European integration and autonomist parties: a Scottish National Party and Frisian National Party perspective.¹

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Panel: On the road from niche to normal: mainstreaming processes in autonomist parties

Abstract
Since the 1970s stateless, nationalist and regionalist parties (SNRP) have become mainstream actors in many Western European countries. These parties are also often identified as one of the most pro-European parties in Europe. This paper’s main aim is to examine the links between mainstreaming processes in SNRPs and European integration and asks the question: to what extent does European integration assist mainstreaming processes within SNRPs? The framework for analysis focusses on three conditions of mainstreaming – increased legitimacy, de-radicalisation of core goals, and broadening of the policy agenda - that have benefitted from European integration. Evidence is based on a documentary analysis and 62 semi-structured interviews in the Scottish National Party and Frisian National Party. The conclusion is that European integration can aid SNRPs development from a ‘niche to normal’ but it provides a range of possibilities and opportunities that can be considered valuable by different SNRPs.

KEY WORDS: SNRP, European integration, niche parties, SNP, FNP

Introduction

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Since the 1960s and 1970s stateless nationalist and regionalist parties (SNRP) in many Western European countries have increasingly challenged the existing power structures of the central state and have demanded a redistribution of power to sub-state institutions (De Winter and Türsan 1998: 1). Whilst on a state-wide level these parties often represent a relatively small proportion of the electorate as their appeal is restricted to a specific territory, within ‘their’ territorial unit they have in many cases become key political actors. Many scholars argue that SNRPs have become mainstream and have moved from niche to normal position (Elias 2009a; Elias and Tronconi 2011a; Hepburn 2009; Mitchell et al. 2012; Elias and Tronconi 2011b). This has involved a process of ideological transformation and expansion of the policy agenda (Elias 2009a) with the aim of appealing to a larger section of the electorate. Another body of academic literature examines how European integration has affected SNRPs. This literature focusses on the new opportunity structures that European integration provided for SNRPs and explains their generally favourable attitudes towards European integration (De Winter and Gomez-Reino 2002; Jolly 2007; Lynch 1996; Keating 2004; De Winter et al. 2006; Elias 2008; Hepburn and McLoughlin 2011). This paper aims to combine these to strands of literature and examines how European integration aids mainstreaming processes in SNRPs.

A growing body of research examines the nature and characteristics of niche parties. Inevitably definitions of niche parties vary (Wagner 2012; Adams et al. 2006) and parties will be classified differently accordingly. Meguid’s definition is perhaps the most comprehensive. She distinguishes three characteristics: niche parties reject class-based politics; the issues that they raise are novel and do not coincide with existing political divisions; and they limit their issue appeal (Meguid 2005: 348). Several scholars have classified SNRPs as niche parties (Meguid 2005; Laver and Hunt 1992; Benoit and Laver 2006). One of the implications of such categorisations is that these parties are considered outsiders and ill-suited for government. This may indeed be true in some SNRPs cases but perhaps not surprisingly is challenged in others. Several scholars have pointed out that many SNRPs have outgrown their niche label (Hepburn 2009; Elias 2009a). SNRPs now ensue in wider political debates which can be linked to traditional ideological cleavages.
Furthermore, in places such as ‘the Basque Country, Bavaria, the Canary Island, Catalonia, Eastern Germany, Flanders, Galicia, Lombardy, Quebec, Sardinia, Scotland, South Tyrol, Valle d’Aosta, Veneto and Wales SNRPs have successfully gained control of sub-state governments either in majority, minority or coalition governments. Moreover, in Italy, Belgium and Germany, SNRPs have entered government coalitions at the state level’ (Hepburn 2009: 477-8).

A second issue arises when considering that fringe and niche parties are often regarded as Eurosceptic (Marks et al. 2006; Aspinwall 2002). Such a classification does not chime well with attitudes towards Europe in SNRPs who have often been described as one of the most pro-European party families (De Winter and Gomez-Reino 2002). Nevertheless, attitudes to European integration amongst SNRPs are not uniform. As Elias (Elias 2009b: 2) points out SNRPs are not ‘Europeanists par excellence’. European integration does not necessarily aid the goals of SNRPs and as a consequence support for European integration is not uniform; leading to considerable tensions within parties. Furthermore, other research has shown that several other party families can be considered more pro-European than SNRPs (Jolly 2007: 119).

The paper’s overarching aim is to examine links between mainstreaming processes and European integration. The second section of this paper outlines the theoretical arguments and identifies three ways in which European integration abets mainstreaming (legitimisation of goals, moderating core message, and providing a platform for learning). These are interconnected and there are considerable differences in how, and to what extent, they apply to different SNRPs. By distinguishing between these three factors the contribution European integration makes to mainstreaming processes can be assessed. The third and fourth section forms the empirical part of this article and examines the processes outlined in the theoretical section in two SNRPs, the SNP and FNP. The analysis uses an emperically thick comparative case study analysis. The evidence is based on a documentary analysis of key SNP and FNP documents (Manifestos, official statements, etc.) and semi-structured interviews were conducted with FNP and SNP elites between April 2008 and August 2010. The findings contribute to a growing body of literature on SNRPs as mainstream political actors (Hepburn 2009; Elias 2009a; Mitchell et al. 2012; Elias and Tronconi 2011a) and to
literature which examines SNRP strategies in a multi-level party setting (Lynch 1996; De Winter et al. 2006; Jolly 2007; Keating 2010).

The SNP is one of the largest and most successful SNRPs in western Europe (Lynch 2011). The main goal of the party is an independent Scotland in the European Union and has positioned itself as ‘a moderate left of centre party’ since the 1980s (Mitchell 1996: 232). The party has developed from niche to a mainstream governing party in Scotland and has developed a professional and modern party organisation (Mitchell et al. 2012; Hepburn 2009). The devolution process which was initiated in 1999 has been the key driver for this process from ‘niche to normal’ but European integration has played an important role in normalising the party’s politics.

The FNP is a less well-known party in the academic literature and for much of its history it has operated on the fringes of Frisian politics in the Netherlands. Historically, the party’s profile is closely linked to the protection of Frisian language and culture but it also focuses on rural and green (in the sense of nature, conservation of landscape and biological agriculture issues) (Hemminga 2006). In terms of constitutional goals the party has long advocated a federalist constitutional framework for the Netherlands but many party members favour a more limited form of cultural autonomy. In recent years the party has also become more mainstream but perhaps not to the extent of the SNP. It has broadened its policy agenda and positions itself more or less as a centre left progressive political party. Moreover, in 2007 the FNP seriously considered becoming a coalition partner in the provincial executive but remained in opposition. However, in 2011 the party did become a coalition partner together with the PvdA (Labour party) and CDA (Christian Democratic Party) in the Frisian provincial executive. The party has had a positive attitude towards European integration for most of its history and although it is too small to ever realistically hope to win a seat in Parliament it has actively participated in relevant EU organisations and structures.

**How does European integration assist SNRPs in becoming mainstream?**

Taking the three characteristic of niche parties (reject class-based politics; raise novel issues that do not coincide with existing political divisions; and limit their issue appeal) identified
by Meguid (2005) and drawing from further literature on small parties, three conditions are analysed which have to be fulfilled in order for niche parties to develop into mainstream political actors. First, niche parties have to become seen as politically legitimate actors. The core goals of niche actors - in the case of SNRPs constitutional change – gain relevance and work their way up the political agenda. Second, niche parties have to moderate their core political message (Elias 2008; Poguntke 2002; Müller-Rommel 2002). In the case of SNRPs that can mean several things. They can moderate their constitutional demands, develop a pragmatic strategy in relation to constitutional change – for example suggesting (several) intermediate steps -, or place their demands within a larger framework. Third, in order to become regarded as a mainstream governing party SNRPs have to broaden their policy agenda beyond their ‘core business’ and be perceived as competent (Müller-Rommel 2002; Elias and Tronconi 2011b: 13). This list is not exhaustive but these three conditions can be hypothesised to be affected by European integration and form a useful framework for analysis. How European integration affects these three processes is described in this the following paragraphs.

Legitimising core goals

European integration has fuelled new debates about definitions of statehood, nationhood and sovereignty (MacCormick 1999; 1982: 264). Sovereignty is no longer considered a zero sum game (Keating 2001), but competencies can be shared. European integration has led to the conceptualisation of new power structures both vertically and horizontally (Hooghe and Marks 2001). Such an understanding of sovereignty can be considered appealing to SNRPs as it has led to increased competencies for regional actors – the level at which the majority of SNRPs are inherently most active. With the increase of political competencies and different conceptualisations of sovereignty SNRPs constitutional goals are afforded increased attention.

Additionally, the EU is a Union of national states in which not one state has overall dominance. As a consequence EU policy-making is based on a process of bargaining and compromising. Within their national states, minorities can consider themselves oppressed by the majority, which are able to impose their will on them because of their numerical
strength. The EU’s slogan, ‘in varietate concordia’, expresses this idea of a union of varieties/diversities in which no majority group has an absolute dominant position and no over-arching pan-European identity (Lynch 1996: 15). Such an understanding of European integration implies that the EU itself is considered more responsive to regional demands and benefits minorities (Cram 2009; Mitchell and MacPhail 2007). Moreover, some argue that ‘the European Union makes smaller states more viable, diminishing the advantages of larger state[s]’ (Jolly 2007: 111) and as such can provide legitimacy to SNRPs and their constitutional claims when these involve secession from larger states.

At the same time, it can be argued that such a post-sovereign understanding of European integration makes the territorial claims of SNRPs’ appear outdated and anachronistic (De Winter and Gomez-Reino 2002). Moreover, the post-sovereign nature of European integration and increased competencies for sub-national actors and protection of cultural minorities can be questioned (Jeffery 2000; Keating 2008). For example, initial moves to protect minority rights have been resisted by Member States. The Copenhagen Criteria laid down in 1993 provided regulations for the protection and treatment of minorities in new candidate member states – mainly from Eastern Europe. Minorities in existing member states had hoped that the strict rules would be extended to existing member states. However, ‘member states have resisted demands to recognise the cultural and linguistic specificities of minority nations’ (Elias 2009b: 11).

European integration has also introduced new forms of cooperation between political parties which provide SNRPs with opportunities to present their claims as legitimate within a wider European context. For example, membership of bodies such as European Free Alliance (EFA), a European Political Party which unites progressive, SNRPs in the EU, also legitimise the territorial demands of SNRPs, ‘by presenting them as part of a much larger movement within the territorial peripheries of the EU for the formal recognition of the rights of nations without a state’ (Elias 2009a: 541). At the domestic level SNRPs are often considered exceptional, being part of a cross European organisation of parties that express autonomist demands, normalises their position at the domestic level. The ability to refer to likeminded parties in Europe may help them to appear more conventional. Furthermore, having representation in European Parliament can be a boost for SNRPs’ legitimacy; they are
able to claim that they can by-pass the central state and represent the nation’s interests at the supranational level. Much of this is of symbolic importance rather than having real influence but MEPs can assist SNRPs to be perceived as legitimate political actors, in particular when they have no representation at the state or regional level (Elias and Tronconi 2011b: 5).

Moderating core message

Scholars have argued that European integration can provide a less radical framework for territorial claims of SNRPs. This is particularly evident in the case for those SNRPs that strive for secession. Arguments against the demands of SNRPs often focus on the in practicalities and administrative disruption of secession (Lynch 1996: 12). European integration provides a continuation of economic and security structures which makes self-determination more feasible and lowers the costs of secession (Keating and Jones 1991: 7; Keating and McGarry 2001). Essentially, the EU provides a framework that protects SNRPs against accusations of ‘Kleinstaaterei’ (Hobsbawm 1992: 31). A claim for independence does no longer appear isolationist but can be presented as a desire to be a partner in an integrated international structure. In such instances SNRPs are more likely to be able to attract voters from beyond their core support. It can of course be questioned whether other EU member states would accept secession claims from regional actors particularly if those states themselves have strong secession movements. These member states may be fearful that secession in one region may set a precedent for others (Lindsay 1991: 88; Elias 2009b: 10). Moreover, not all SNRPs are secession movements. It may be the case that European integration de-radicalises the core goals of SNRPs with secession ambitions but it is questionable whether it does the same for movements that have less far-reaching constitutional goals. For example, SNRPs that have federalist goals challenge the constitutional framework of the internal state but by placing them in a European context and relating their federal goals to post-sovereign conceptions of the traditional state, they also challenge the external sovereignty of the state. This can arguably be described as a more radical or far reaching constitutional goal than their initial federal goals.
In the previous section it was argued that being part of pan-European groups can legitimise SNRPs’ goals. However, SNRPs differ hugely in terms of their constitutional goals, by being part of a pan-European groups that includes so many different SNRPs with a wide variety of goals, SNRPs with less radical constitutional goals could become tainted by association. Their relation with other SNRPs who may be perceived to have more radical constitutional goals can be scrutinised and exploited by domestic political opponents arguing that the more radical constitutional goals (secession) are the true goals of the party. Moreover, SNRPs often have different conceptions of their nationhood and belonging with some perhaps being more civic and inclusive than others. Such differences can also affect a party’s image.²

A platform for learning

Territorial demands are SNRPs ‘core business’ and these demands relate to a centre versus periphery cleavage (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). However, SNRPs that strive to become mainstream political actors have to broaden their policy agenda and adopt policy positions that relate to other cleavages (notably the left-right cleavage) in order to compete across the political spectrum. European integration presents SNRPs with opportunities to assist this process. It provides a platform, in which parties can cooperate, learn from each other and develop their policies. De Winter and Cachafeiro (2002: 483) argue that ‘Europeanisation allowed the very constitution of a European party family [of SNRPs] from scratch’ which had been difficult previously because of the diverse nature of this party family. There is some evidence that suggests that this has led to some ideological convergence among SNRPs (De Winter and Gomez-Reino 2002) and it has encouraged SNRPs to adopt more civic and inclusive criteria for territorial membership (De Winter and Türsan 1998; Keating 2004). Nevertheless, European integration has created an arena in which alliances between parties can be valuable. In some countries, this has led to cooperation between SNRPs from different regions within the same state in order to achieve the electoral threshold in European elections. As mentioned, it has also led to cooperation between SNRPs from different countries in groups such as EFA. EFA presents SNRPs with an opportunity to

² Such problems also occur to other political parties. For example, the British Conservative Party UK has faced criticism for leaving the Centre Right European People Party and joining a new party group called ‘good for European democracy’ which, according to some included parties with extreme views.
engage in policy learning, knowledge exchange and branding at a European level (Lynch 1996). The process has led to regular meetings and exchanges between SNRPs from different parts of Europe. The definition of a shared ‘nationalist’ political agenda, helped develop a more coherent narrative about their long-term aspirations for national self-determination within the EU (Elias 2009b: 64-5, 98-100).

**European integration and the SNP**

The SNP’s position on European integration has changed on several occasions since its foundation in 1932. In the inter-war years and in the immediate post-war period, the SNP supported European integration (Mitchell 1998: 110; Lynch 1996: 29). However, the party became increasingly suspicious of the process in the 1960s and campaigned against UK entry to the EEC in the 1975 referendum, arguing that the community reinforced the ‘old’ member states (Keating and Jones 1991: 319). In the early 1980s the SNP remained anti-EC, which mirrored public perception at the time that the EC suffered from ‘Euro-sclerosis’ and inefficiency. However, this position did not strike a chord electorally. Under the leadership of Gordon Wilson, the party’s policy on Europe started to shift and by 1988 the leadership felt confident enough to make ‘independence in Europe’ the party’s slogan (Lynch 1996: 37).

**Legitimising core goals**

At the time that the SNP adopted its pro-European position, the Conservative Party under Thatcher had shifted to a hard-line defence of British interest in Europe (Thatcher 1993). The SNP argued that Thatcher’s treatment of Europe mirrored that of Scotland (Sillars 1988: 6-7). Her insensitive style of negotiating may have touched the same nerve in Europe as it did Scotland. Scots, according to the SNP, were not interested in the narrow nationalistic views expressed by Thatcher. Jim Sillars, a former deputy party leader and one of the main protagonists of the Independence in Europe strategy, claimed: ‘when one tells someone from the South East that he or she is talking like a British nationalist the reply will be ‘So, what’s wrong with that?’ Tell a Scot that he or she is narrowly nationalistic and we feel guilty’ (Sillars 1988: 6-7). Thatcher’s confrontational style, both at home and in Europe,
allowed the SNP to exploit the Conservative Party’s unpopularity in Scotland. By clearly distinguishing themselves from the Conservative government on the issue of Europe, the SNP was able to position itself as an outward looking and modern party. European integration provided the SNP with a narrative through which they could argue that an independent Scotland would be a ‘truly European country’, based on the principle that many smaller nations work together by a process of compromise and consensus in order to achieve common goals. Within this context the UK was presented as an outdated state that was no longer relevant. This theme remains relevant today, for example, it is argued that Scotland does not have the historical baggage the UK has; the UK suffers from imperial grandeur, or is an ‘imperial relic’, which hampers constructive liaisons in Europe’. Scotland is envisaged to be more cooperative: ‘We would find common cause with other smaller countries. Britain wants to lead in Europe. That is outdated. No country should want to lead in Europe. Scotland would be in the mainstream of small countries’. Another recurring theme amongst party representatives is that Scotland is a more open, less parochial country than the UK: ‘Scotland should play full part in Europe and British nationalism does not want that. ... Scottish nationalism is outward looking whereas British nationalism is inward looking’. This tendency of presenting Scotland as a relevant, open and modern nation within Europe is closely related to the moderating function of European integration for SNRPs (see next section). By providing a modern and outward looking vision for an independent Scotland, the party itself as well as its goals appear more legitimate and therefore more attractive to the electorate.

Since the establishment of European Parliament in 1979 the SNP has had at least a single MEP elected. MEPs are of a significant symbolic value to the party as it allows the party to demonstrate its international and European credentials. It also affords support for the claim that it represents Scotland’s interests at that stage. Above all the role of Winnie Ewing, who sat as an MEP from 1979-1999, was important for the party. She was a prominent party member and one of the most recognisable SNP politicians who had achieved a by-election in 1967 in Hamilton which is often considered the start of the SNP’s success in the 1970s. In the 1980s her success in European elections was valuable to the SNP as it brought some positive news in a time when electoral success in the UK was in decline (Tarditi 2010).
European successes allowed the party to claim it remained legitimate political actor that continued to represent Scottish interests.

Moderating core message

When the SNP adopted its ‘independence in Europe’ strategy in the late 1980s it was believed that it would remove criticism of isolationism. Instead it would present independence as a modern and international option. Sillars was aware of the power of emotive words such as ‘break up, rupture, dismemberment, isolation’ (Sillars 1986: 182) and argued that the party’s position against EEC membership left it open to ‘the charge of double separation: peeling off from England and the EEC’ (Sillars 1986: 186). The ‘independence in Europe’ strategy provided a ‘mechanism to avoid economic dislocation in the event of secession from the Union’ (Lynch 1996: 39). It would ensure access not only to the English market but also to other European markets. Dardanelli (2003) refers to a process of Europeanisation of secession and shows that the utilisation of the European dimension by elite political actors in the 1997 devolution referendum in Scotland had a deep impact on attitudes in Scotland, especially when compared to 1979 referendum where the SNP had not utilised the European dimension.

Opinions in the party differ about what the end goal of European integration should be. Overall there is a strong tendency to favour an intergovernmental Europe (Keating 2010: 375). Interviewees, for example states: ‘I like to see a confederal Europe, not federal. Countries contribute according to their means and gain according to their needs. ... It would not suit Scotland to go from being an adjunct of one power to becoming the adjunct of an even larger power’. The Independence in Europe strategy has not been without its difficulties. The federalist tendencies of the EU sit uncomfortable with the SNP’s preference for intergovernmental cooperation. Furthermore, the SNP’s ‘independence in Europe’ strategy involves strong opposition to the idea of a Europe of the regions (Sillars 1989; Lynch 1995: 9). For example, an interviewee stated ‘I do not want Scotland to be a super region, I want a nation’.

In recent years the ‘independence in Europe’ strategy has become less prominent. Instead the SNP has linked independence (at least, up until the financial crisis in 2008) to a narrative
of the ‘arc of prosperity’ comparing Scotland’s position in particular to Ireland, Iceland and Norway (SNP 2006). Since Norway and Iceland are outside the EU it makes the party’s commitment to European integration more ambiguous, but the Irish success story up until 2008 demonstrated the perils of being a smaller nation in the EU. Additionally, internally there has been less focus on the ‘independence in Europe’ strategy because the debate on Scotland’s position in Europe, should independence be achieved, has been won by those in favour of Scottish independence within the EU (at least at the elite level). None of the interviewees expressed a desire for an independent Scotland outside the EU. Simultaneously, all had considerable reservations and expressed criticism of certain aspects of European integration (such as the Common Fishery Policy, the Euro, centralisation, lack of democratic deficit and high levels of bureaucracy).

Since the announcement of an independence referendum after the SNP election victory in 2011, the independence in Europe strategy has been challenged by opponents of independence. Doubt has been raised about the status of an independent Scotland in the EU and whether it would need to re-apply or re-negotiate entry. The SNP argues that as the United Kingdom is a Union of states and in that Union Scotland has the same status as the other members and therefore will be able to maintain its international agreements and treaties. Others (mainly those who oppose Scottish independence) have argued that Scotland would be considered a successor state and therefore would have to re-negotiate its international treaties, including EU membership. They raise concerns that other EU member states, particularly those that have their own regional minorities, would not accept Scotland as an independent member, as they do not wish to set a precedent.

A platform for learning

The SNP has been a full EFA member since 1989. Strict adherence to democratic principles is obligatory for membership and therefore the group does not include all SNRP’s. Extreme right parties like Vlaams Belang in Belgium and radical left wing parties like Herri Batasuna in Spain are not allowed entry. The Lega Nord in Italy was a member but its membership was suspended in 1994 after it entered into a coalition with the National Alliance, a post-fascist party in Italy. The SNP’s association with the Lega through the EFA caused ‘considerable
embarrassment’ (1995: 10) and was exploited by political opponents domestically although the electoral impact is unlikely to have been significant.

Some SNP representatives regard EFA membership with considerable scepticism. These interviewees find the SNP out of place in EFA as it represents a large nation. One SNP interviewee stated:

‘Scotland is an undisputed nation. The land boundary is not disputed – there are some issues about the sea. There is doubt that Flanders is [a nation], or Basque is divided over several countries with unclear boundaries. ... We start from the premise that this is the nation of Scotland, whereas the others start from; we believe this is the nation of Catalonia. Even unionists say Scotland is a nation’.

A distinction between a ‘little EFA’ and a ‘big EFA’ (Scotland, Flanders, Catalonia, the Basque Countries, Galicia and Wales) is made. Little EFA are considered ‘not to be in it for the politics but for identity and linguistic traditions’. Big EFA consists of parties to which the SNP is more willing to compare itself but even here it regards itself as in a somewhat unique position. EFA membership is considered a short to medium term solution for the SNP: ‘I do not think EFA is a long term proposition for the party. Where we fit in the long term is that we are a centre left social democratic party’. EFA membership seems to be more born out of necessity than actual party affiliation and evidence of EFA being considered a vehicle for policy learning appears to be limited.

**European integration and the FNP**

During the 1960s and 1970s the FNP showed little direct interest in Friesland’s place in the European Economic Community (EEC). The party focused on local issues and Brussels was politically distant. However, the European dimension was not completely neglected, since the FNP is a federal movement, it saw Friesland’s interests as best represented within a federalised Kingdom of the Netherlands and since the Netherlands was part of the EEC, Friesland would be as well. The first party programme in 1965 states, ‘the FNP aims for a federal state in the Netherlands and Europe’ (FNP 1965). This can perhaps be interpreted as a tentative attempt to link the party’s aspirations at a regional level with European
integration. However, the limited competences, the highly bureaucratic structure and the inaccessibility of the EEC are important factors explaining why the FNP showed little direct interest in Brussels. Additionally, the party’s small size and limited resources imposed (and have continued to impose) considerable constraints on its ability to actively engage with events in Brussels on a regular basis. Moreover, the FNP agenda focussed on local and regional issues and these were not (yet) linked to the process of European integration. However, the increasingly prominent regional dimension of European integration, together with the opportunities presented as a consequence of democratisation processes the FNP underwent a period of Europeanisation. In 1981 it was one of the founding members of EFA and it has since been an active. As will be argued in this section EFA membership has played a major role in shaping the FNPs European agenda.

Legitimising core goals

Despite being a party that has a strong focus on local issues, the FNP has a long history of looking beyond its own borders to legitimise its cause. In the 1970s links with several other SNRPs throughout Europe were established. Representatives would attend congresses and organise working holidays to visit other SNRPs, such as in Scotland, Wales and Catalonia. Furthermore, the party was outspoken on global issues, showing strong support for pacifist solutions. Moreover, throughout its history the FNP has proclaimed solidarity with other minorities in Europe and further afield (Huisman 2003: 196). The achievements of like-minded parties were followed with interest and communicated to party members. For instance, when the SNP won a seat in the House of Commons in the 1967 Hamilton by-election, the FNP sent a letter congratulating the party and reported the win in its party paper; the party also ensured coverage in local newspapers (Leeuwarder Courant 1967: - author’s translation). Internationalising the FNP’s cause was part of a wider strategy to legitimise the party’s goals, and Europe was to become an important part of this strategy.

The FNP asserts that the party’s international ‘friends’ increase its credibility in Friesland. EFA membership has made the party appear more attractive to the mainstream Frisian public as its goals and aims are put into a European context and therefore no longer seem as
idiosyncratic as they might do in the Dutch context. For example, in 1987, the FNP hosted the EFA congress in Leeuwarden. According to one commentator this gave the party ‘new inspiration and a broad European-Federal perspective’ (Leeuwarder Courant 1987: - author's translation). The FNP considered the event an opportunity to showcase their European associates. However, the FNP’s European credentials should not be exaggerated. For voters and members the FNP will most likely remain a local party rather than one they associate with European issues. Nevertheless, the point remains that the Europeanisation of the FNP has made the party appear less peculiar. In the Netherlands the party is in the relatively unique position of representing a minority community, whereas in Europe the FNP ‘shares something with representatives from other regions’. The FNP is able to demonstrate to the electorate that there are other parties like it in Europe and that its goals are not unique.

Some FNP interviewees regard the EU as a better protector of Frisian minority rights than the Dutch state: ‘The EU means more for minorities than the Dutch government. In the Netherlands there is no movement on including Frisian in the constitution as an official language because The Hague does not understand what we feel and what motivates us - so that has to come from the top [EU]’. Another interviewee stated: ‘Because the Netherlands became aware that there were all sorts of minorities throughout Europe they have to recognise their own’. A third respondent stated that: ‘Brussels has warned the Netherlands to treat Frisian language differently. On the back of that, Frisian has been accepted as a second official language in the Netherlands’. Not all FNP representatives agree, one respondent argued that ‘within the larger EU there is no attention for minorities and minority languages’. However, most representatives are of the opinion that the EU has helped to protect minority rights. According to these FNP representatives, the Dutch government has been influenced to recognise Frisian cultural demands by the EU. The argument is that only under the supervision of Brussels has the Netherlands been forced to formulate and implement meaningful policies that protect Frisian culture. Such attitudes are shaped by the idea that the EU is a polity in which no nation has a majority, whereas in the Netherlands one region (Holland or the West) is dominant. In the EU no cultural group is dominant and minority views are therefore better taken into account, whereas in the Netherlands the views of cultural minorities are less well represented.
The FNP combines its federalist constitutional goals for the Netherlands with its vision of a Europe of the regions. The party advocates a (partial) federal framework for the Netherlands whilst at the same time arguing for direct Frisian representation in a federal Europe of the regions. According to the FNP, the EU’s current structure is a half-way house and only represents the majorities in states in Europe. Furthermore there is a huge imbalance, as member states include states as large as Germany and as small as Malta.¹⁵ The FNP advocates the creation of a second chamber which represents cultural communities, or – if these are too large – smaller regions within cultural communities. The Committee of the Regions (CoR) is identified by some FNP party representatives as particularly suitable for this purpose. These members believe that Friesland should be represented directly in the CoR (Huisman 2003: 198-200).

Furthermore, as the party is too small to hope to win a seat on its own in the European Parliament, it proposes European party lists that would allow FNP voters to vote for other SNRPs in other countries and would allow the establishment of an autonomist European party representing like-minded SNRPs throughout Europe.¹⁶ The 2007 election manifesto expresses the above views as follow:

> It should be possible to vote for transnational party lists in Europe. Besides that we want increased awareness of the diversity in Europe. Therefore the Committee of the Regions should be transformed into an elected senate of Europe. It should represent those European peoples without their own state – all 50 million of them (FNP 2007: 11 - author's translation).

The FNP envisages less of a role for the central state and more shared competences at the sub-state and supranational levels (van Wonderen 2002). Ideas such as post-sovereignty and subsidiarity fit well into the party’s grassroots localism. These post-sovereign ideas are illustrated by one senior FNP interviewee who stated:
Certain competencies like foreign affairs and defence are better taken care of in Europe. But education, language and culture have to be dealt with in the relevant cultural communities (volksgemeenschappen), not national states. National states have to give up power and communities, including Friesland, need to gain power and have to have more power in Europe.\textsuperscript{xvii}

Considering the highly centralised Dutch state it is today, the FNP’s proposal for a federal structure in the Netherlands constitutes a radical and perhaps unattainable goal. Moreover, the party itself is unlikely to have much influence in changing Dutch constitutional structures as it does not contest elections led alone win seats at state-wide elections. By linking its domestic federal agenda to a federal idea for Europe in which cultural communities would have direct representation, it perhaps becomes an even more radical proposition; not only the Netherlands is itself has to undergo significant constitutional reform but also its position as a state in Europe requires to be redefined.

A platform for learning

EFA membership has afforded the FNP a sense of belonging and sense of purpose in Europe: ‘The FNP felt a connection with other representatives of parties that represented people that have fallen between the cracks of history’.\textsuperscript{xviii} Furthermore, EFA membership enabled the FNP to claim direct links with Brussels and demonstrate some influence in the EU decision making process, although the extent of this influence is probably more symbolic than practical. As a small party in Friesland the FNP’s influence in Europe is inherently small. Therefore, its activity in Europe is largely reactionary. The party considers the EU to be economically beneficial for Friesland and wants to exploit economic opportunities in Europe. Under the heading ‘active in Europe’ the FNP 2011 manifesto stated:

The FNP also wants Friesland to be actively present at places that are important for Friesland, politically and economically - in The Hague, Brussels or further afield. This does not only relate to cultural aspects. It also affects our ability to strengthen the structure of our economy through innovation, knowledge exchange and export enhancement (FNP 2010: 6 - author’s translation).
EFA membership is considered important for the FNP, particularly by elites, but the membership is also kept up to date with EFA activities and regular updates in the party magazine. Former Chairman, Aalsen Everts, states that for the FNP European contacts are very useful in relation to exchanging knowledge. You learn how best to address certain issues. A few words are often enough to understand each other as many of the issues in regions are similar (van Wonderen 2002). Several interviewees stated that the FNP has been able to tap into the knowledge and policy development of other parties with much larger organisational structures and research capabilities than its own, for example in relation to policies on language and cultural protection and as was argued in the previous section European contacts has had an influence on the party’s constitutional thinking. However, it is difficult to say to what extent such policy transfer and learning process take place. The party magazine regular reports on new ideas expressed by other European SNRPs but to what extent these filter through to the policy making process is unclear.

**Conclusion**

The paper’s overarching aim is to examine links between mainstreaming processes in SNRPs and European integration. The paper identifies three ways – increasing legitimacy, moderating core message, and policy learning - in which European integration can assist SNRPs in becoming to be considered more ‘normal’ political actors. However, the extent to and manner in which these aspects can be pursued differs across parties. Table 1 provides an overview of the main differences in which the two case studies in this paper.

**Table 1: Comparison SNP and FNP**

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<th>SNP</th>
<th>FNP</th>
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<td>Legitimising core goals</td>
<td>• Able to demonstrate that many smaller nations prosper in the EU.</td>
<td>• More attention for regional and minority issues in EU</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• EU electoral success can provide continuity and status when domestic electoral success is limited</td>
<td>• In the EU FNP goals are normalised (less idiosyncratic)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Internationalisation of party</td>
<td>• Linkages to parties with similar goals</td>
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European integration can provide SNRPs with increased legitimacy. The territorial demands made by SNRPs were often dismissed as anachronistic and dangerous. The majority group(s) within a state often took little notice of them or regarded them with scepticism. By placing these demands within the wider European context SNRPs are able to legitimise their political goals in two ways. First, they can point towards other groups in Europe with similar demands and argue that their own goals are not unique or idiosyncratic. Second, the EU is a Community of minorities and no single group has an overall majority. Within such a framework minority views are perhaps perceived as more legitimate than in a state where one group has a political and cultural hegemony. In one sense, within such a framework minority nationalist politics are legitimised and present SNRPs as more normal political actors both in the eyes of the electorate and other political parties. In the cases presented in this paper this argument is perhaps more relevant in the case of the FNP which can be considered more idiosyncratic in the Dutch political context whereas territorial politics has been a long standing feature in several parts of the UK. However, for the SNP Europe has also played an important role in terms of legitimising their existence particularly at times the party was less successful domestically.

The territorial claims made by SNRPs are often regarded as novel, radical and closely associated with nationalist ideologies. European integration provides a framework in which such demands are not only legitimised but also de-radicalised. SNRPs often have to face accusations of isolationism and anachronism. The European integration process allows SNRPs to combine their nationalism with supra-nationalism and hence present an inclusive, internationalised and modern framework for their territorial demands. It also provides a framework for continuity should the relationship between the state and sub-state alter.
That said the nature and visions of European integration is sufficiently malleable and vague to accommodate different views – ranging from inter-governmentalism, federalism or based on post-sovereign conceptions of state sovereignty. Many SNRPs have developed a post-sovereign narrative in relation to European integration, based on the idea of ‘Europe of the regions’. The latter is perhaps more radical than a more traditional inter-governmental understanding of sovereignty in the EU. The SNP has a more traditional idea of sovereignty and hence perceives European integration as based on an inter-governmental framework. In the case of the FNP European integration has radicalised its constitutional goals; not only does it want the Dutch state’s internal structures altered but it also wants state reform in relation to its external sovereignty.

European integration has enabled cooperation and interaction between SNRPs in several platforms. This is thought to invite opportunities for policy learning and exchange of experiences (Lynch 1996). However, the extent to which such interactions take place requires further research. This article tentatively concludes that such interactions and cooperation are more significant for smaller SNRPs. In the FNP’s case there appears some evidence of exchanges taking place and the party values its membership to EFA. The SNP appears to attach less value to its EFA membership and regards it less useful for its policy development. It finds that it has little in common with most of the EFA members and that its goals and ideology is more compatible with centre left parties in Europe.

Research has shown that European integration has led to Europeanisation of the core goals of SNRPs (Dardanelli 2003). However, the extent to which it has led to mainstreaming processes in these parties remains relatively unclear. The diverse nature of SNRPs should be a key consideration in a comparative analysis and therefore the framework requires to be relatively loosely defined. This paper has made a start by providing such a framework in which such a comparison can take place and has operationalised it in two cases. This systematic approach could be used and extended to analyse other SNRPs mainstreaming processes within a European context. The process provides insights into the multi-level governance models in which these parties operate and how the different levels of government interact with each other.
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viii Interview SNP 35 -29th October 2010
ix Interview SNP 35 – 29th October 2010
x Interview FNP 01 – 28th August 2008
xi Interview FNP 14 – 5th January 2010
xii Interview FNP 15 – 5th January 2010
xiii Interview FNP 20 – 30th March 2010
xiv Interview FNP 21 – 25th March 2010
xv Interview FNP 01 – 28th August 2008
xvi Interview FNP 12 – 13 August 2008
xvii Interview FNP 06 – 9th June 2009
xviii Interview FNP 5 – 1st August 2008