of how one can study the 'ideologisation' of Europe. Using Freedman's morphological approach to the study of ideologies, Wolkenstein analyses how left-wing parties developed and changed their positions on EU integration, focusing specifically on understanding whether their early Euroscepticism was related to their ideological core or if it was linked to 'adjacent' concepts.

On the more practical side, an investigation into the ideologisation of Europe would have to bring attention to the processes and changing modes of ideological production on Europe. If the analysis of how Europe 'fits' into a political party's ideology looks, in a more interpretive sense, at how one makes sense of Europe, analysing the modes of ideological production tells us something valuable about how these positions are developed in the first place. Who establishes the party line on the EU? How are positions developed within the political party? Are they the purview of activists or elites, or are they developed in concert with other actors such as think tanks and outside researchers? In recent work on socialist parties and the EU, for example, Isabelle Hertner (2018) has approached some of these questions when looking at how

different actors within these parties participate in developing positions on the EU. Looking at questions surrounding the development of positions on the EU also offers useful intersections with the literature on party-based Euroscepticism (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, 2002; e.g., Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008), because it makes it possible to detect how considerations on ideology and strategy interact in the view of political actors themselves, helping establish their relative role in the shaping of party positions on the EU.

In answering these questions, there is ample space for diachronic analyses of how positions evolve, and how change is negotiated and managed from an ideological perspective. The importance of the 'time' dimension in the study of the EU has already been noted in existing research on parties and the EU (Hellström, 2008; Prosser, 2015). Given the nature of the EU as a construction with changing institutional structures and boundaries, including a diachronic approach can highlight how ideologies adapt to the changing reality of EU integration.

The agenda outlined here is complementary, but distinct, from that research stream in political science that analyses the determinants of positions on European integration (Hix, 1997; Hooghe and Marks, 2009). This research tends to focus on an outcome (party positions on EU integration, usually defined as support for or opposition to it) and the ideological determinants of that outcome (e.g., left/right positioning, GAL/TAN placement). It pays significantly less attention to the 'journey' leading parties to a certain position. It also approaches ideology rather narrowly, looking at it as a bundle of ideas that can be subsumed to a position on a scale. Doing so, it misses much of the nuance that exists in parties' ideological approach to Europe. Conversely, the adoption of a broader understanding of ideologies and an interpretive stance highlights questions pertaining to the processes through which EU integration is 'made sense of', and how it relates to broader party commitments. The focus in this case is more on the articulation of positions than it is on their determination, and on interpreting those positions in light of general commitments that the party holds. Such an approach is more likely to reflect the complex reality that parties face when it comes

to understanding Europe. Showing this complexity is not just important for accuracy's sake, but also because it better captures the real-life challenges that EU integration presents for political actors.

3.2 Europeanising ideology

Where studying the 'ideologisation' of Europe brings attention to how the EU is understood in the first place, studying the Europeanisation of ideology looks more closely at whether and how this integration of European issues has any effect on a party's ideology as a whole.

A first way of approaching this question is to look into the commitments that parties make in response to EU integration. This is essentially the question of programmatic adaptation pointed at by Ladrech (2002), which requires the researcher to consider what new positions political parties adopt in order to adapt to EU integration, and which ones they have to leave behind. It can also include considerations on the salience of EU issues in party programmes and campaigns (Marks and Steenbergen, 2004; Hoeglinger, 2016; Maier, Adam and Maier, 2017), a topic that tells us something about how central the EU becomes for them.

On a more conceptual level, and building on the discussion in the previous section, one can also look at how the integration of EU issues in an ideology affects the broader structure and content of an ideology. Party ideologies may be hard to change, but they are not fixed – otherwise, they would not be able to adapt to evolving social and political contexts. If we think of ideologies as more or less consistent clusters of interconnected ideas, the addition of a new concept or issue can change the way in which old concepts are interpreted. Political concepts within an ideology may not always be intimately connected to one another, but they will also rarely be fully disconnected from one another. Changes in one area can, therefore, have knock-on effects on other areas because of the relation that exists between them.

From a structural perspective, it would therefore be pertinent to analyse how central the European issue becomes once parties start discussing it, and how it shapes (if at all) the way in which parties position themselves on other issues. Does speaking of EU

integration 'displace' certain issues and relegate them to a more marginal position? Does it change the balance between different concepts or ideas within their ideologies, and bring attention to new areas? These questions have some overlap with the idea of 'salience' discussed before, in that they tell us something about EU integration's position relative to other issues. However, looking at 'salience' as a pure quantitative measure does not tell us much about the ideological centrality of the issue of EU integration: is it one that parties just talk a little or a lot about, or does it also qualitatively shape how they understand other issues?

More substantively, an investigation in the Europeanisation of ideology should analyse whether the way parties understand the EU affects the way in which other concepts in their ideology are interpreted: does it change the way in which they understand politics more broadly, prompting a rethink of how they understand core or adjacent concepts or shaping what they see as the natural space for politics? For example, does the inclusion of a supranational issue in socialist parties' ideology lead them to interpret a key concept such as equality in a different way – for example, by broadening (or narrowing) who is the object of 'equality'? How (if at all) does it affect their commitment to internationalism? I discuss some of these questions in my own work on the far right and Europe (discussed below) and show, for example, how engaging with European issues led these parties to change the way they understood certain core concepts such as identity.

Some of these questions have already been analysed in existing research on political parties and the European Union, particularly in work that investigates how EU integration has affected the kinds of commitments that political parties make (Mair, 2013; Nanou and Dorussen, 2013). However, this work remains more limited than what is being suggested here, in that it looks primarily at programmatic commitments rather than at ideology broadly intended. In this sense, while it might tell us something about how European integration has affected certain parts of party ideology, it says little about the more substantive changes it may (or may not) have entailed in terms of how parties see the world and what they (claim to) believe in.

3.3 Ideological challenges and opportunities

There is a final research area that follows from these two and pertains to the implications of these processes for parties. The ideologisation of Europe and the Europeanisation of ideology have consequences for parties, and some of these are covered by the areas identified above. In particular, the agenda outlined in the previous two sections brings attention to how the ideologisation of Europe and the Europeanisation of party ideology affects the shape and content of party ideologies more broadly. However, one might want to reflect on the implications of these changes, and whether they provide parties with both challenges to face and opportunities worth seizing. Because both processes might have consequences of this kind, it is worth discussing them together.

In terms of the challenges, the sections above have already suggested that the integration of European issues in ideology can generate tensions within a political party and indeed, party divisions concerning EU integration are well-documented (Lynch and Whitaker, 2012). Different members of a party may interpret the EU's place in an ideology differently. Conversely, once an ideology has adapted to the EU, this could generate tensions in terms of how commitments to other principles in the party ideology are interpreted. Analysing how political parties negotiate and resolve such tensions would help better understand how ideological change is managed within political parties: are tensions defused, and how? Are processes of 'de-ideologisation', where EU issues are presented as purely pragmatic issues, one way to deal with these tensions? What kind of problems do the ideological tensions generated by integrating EU issues in ideologies pose for political parties' (diachronic and synchronic) coherence as ideological bodies?

Conversely, EU integration provides political parties with new opportunities, or 'ideological resources' (Lorimer, 2024). It enables them to cover new policy areas, expand their ideological offering and potentially use the EU issue to their advantage (Woll and Jacquot, 2010). It also offers them opportunities to revisit and reframe their ideological commitments or restate them in new areas. All these points may be

valuable for parties looking to, for example, maintain the allegiance of their supporters or attract new ones. A research agenda studying party ideologies and the EU could engage further with such questions, considering what integrating Europe in party ideologies enables parties to do.

4. A brief illustration: The far right and Europe

In order to provide a practical illustration of how one might go about studying these questions, I'll briefly present some of the findings from my previous research as published in the book *Europe as Ideological Resource: European Integration and Far Right Legitimation in France and Italy* (Lorimer, 2024). The book traces how two far right parties, the Movimento Sociale Italiano/Alleanza Nazionale (MSI/AN) in Italy and the Rassemblement National (RN) in France, integrated the European issue in their ideological frameworks and to what effects. To do so, it draws on the interpretive analysis of over 400 documents produced by these parties between 1978 and 2009 for the MSI/AN, and 1978 and 2019 for the RN.

The book engages to different extents with each of the research areas I identified above. First, through a morphological approach to the study of ideologies (Freedman, 1998), it traces how the parties 'ideologised' Europe by looking at the concepts they relied upon to integrate Europe in their ideological frameworks. In morphological analysis, ideologies are treated as constellations of concepts placed in core, adjacent, and peripheral positions. Core concepts are the long-term and shared features of all known cases of a given ideology. Adjacent concepts finesse and flesh out this ideological core, while peripheral concepts, amongst other things, anchor the ideological core in contemporary realities. Starting from the assumption that far right parties' ideological core is nationalist, and treating Europe as a peripheral concept, the book shows how the MSI/AN and RN relied on core and adjacent concepts in their ideology to determine their positions on European integration. It shows how they used two core concepts of nationalism, that of identity and that of liberty, to define their approach to

Europe. The concept of identity, which in nationalism serves the purpose of defining the confines of the nation, was used to define Europe's nature as a 'community of civilisation', draw out its boundaries, and express the parties' sense of belonging to this civilisation. The concept of liberty, which captures the notion that a nation should be able to express itself politically, was used in the 1970s and 1980s to reclaim the 'autonomy' that Europe had lost following WW2. From the 1990s onwards (and most prominently in the case of the RN), liberty was used to criticise the EU's impact on domestic national sovereignty. These two concepts were further fleshed out by the adjacent concept of threat, which served to present Europe and its nations as endangered. Finally, the book shows how these elements came together in the concept of 'national interest' that the MSI/AN and RN used to articulate their programmatic positions on the principle, practice, and future of EU integration.

As far as the Europeanisation of ideology is concerned, I discuss how the integration of Europe in far-right ideology prompted certain changes in the parties' ideology. Apart from the obvious addition of a new issue in the form of programmatic commitments, the book shows how approaching Europe through the prism of identity opened the parties' ideology to a transnational dimension of belonging. However, this 'opening' also stayed within clear civilisational boundaries, making it possible to keep a distinction between 'us' and 'them' alive. The book also argues that speaking of Europe in terms of liberty shifted the balance in these parties' ideological core, bringing attention away from some topics that set them apart from other parties (such as their commitment to national identity), and placing a firmer focus on a concept that is more widely appealing and shared with other actors. In this sense, the ideologisation of Europe changed the nature of some of their commitments and the overall balance between different topics.

Finally, in the book I argue that the incorporation of Europe in their ideology provided the MSI/AN and RN with a valuable resource in their paths towards legitimisation, because it enabled them to attract new voters while keeping their core supporters on board. Specifically, I hold that relying on the concept of a European identity enabled

the parties to transnationalise their message and appear more open to other peoples and cultures than normally perceived. Using the notion of liberty made it possible for them to foster an image of actors holding uncontroversial positions. This form of legitimacy through shared narratives made the parties look more aligned with key values of their domestic political systems. The concept of threat helped them promote the idea that 'desperate times call for desperate measures', such as their own, shifting perceptions of what counts as legitimate political action. Because crises and emergencies, whether real or purported, convey the idea that an unprecedented emergency requires, or at the very least justifies, an unprecedented response, the parties could use the notion of threat to suggest that their previously untested 'extreme' (in normal times) solutions would be, in fact, perfectly commensurate in a situation of emergency. Finally, the concept of national interest helped them stress commitment to core principles in their ideology because it enabled them to show how even as they were 'adding on' a new issue, old principles still applied. Taken together, these factors helped the parties build a more respectable image that would in principle help them address the 'legitimacy deficit' they suffered in their respective countries.

The findings of *Europe as Ideological Resource* challenge some common assumptions about the far right's ideological approach to the EU. They show that there is nothing 'natural' about its Euroscepticism, and that different ideological positions on the EU were available to them. They also demonstrate that the far right's positions on Europe do not necessarily entrench *far right parties* into a marginal position, but may have in fact contributed to their entry into the mainstream. As such, the book shows what can be gained by adopting a conceptual approach to studying the relation between parties and the European Union. Such an approach brings attention to the mechanisms of party ideology and its interactions with European integration, contributing to a more thorough understanding of the ideological dimensions of the EU integration process. The book remains, however, just one application of this approach to a specific party family, and focuses exclusively on how parties made sense of Europe in party literature. Much would be gained from adopting a similar perspective for different parties, with different data, and at different times.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I looked at how political party ideology interacts with the process of European integration and suggested a series of questions one might want to ask on this topic. I identified three promising areas of research: the study of the ideologisation of Europe, the analysis of the Europeanisation of ideology, and finally, the challenges and opportunities offered by these processes. In times of change for (and of) the EU (Vasilopoulou, 2023), of growing politicisation of European integration (Hutter and Grande, 2014; Hoeglinger, 2016), and of the return of ideological divisions after a period of seeming convergence (Hay, 2007; Mair, 2013), understanding how the notion of ideology might be relevant to parties' approaches to the EU seems particularly important. Even though one might argue that political parties and party democracy are in decline, political parties still play a key role in democratic politics, as they provide the linkage between institutions and citizens, particularly through the articulation of ideas about what politics is and what policies should be enacted (Gaffney, 1996). Studying them, and their ideas, is therefore still important to anyone who cares about politics.

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