Where to for the Radical Right in the European Parliament?
The Rise and Fall of Transnational Political Cooperation

Abstract
Amidst all the academic and media discussion in recent years of the causes and consequences of the rise in support for Radical Right parties (RRPs) in Europe, a related, but equally significant development has generated less debate; namely the rise and fall in the European Parliament in 2007 of the trans-national Radical Right political group, Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty (ITS). Drawing on interviews with and a qualitative survey of former ITS members, as well as EP archival evidence, the paper begins by discussing why the notion of trans-national cooperation for far-right political parties has proved difficult, and thus far doomed to failure, before analysing the internal and external dynamics behind the rise and fall of the ITS group. Finally, the paper focuses on current collaboration among Radical Right parties post the June 2009 European elections and on the chances of a new trans-national far-right group emerging in the current parliament.
Over the last twenty years one of the most significant and controversial developments in European politics has been the electoral rise of Radical Right parties (RRPs) (see Norris 2005; Givens 2005; Mudde 2007). Although Jean-Marie Le Pen and the late Jorg Haider have grabbed most of the media headlines, the success of RRPs has not just been confined to France and Austria. From Scandinavia to the Mediterranean States and from the Benelux countries to the post-communist states, the Radical Right have made electoral inroads in recent years. Minkenberg and Perrineau (2007:30) label the term radical right ‘as a collection of nationalist, authoritarian, xenophobic, and extremist parties that are defined by the common characteristic of populist ultranationalism.’ Zaslove (2004) states that such parties are opposed to open immigration policies and to globalization, draw attention to the distance of traditional parties from the concerns of the people, tend to focus their energies on local and regional politics, and tend to be led by charismatic leaders. Classifying the Radical Right has been something of a ‘definitional minefield’ among the academic community (see: Eatwell 2003; Merkyl 2003; Norris 2005) with a wealth of terms employed to describe those parties perceived to be to the right of the mainstream right and disagreement as to whether it is possible to describe such parties in generic terms. More recently Mudde’s (2007) use of the term Populist Radical Right parties to describe those parties to the right of the mainstream-right has generated much debate and gained much respect within the existing literature. (See Zaslove 2009; Lucardie 2009; Goodwin 2009) The debate surrounding the Radical Right has further intensified in media, academic and political circles as election results in 2007 and 2008 pointed towards an increase in electoral support in many EU countries in local and national elections. The subsequent June 2009 European election results confirmed that the Radical Right had made further inroads in terms of European Parliament (EP) representation, gaining or maintaining seats in Austria, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania and the UK and maintaining seats (all-be-it in reduced numbers) in Belgium, France, Bulgaria and Latvia (see Phillips 2009a). Only in Poland did a RRP lose its entire representation in the EP with the _Liga Polskich Rodzin_ (LPR) in Poland shedding all of the 10 seats it won in 2004.
While there has been much academic discussion about the causes and consequences of this rise in support for RRPs within domestic political contexts (see Kitschelt 1995; Norris 2005; Givens 2005; Ignazi 2006; Hainsworth 2008), within an EU framework, the rise of the Radical Right has generated much less scholarly debate. Mudde (2007: 158) points out that the study of ‘populist radical right parties in the EP’ remains ‘the domain of anti-fascists and freelance journalists’ and ‘that there has been virtually no systematic empirical challenge’ to what he describes as ‘their often grotesque misrepresentations of a ‘brown network’ based largely on bizarre conspiracy theories.’ It is thus no surprise that coverage of the formation of the transnational Radical Right European Parliament political grouping, Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty, known as ITS), which was formed initially by 20 MEPs from 7 different countries in January 2007, has been dominated by writers from think-tanks, anti-Radical Right pressure groups, weekly political magazines and broadsheet newspapers. The break-up of the group in November of the same year, amid media reports of acrimony among the Romanian contingent, after accusations by Alessandra Mussolini (the grand-daughter of Benito) in a newspaper that law-breaking had become a way of life for Romanians, only served to further fuel media interest.iii While the demise of a transnational political grouping where nationalist values predominate was in itself no great shock, the existence of ITS nevertheless represents a significant development in the relatively short history of EP party politics. Drawing on Mudde’s (2007) analysis Zaslove (2009:311) argues that the ‘success and failure [of RRPs] depend upon party ideology, leadership and party organisation’. These variables, I would argue, are equally as important, if not more so, for RRPs in their quest for meaningful transnational collaboration. Whereas previous attempts at cooperation among such parties were less formal, ITS was an attempt among Radical Right elites to develop stronger and more meaningful cooperation, beyond the previous Technical Group status.

Drawing on interviews with and a qualitative survey of former ITS membersiv (see appendix 1), the purpose of this paper is to help bridge the gap identified in the literature by Mudde (2007: Ibid) by analyzing the internal and external dynamics behind the rise and fall of the ITS group. It begins by discussing why the notion of meaningful trans-
national cooperation for RRP's has thus-far proved difficult, and prior to 2007 doomed to failure, and why such collaboration is particularly controversial within the European context. It then briefly charts the evolution of transnational cooperation between RRP's in the EP prior to the formation of ITS, before examining the internal and external dynamics which led to the group’s formation, its overall aims and objectives, as well as the reasons for its dissolution. Finally, the paper focuses on current collaboration among RRP's post the June 2009 European elections and on the chances of a new trans-national Radical Right group emerging in the current parliament.

The dilemma of transnational political cooperation for radical right parties

The very concept of political cooperation on a trans-national basis is a troublesome one for RRP's and attempts to organize such cooperation have been mostly short-lived and unproductive. As Fieschi (2000:518) pointed out nearly a decade ago ‘the difficulties encountered by [Radical Right] parties in attempts to form parliamentary groups [in the EP] are indicative of the primacy of nationalisms which undermine any potential for ideological alliances.’ Such parties seem unlikely bedfellows as the basis for their cooperation seems to be out of tactical necessity rather than stemming from any clear ideological conviction, other than the preservation of their country specific national identities. Theoretically, the rationale of the EP’s party system is one where ‘national lines are suppressed in favour of ideological cleavages’ (see Fieschi ibid) and this poses a dilemma for parties of the Radical Right.

Also, there is no broad agreement on the issue of ‘Europe’ itself and this is another reason why transnational cooperation among such parties has been problematic. While the RRP's share a fairly common bond on the issues of national identity and immigration (differentiated only by degrees of extremism, depending on the party) they have typically been unable to forge a coherent collective position on, firstly whether the EU should actually exist and secondly, if so, what direction it should proceed in terms of both policy direction and institutional structure. Contrast the understandably softer euroscepticism (to use Szcerbiak’s (2000) much cited definitional structure) of the Belgian Vlaams Belang (VB) (based in the country where the EU is situated) with the more hard-line
euroscepticism of its French *Front National (FN)* neighbours, which in Le Pen’s 2002 presidential election manifesto called for a referendum over whether France should remain within the EU. Being an elected member of a parliament to which many RRP MEPs are fundamentally opposed is an ‘existentialist’ dilemma which is difficult to square, which ensures an uneasy relationship between the Radical Right MEPs, the institution of the EP and the majority of its elected members. What adds to this dilemma for the Radical Right is that European elections have often acted as the political arena which has launched the breakthrough of such parties. The EP elections’ combination of second order status (see Reif & Schmitt 1980), the common use of proportional electoral systems for such contests and the rise in public euroscepticism in many European states in the late 1980s and 1990s, ensured that RRP s have often performed better in the European electoral arena than in the domestic context. (See Minkenberg & Perrineau (2007: 34)

So while the majority of MEPs and the EU’s political elites are hostile to the presence of the Radical Right, the latter parties rely greatly on the EP as a political outlet in terms of their domestic political representation. As Fieschi (2000: 521) points out, in spite of ‘their anti-Europeanism, these parties have gained enormously from the solemnity, ritual and political symbolism of the European arena and from the credibility derived through seats in the European Parliament.’ Creating a sense of legitimacy is crucial to the success of RRP s (see Eatwell 2003: 68--9) and political representation in Strasbourg helps provide this, as well as guaranteeing resources and patronage. (See Norris 2005: 255-6)

While the above factors point towards the tactical necessity for Europe’s RRP s to cooperate on a transnational basis, such collaboration has proved problematic for reasons which go beyond mere nationalist rivalry. A number of institutional dynamics within the EP have also contributed to the predicament. Building cooperation and forging strategic alliances has been made more difficult by the response of the EU itself, and in particular of the mainstream political groups within the parliament. One of the major reasons why the European Community (EC) was formed in 1958, following on from the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951, was the desire on the part of European
(notably French) leaders, on the back of the Nazi and Fascist experiences of the 1930s and 1940s, to consign conflict and overt nationalism to the past. Fearful of a resurgence of extreme right politics since the beginning of the 1980s (as a consequence of the oil-crisis of the late 1970s), the EU has been quick to react - some would say overreact- to both the emergence of and cooperation between RRP’s in the EP. Thus, in the same way that countries such as Belgium and Germany have used a *cordon sanitaire* to block the emergence and advancement of RRP’s within the national electoral arena (see: Donselaar 2003), so the EU’s political elites, powerless as they are to prevent the emergence of such parties in the EP, have deployed similar tactics to marginalize the Radical Right within an EU context. The most obvious example of this was the decision of the EU to impose diplomatic measures against the Austrian coalition government in which Jorg Haider’s *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) was the junior partner to the Christian Democratic *Österreichische Volkspartei* (ÖVP) following the 1999 general election. (See Fallend: 2004; Westin 2003). The fact that Austria was the case study in question certainly gave the EU’s decision more historic resonance, but the tendency for the EU to make moral judgments about the Radical Right and to impose an EU-wide style *cordon Sanitaire*, has not just been confined to the high-profile Austrian case from a decade ago. The EU had previously refused to allow the Technical groups that existed between 1984 and 1994 the right to chair committees and generally deployed tactics designed to marginalize them. In 1994 the EP issued a declaration urging the Italian government to ‘remain faithful to the Community’s fundamental values’ in response to Silvio Berlusconi’s inclusion of five ministers from the *Alleanza Nazionale* party, (AN) (formerly the neo-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI)). (See Fieschi 1999: 528) More recently, the urgency of the decision in April 2007 by the EU to make incitement to racism an EU wide-crime was in part motivated by the emergence of the ITS group three months previously.

Another EP institutional dynamic that has hindered the development of formalized trans-national political cooperation among the Radical Right has been the existence of competing political groupings in the EP. Although most RRP’s have retained ‘non-attached’ status when there has been no formalized cooperation among like-minded
parties, others such as the Danish Folkeparti (DFP) or the Italian MSI have chosen to affiliate themselves with other groups such as the Europe of Nations Group (ENG), who share some of their views, all-be-it in a more diluted form. Also, the existence of the eurosceptic Democracy and Diversities group between 1999 and 2004, which was revamped as Independence and Democracy (ID) after the 2004 European elections, limited the trans-national recruitment potential of the RRP as certain parties such as the Italian Lega Nord (LN) and the Greek Laïkós Orthódoxos Synagermós (LAOS) have chosen to align themselves with this group. In essence, the fact that RRP have not found a natural home within the confines of the EP’s transnational party structure is a reflection of the fact that such parties do not fall neatly into party typology in the way that other party families, such as the Conservatives, Liberals or Greens, clearly do (see Norris 2005:43). Merkyl (2003:4) remarks that ‘the nature of right-wing extremism has not quite jelled and experienced analysts still disagree on categorisation, labels and boundaries between its different manifestations.’ The sporadic alliance building among the far-right in the EP, with no consensus among the parties as to whether, where and how they should cooperate, underline this point.

**The Radical Right in the EP – the historical perspective**

At the first set of European elections in 1979, before the rise of significant public based euroscepticism, there were no RRP elected to the EP among the 10 member states, apart from 4 members of the Italian MSI. By the time of the 1984 European elections, however, the arrival of Greece in the European Community, combined with the breakthrough of the French FN at these elections, led to the formation of an inter-parliamentary group known as The Group of the European Right. The group instigated by Jean-Marie Le Pen (see Mudde 2007: 178) was made-up of the 10 MEPs from the French FN, the 5 Italian MSI members, one representative of the Ethniki Politiki Enosis (EPEN) and were later joined by the Ulster Union Party (UUP) MEP, John Taylor. Despite the loss of the Greek EPEN member, the 1989 European elections afforded the opportunity for the expansion of The Group of the European Right with the election of six MEPs from the German Republikaner Party (REP) as well as two Italian LN, and two Belgian
Vlaams Blok (now the Vlaams Belang) representatives. However, after a dispute between the Italian MSI representatives and the German REP over the status of the South Tyrol region (a long term source of dispute between Austrian, German and Italian nationalists), the group initially disbanded (see Williams & Atkinson 2007). It was re-invented under the title of The Technical Group of the European Right (TGER) in July 1989 (see Fieschi 2000: 523) and was comprised of German REP, Belgian VB and French FN members, with Jean-Marie Le Pen as its chair. According to Fieschi (2000:523) ‘the group……was riddled with conflict and, although it drafted resolutions and continued to exist more or less until 1994, it had more conflict between members of the group than concerted action.’

After the 1994 European elections the TGER was disbanded as the German REP failed to reach the 5% threshold for EP representation, leaving insufficient MEPs to form a party group. During the period between 1994 and 1999, the remaining Radical Right MEPs from France and Belgium were part of the ‘non-attached’ group and there was little cooperation or formalized dialogue between the various parties during this period. The entry of Austria to the EU in 1995 resulted in the election of six FPÖ MEPS but they refused to join forces with the other RRRPs in the EP. (See Mudde 2007: Ibid) At the 1999 European elections, although the number of French FN members more than halved from 11 to 5 (due to the setting up of rival Bruno Megret’s short-lived breakaway Mouvement National Républicain (MNR) party) the number of countries sending Radical Right MEPs to the EP increased, with the Austrian FPÖ and the Danish DFP joining the existing parties from France, Belgium and Italy. Again, Jean-Marie Le Pen attempted to form a political grouping of the Radical Right but was forced to set-up non-ideologically aligned Technical Group of Independent Members which comprised the Italian LN and Movimento Sociale Italiano–Destra Nazionale (MSI–DN) and the Belgian VB, as well as a member of the Basque Eusakol Herritarrok party and nine MEPS from the ultra libertarian, anti-statist Partito Radicale. Le Pen’s attempts to form a Radical Right grouping failed once the one Danish DFP MEP, Morgans Camre chose to join the pro-sovereignty Europe of Nations group and the four Austrian MEPS decided to remain non-affiliated, not wanting to be associated with the perceived extremism of the FN and the
VB. The cooperation of the Technical Group proved short-lived as in September 1999, the Constitutional Affairs Committee decreed that they lacked any coherent political affinity and the group was forced to dissolve. While the French FN and the Belgian VB continued to collaborate quite closely including sharing a secretariat (see Fieschi 1999: 524-525) formal cooperation among the RRP’s did not materialize for the remainder of the 1999-2004 Parliament. The ‘big bang’ enlargement in 2004 ensured that the number of Radical Right MEPs increased further with ten Liga Polskich Rodzin, (LPR) MEPs elected, but elsewhere in Hungary, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia more orthodox right-wing parties dominated the polls and the Radical Right was largely squeezed out in terms of representation (See Minkenberg & Perrineau 2007: 42-49) While Euronat, an association of Radical Right and nationalist European political parties was formed outside of the confines of the EP by Jean-Marie Le Pen in Paris in October 2005, and following on from this the FPÖ organised a meeting of RRP’s from 7 different countries in Vienna the following month (see Mudde 2007: 180), the concrete momentum required to foster renewed, formalised cooperation within the EP did not materialise until the 2007 EU enlargement.

Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty: Membership, Formation and rationale

The ITS group was formed in the EP on January 15 2007, following the enlargement of the EU to 27 nations, to include Bulgaria and Romania, with the arrival of the Bulgarian Natsionalen Sǎyuz Ataka (NSA) and the Romanian Partidul România Mare (PRM). Prior to the accession of Bulgaria and Romania the RRP’s had lacked sufficient numbers to formalize their cooperation at an institutional level. The rules of Procedure of the European Parliament (2007) state that:

A political group shall comprise Members elected in at least one-fifth of the Member States. The minimum number of Members required to form a political group shall be twenty

ITS was initially made-up of 20 MEPs from seven different countries and included a number of high profile and controversial MEPs, including the FN’s Jean-Marie Le Pen
and his daughter Marine, the party’s deputy leader Bruno Gollnisch (who became the President of ITS) and Alessandra Mussolini, the grand-daughter of Benito. ix (see Table 1)

Table 1

Somewhat ironically, given the hostility of the EU’s political elites to the Radical Right, the formation of ITS occurred without the direct election of any Bulgarian and Romanian MEPs, as the representatives from these two countries were not initially elected to the EP, instead being nominated by their national governments, based on election results from their previous general elections. x When an election to the EP did occur in Bulgaria in May 2007, the NSA polled 14.2% of the vote, returning 3 MEPs to the Strasbourg chamber and thus increasing the number of members of the ITS group to 22. (See Table 1) The European by-election in Romania was delayed, following a postponement of the original May date due to domestic political reasons (see Maxfield 2007). When the election did finally occur in November 2007, the PRM polled 4.15% of the vote, falling below the 5% threshold, which meant that no PRM representatives were elected to the EP. This development meant that ITS no longer met the European Parliament’s procedural rules both in terms of the number of MEPs and the number of different countries represented and this ultimately contributed to the group’s demise. So a group often chastised by other groupings in the EP as lacking a proper democratic structure and programme, had to all intents and purposes been propped-up by an undemocratic procedure, where the Romanian contingent were not ever elected to the EP.

Commentators have long recognized the efforts of the two best known RRPs (the French FN and the Austrian FPÖ) to organize trans-national political cooperation within both the confines of and outside of the EP, with Jean-Marie Le Pen and Bruno Gollnisch of the former, and Andres Moertz and Andreas Mayer of the latter, cited as influential players in this process. (See Mahony 2007a; Fieschi 2000) Evidence from the qualitative surveys and interviews conducted with the members of the ITS group affirm that the two main protagonists cited as instrumental in laying the ground work for the formation of ITS were indeed Bruno Gollnisch, the deputy leader of the FN (who became president of the
Group) and Andreas Moertz, the FPÖ MEP and publisher of Zur Zeit, an Austrian political magazine, representing Radical Right views. Similarly, Philip Claes of the Belgian VB played a key part.

Much of the media and anti-radical right pressure group reporting of the motivations behind the formation of ITS flagged-up the opportunistic nature of the group’s coming together, highlighting the financial and practical day-to-day advantages of being in a political group to help raise the national profiles and coffers of their parties. (See: Williams & Atkinson 2007; Kraske & Schlamp 2007; Mahony 2007a,b,c). Doubt was cast on any genuine ideological conviction shared by the parties, beyond a common desire to preserve national identities in an inward looking and insular fashion. A closer examination of the evidence, which looks at statements made by the ITS group members at the time of its formation, evidence from its founding group declaration and the responses given in the qualitative interviews and survey, indicate that the motivations were more varied and complex than speculated by the media and mainstream political elites and that a sense of shared ideological belief and conviction does emerge as one of the raison d’êtres behind the formation of the group. Although the motivations behind the emergence of ITS, clearly differ from party to party and from MEP to MEP, it is possible to categorize the rationale for the Group’s formation under the following three broad, generic headings:

- Shared Ideological conviction
- Respectability and legitimization
- Practical survival/considerations and financial motivations

**Shared Ideological conviction**

Taylor (2005:8) argues that the contemporary European RRP s draw a ‘sharp distinction between “Europe” as a political category and “Europeans” as a cultural and historic entity’ and argues that ‘a burgeoning [radical] right is beginning to coalesce around a common set of ideas and discourses that project an abstract vision of Europe that is at once independent, exclusive and superior.’ Certainly the two most high profile RRP s of the last 20 years, the French FN and the Austrian FPÖ, have on a number of occasions
tried to develop a common euro-nationalist agenda with broadly defined common ideological beliefs and convictions. Over a decade ago, Flood (1997: 131) argued that FN political elites such as Bruno Mégret, Jean-Claude Bardet and Yves Blot ‘persistently expounded the nobility of the common European heritage of culture and civilization with France as its epitome.’ Jorg Haider, while ambivalent about the EU’s institutional structure and its lack of democratic accountability was a also firm believer in the need for the EU to develop a common European identity (see Hobelt 2003) and one of the main lines of demarcation between the FPÖ and Haider’s Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (BZÖ) party formed in 2005 was the latter’s greater recognition of a sense of shared Euro-nationalism and a softer eurosceptic discourse. (See Taylor 2005:12) More recently Jean-Marie Le Pen, who was instrumental in the formation of Euronat in Paris in October 2005, made much of the common heritage, destiny and goals shared by the people of Europe, as the following statement on the Euronat website homepage illustrates:

All Nationalist people in Europe must learn to look far beyond their borders considering all the aspects of their politics, their culture, their identity and their common future.......The Nationalist phenomenon cannot be and will not be restricted to an island, cooperation is essential to achieve freedom and our common goals (See www.euronat.org)

Although it is difficult to determine the extent to which this shared ideological focus, rather than practical and tactical motivations, led to the formation of ITS, there is no doubt that the rhetoric and discourse apparent at the time points towards a common euro-nationalist, ideological bond. When the ITS group was formed in January 2007, its President, Bruno Gollnisch, the deputy leader of the FN, claimed to represent some 23 million Europeans, "who would not be represented without us", and added "We are in favour of upholding European identity, the identities of our individual countries. We want to uphold European tradition and yet remain modern." (See Mahoney 2007: c) Andreas Molzer of the FPÖ also played up both the common convictions shared by the group and the need to bolster Europe’s shared identity as a motive behind the formation of the
group, stating on its launch that the formation of ITS would bring significant changes for Europe’s “traditionalists, nationalists and patriots.” (See Kraske & Schlamp 2007)

Evidence from the survey also points to a sense of shared ideological aspiration within the membership of the group. In response to the question ‘What were the main aims and goals of the ITS group?’ one ITS member responded ‘to build-up a platform on the European level for patriotic parties’ and another stated ‘we wanted to form a group which would be eurosceptic and represent pro-sovereignty beliefs.’

The ITS group’s founding charter also sheds some clear light on the RRPs’ common bonds and outlook. The second principle which emphasises a common ‘commitment to Christian values, heritage, culture and the traditions of European civilisation’ is a clear acknowledgement of the group’s perceived, shared, cultural destiny, an implicit critique of non-European cultures and by implication of the multicultural model. This sense of an ‘insider-outsider’ mentality with regard to a common European destiny, built around the Christian tradition, features in the interviews and surveys of the ITS MEPs. Opposition to Turkish membership was mentioned by two of the respondents as being a concrete shared policy position among all members of the group. Similarly, while Immigration and the perceived failure of the multicultural model were not mentioned in the founding charter, these issues nevertheless surfaced in the interviews and survey responses with two ITS members specifying in response to the question ‘what were the main aims and goals of the ITS group?’, the urgent need to tackle immigration on a European level.

Interestingly, over the question of European cooperation and European Union membership, the respondents were careful not to portray themselves as anti-EU in principle or indeed against their country’s membership. No mention was made by the participants in the survey of the desire for their country to withdraw from the EU, in response to the question ‘Are you in favour of your country’s membership of the EU?’ One of the respondents stated ‘we are not anti-EU per se or sceptical like UKIP for example’ while another observed, ‘I am not against the EU. We are from our party’s tradition a pro-Union party.’ There was criticism of the workings of the EU, its
institutional structure, its bureaucratic nature and of the level of corruption within the EP, as well as specific mention of the undesirability of the proposed Lisbon Treaty, but none of this was couched in overtly ‘hard’ eurosceptic rhetoric or language. While nationalist differences would ultimately contribute to the demise of the group, it is clear that shared common cultural bonds and values and a clear perception of a Euro-nationalist identity and destiny, based around a clear set of shared principles, did act as a motivating factor with regard to the rationale behind the group’s formation, certainly among the main protagonists from Austria, Belgium and France. This common thread largely dismissed in media and political circles should not be underestimated.

Practical survival/considerations and financial motivations

One of the principal reasons why a broadly hostile euro-wide media were quick to focus on the opportunistic and financial motivations of the rationale for the group was due to the comments of Alessandra Mussolini. In contrast to the ITS president Bruno Gollnisch’s founding statement about the common aims of the group, Mussolini gave a very different explanation about the reasons for the RRP’s decision to cooperate on a formal basis:

*The ITS group is more a technical group than a political group…… We are mainly getting together out of necessity. Survival is only possible in a political group…. [such groups] have a right to more funds and political positions in the European Parliament, something non-attached MEPs do not have* (Mahony 2007a)

Williams and Atkinson (2007) highlight that ‘only multinational groups have any real opportunity to set the agenda, table amendments to legislation and get speaking time in debates’, something which is acknowledged by the findings of the survey and the interviews undertaken. Certainly a principle motivation for the formation of ITS was undoubtedly the necessity for political survival, which could only really be obtained
within the institutional framework of a political grouping. One member of the group summed up the rationale for the group’s formation as follows:

To obtain more political and legal rights in the EP and in the Plenary! To have some kind of platform to communicate on a European level and to build up an infrastructure for the members

Another member pointed out the disadvantages of being ‘non-attached’ compared to being in a political group:

The problem is when you are non-attached you do not enjoy the same rights and facilities as the other members......you get less speaking time........you are not entitled to have funding to have a secretariat, you are not entitled to table motions for resolutions in the plenary sessions, you cannot table amendments in the plenary sessions, you cannot be a candidate to be President of the Parliament or Chairman of Delegations or Committees

More specifically, the financial benefits of becoming a political group, although not mentioned in the interviews or the surveys, should not be underestimated. As a result of ITS’s formation the RRP gained a number of economic and practical benefits, including entitlement to about a million Euros for staff and administrative costs (see Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty: A Who’s who 2007), a significant pool of finance for parties whose finances are often far from secure on the national stage. Although economic motivation undoubtedly played a key part in focusing the minds of the radical right MEPs (and perhaps helping them to overcome some of their nationalist differences), a potentially more important factor which united the RRP in their drive to pursue formal transnational political cooperation, and one which emerges in the responses to the surveys and the interviews, was the desire to gain respectability and legitimization.

Respectability and legitimization
It has already been argued (see Eatwell 2003:68-9) that one of the key factors which helps to explain the emergence of RRP\s is the perception of achieved legitimization. Achieving group status in the EP is the transnational equivalent of this process. The desire for respectability and legitimization clearly emerges from the findings of the survey respondents and interviewees. In response to the question ‘what are the advantages of trans-national political cooperation in the European Parliament?’ one of the respondents answered: ‘it gives you more credibility as a political force in Europe if you can show you can work together with other likeminded parties. If you have a group you can be more effective in the Parliament.’ Another flagged-up the legitimacy factor: ‘To be a legitimate member of the EP, you need to be a member of a political group. These are the rules of the game.’ Certainly for the Radical Right MEPs such cooperation represents a clear and transparent confirmation that their parties are able play by the existing rules of the game within a clear democratic framework, thus allowing them to negate some of the accusations of a broadly hostile media and political class about the group’s lack of democratic integrity. This quest for respectability and legitimization was undoubtedly a driving force with regard to the motivation behind the formation of the ITS group.

**The Break-up of the ITS Group**

When the ITS group dissolved in November 2007, media portrayals focused almost entirely on the row between Alessandra Mussolini and the Romanian contingent, following her inopportune comments about Romanian gypsies. From the outset, Mussolini seemed on the fringe of the group, stating on its formation that there were ‘many difficulties’ surrounding its launch (see Kraske & Schlamp 2007). Set against this background her subsequent decision, shortly after this outburst, to align herself to Silvio Berlusconi’s new party, the *Popolo della Libertà (PdL)* party, which was founded a few weeks later, should come as no great surprise. One of the respondents to the survey pointed out that ‘Mussolini was not very active in the group; she didn’t come very often to the meetings or the plenary sessions, so we didn’t see her a lot really.’ Although Mussolini’s presence was a negative one with regard to the overall success of ITS, it was clearly not the sole explanation for the group’s demise. Evidence from the survey
suggests that the Group was already facing difficulty with regard to its survival. In response to the question ‘why did the ITS group break-up in November 2007?’ one of the MEPs stated categorically: ‘It would have happened anyway…..The Romanians who were not elected in the first place did not succeed the 5% threshold when their European elections finally took place.’ Another respondent made no mention of the Mussolini outburst simply responding that the group dissolved ‘because the Romanian party lost the elections for the EP in Romania! (They did not reach the 4% goal)’

There was also a feeling among the non-Romanian and non-Bulgarian respondents to the survey that one of the reasons for the failure of the group was the difficulty of working with the CEE parties, in particular the Romanian GRP. Andreas Moltzer had stated on the formation of the group that:

*It is important to understand that Bulgarians and Romanians have “a different political culture.” After almost 50 years of communism, “we have to provide them with political and democratic incentives in order to develop* (See Kraske & Schlamp 2007)

In the survey and interviews though, a different reaction to CEE colleagues was evident (although not from Moltzer one should add). While not defending Mussolini’s outburst one of the respondents pointed out that ‘it was indeed hard to work with the Romanian contingent.’ Another added:

*We had problems with the Romanians……they were really difficult people to work with. They were fighting amongst themselves the whole time and it was sometimes very tiring to work with them*

While the Bulgarian NSA party was not identified as having caused specific damage in terms of the internal dynamics of the group, the negative press coverage of this party was identified by two respondents as having caused damage to the external image of ITS.

[17]
Another factor that contributed to the demise of ITS was the sheer institutional force of the EP to act as a transnational *cordon sanitaire* which, combined with the strength of European media hostility, also added to the marginalisation of the group, and in turn its ultimate dissolution. A rump within the Socialist group in the EP (the PSE), led by Martin Schultz, the leader of the group, and backed by a number of conservatives from the European Peoples’ Party (EPP), tried unsuccessfully, to prevent ITS from forming in the first instance. Schulz argued that ITS did not meet a fundamental requirement of "shared political affinity." (See Mahony 2007b) There was also an initial move from within the Socialist group to vote against the ITS candidates for the two posts to which the group was entitled as deputy president of Parliamentary commissions.

The MEPs interviewed, or who responded to the survey, were unanimous about the damage inflicted on ITS’ credibility by the other political groups and in particular the Socialist group. When faced with the question ‘How did the other groupings in the European Parliament react to the emergence of the ITS group?’ One respondent stated:

> They were mad about it because this was a group which was EU-sceptic and not blind on the things going wrong in the EU and the EP like all the others!

Martin Schultz was singled-out for his tactics in trying to spoil the progress of ITS: ‘In particular the leader of the Socialist group Mr. Schultz showed his true anti-democratic face.’ Another took-up a similar theme:

> There was a more or less hysterical reaction from Martin Schultz........The day we announced our formation, he took the floor and wanted to verify whether we really qualified to form a group; he tried to use the statement by Mrs. Mussolini in order to block us from making a group
With hindsight it is clear that the media overplayed the Mussolini card as an explanation for the group’s demise. Her comments may have been the catalyst for the group’s dissolution but they were not the underlying root cause. As Minkenberg & Perrineau (2007: 51) point out ‘there is nothing more difficult to establish than an “international group of nationalists” and there is certainly evidence of tension between the various members, in particular signs of a divide between the CEE and non-CEE members. Added to this, the goals of the group and the rationale behind its formation were non-unitary. The desire for a euro-nationalist response to global developments, as espoused in ITS’ concise 7-point declaration, and as represented by the views of the Group’s Leader and Deputy Leader, was not shared among all parties and members of the group, for whom some, like Mussolini, the practical and financial considerations, were the principle motivating factor. The political outlook of the FN, the FPÖ and the VB, all of whom have enjoyed some longevity within their domestic and the EP party contexts, contrast noticeably with the Bulgarian and Romanian parties. It is noticeable that while the former group of parties who have made discernible efforts in the last decade or so to tone-down the extremity of their political discourse, acknowledging the need for trans-national, cross-party cooperation in order to enhance their electoral progress nationally, the latter have demonstrated themselves less inclined to cooperate within the existing rules of the ‘democratic game’. The Radical Right is ‘a broad church’ in terms of degrees of extremity, and it is as much the different degrees of nationalism as it is a general inability to cooperate in principle on a trans-national basis, that led to the demise of the ITS group.

Certainly, the interviewees and the respondents to the survey felt that their efforts to achieve meaningful cooperation were thwarted as much by the external dynamics of the EU itself and by a hostile media as they were by the internal dynamics of the parties (beyond some criticism of the Romanian contingent) within the group:

We existed for less than a year. We had lots of problems with the administration of the Parliament in order to get to a point where we could function......To make things worse the budget had
already been voted before we formed our group……we didn’t get lots of cooperation from the Parliament. I am not saying everyone was at fault but some people were not really helpful to put it mildly

Despite this setback, in their search for legitimacy and economic survival (and in a bid to present a coherent, shared ideological identity), it is clear that the quest for closer transnational cooperation remained on the agenda among RRPs after the break-up of ITS. In February 2009 radical right political elites from Austria, France, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Bulgaria, Switzerland and Russia met in Vienna to strategize a common response to the proposed Lisbon Treaty, in the light of the second referendum on the issue scheduled in Ireland for October 2009. (See Phillips: 2009b) Evidence from the interviews and survey (conducted at the end of 2008) suggests that discussion about future collaboration has continued among Radical Right elites.

Where to for the Radical Right in the European Parliament?

Moving forward to the 2009 European elections, the combination of the legitimization of immigration as an issue and the growing sense of global economic uncertainty reinforced by the world-wide recession unsurprisingly led to the election of more RRPs MEPs from more EU countries. (See Table 2)

Table 2

In the Netherlands Geert Wilders Partij Voor de Vrijheid (PVV) polled 17% of the vote, winning four seats, filling the void left by the late Pim Fortuyn. In the UK the BNP, following on from its success in the London Assembly elections in 2008 (where it obtained a seat for the first time) won two seats, gaining 6% of the poll nationally. In Italy the LN polled 10% doubling its representation from four to eight MEPs. Major gains were also made in the CEE states with the Hungarian Jobbik party winning three seats on the back of a 15% poll, while the Slovenská národná strana (SNP) from Slovakia
won a seat for the first time in the EP with a 5.5% share of the vote. With regard to the two CEE parties that were former members of the ITS group, the Romanian *PRM* scored 9% of the vote returning 3 representatives to the Strasbourg chamber, while the Bulgarian *NSA* lost one of their 3 MEPs, polling 12% nationally. In Latvia the *Tēvzemei un Brīvībai, (LNNK)* gained sufficient votes (7.5%) to return one MEP and the Greek *LAOS* party won two seats, polling 7%. As for the three most established parties in the ITS group, the Austrian *FPÖ* increased their share of the vote, polling 13% and winning two seats; the French *FN* were pegged back losing four of its seven seats and the Belgian *VB* polled 10%, (a reduction of 4% compared to 2004) and thus lost one of its three seats. Elsewhere, in Finland the True Finns party (*Perussuomalaiset*) polled 10% gaining a seat in the EP for the first time, while the Danish *DFP* doubled its representation to two seats, increasing its share of the vote from 7% in 2004 to 15%.

Despite this increase in the number of Radical Right MEPs to 34 as a result of the 2009 European elections and the demise of the *Ind/Dem* and *UEN* groups, a radical right grouping similar to ITS has failed to emerge in the new parliament. The Latvian *LNNK* decided to migrate to the newly formed soft-eurosceptic, European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group initiated by the UK Conservative party, while the Italian *LN* and the Danish *DFP*’s representatives (despite speculation that they would join the same group) ended up attaching themselves to the Europe of Freedom and Democracy (*EFD*) group, the UKIP driven, revamped merger of *IND/DEM* and *UEN*. When the True Finns (*Perussuomalaiset*), Slovakian *SNP* and Greek *LAOS* representatives followed suit and Geert Wilders *PW* party decided (for the time being) to remain unattached this effectively put an end to the possibility of a Radical Right group emerging, particularly given the change of rules introduced by the EP’s Committee on Constitutional Affairs in July 2008, which now requires a Group to be comprised of 25 MEPs instead of 20 and from seven countries rather than six (see Mahony 2008). Currently the 21 MEPs from the Austrian *FPÖ*, the French *FN*, the Belgian *VB*, the Dutch *PW*, the British *BNP*, the Bulgarian *NSA*, the Romanian *PRM* and the Hungarian *Jobbik* party remain unattached in the EP.
In spite of the positive electoral consequences of the global economic recession, the failure of a new Radical Right group to emerge after the June 2009 elections was no great surprise, given the air of pessimism among the respondents to the survey at the end of 2008. The change in rules was cited by two MEPs as an institutional barrier which could well prevent the possibility of further, formal cooperation. In reality, the contemporary European Radical Right is a ‘broad church’ and any new transnational grouping within the EP would continue to face the same problems encountered by ITS. The degrees of nationalism and extremism that exist among the different parties, as epitomized by the ideological differences between say the Belgian VB (whose prime goal is the separation of Flemish Flanders from Wallonia) and the British BNP (who still display some of the characteristics of an overtly extreme right party) renders it difficult, for those elites interested in closer collaboration, to unite this disparate party family in transnational terms. At the same time in the search for legitimacy (as the key to electoral success) the less extreme parties are wary about formal association with those parties perceived to be more extreme. The Danish DFP and the Italian LN, despite negotiations with other RRP at various stages, have never felt comfortable about joining forces with the French FN and the Austrian FPÖ. A failure on the part of the latter two parties, and on the part of the Belgian VB, to convince their Danish and Italian counterparts, and more recently Geert Wilders PW, that they share common ideological ground has ultimately left the three long-established French, Austrian and Belgian RRP isolated in the EP, with their only, remaining, potential allies the CEE RRP from Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania and the British BNP.

The likelihood of future, formal transnational political cooperation among the non-attached RRP in the current parliament looks increasingly unlikely and the situation is rendered more improbable by the evidence from the survey which suggests that an East/West divide runs through the heart of their collective relationship. Historically, the RRP have been notoriously anti-communist and this distrust remains among some of the elites in the Western parties. Conversely, the parties from the CEE states, raised in a political culture hostile to extreme right and fascist politics, view their historical circumstances differently to those of the Western parties and this has ensured a
perception that as a region they face different economic and political challenges and difficulties. Overcoming these divisions may prove to be insurmountable well beyond the current parliament for the Radical Right in their efforts to reach meaningful trans-national agreement which crosses the East-West divide.

Despite the increased presence of the Radical Right in the EP in numerical terms and the endeavour of the established parties to form a new group from the ashes of the ITS, former UK Labour MEP Glyn Ford’s feared scenario (see Phillips 2008) of the emergence of two groups, which he described as ‘fascist light’ and ‘fascist right’, has not materialized. The quest for legitimacy and the financial benefits associated with being in an EP group tempted sufficient numbers of MEPs to seek shelter in the UKIP dominated Europe of Freedom and Democracy group and this has left the non-attached parties both marginalized and financially impoverished. Mudde (2007: 177) asserts that ‘the European Parliament is one of the few arenas in which the populist radical right has been able to establish some structured cooperation.’ In reality, however, they remain on the margins and durable collaboration looks set to remain untenable as nationalist differences, elite ego-clashes, negative perceptions about other parties’ images, disagreements over the direction of the EU, and the EP’s attempts to impose an institutional cordon sanitaire have combined to divide rather than unite the Radical Right. The situation does not look set to change in the current parliament and the possibility of a new transnational political group emerging remains unlikely.
Table 1: The membership of the ITS group in the EP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country and Party</th>
<th>Number of MEPs</th>
<th>Name of MEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France (Front National)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bruno Gollnisch (Chair of Group); Carl Lang; Jean-Marie Le Pen; Marine Le Pen; Fernand Le Rachinel; Jean-Claude Martinez; Lydia Schenardi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium (Vlaams Belang)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Philip Claey (Vice chairman of Group); Koenraad Dillen; Frank Vanhecke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Andreas Mölzer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy (Movimento Sociale Italiano) (Fiamma Tricolore)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Alessandra Mussolini; Luca Romagnoli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom (Independent)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ashley Mote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria (Natsionalen Sǎyuz Ataka)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dimitar Stoyanov (after initial observation status in January 2007 he was elected in May 2007); Slavcho Binev; Desislav Chukolov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania (Partidul România Mare) (Independent)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Daniela Buruiană; Eugen Mihăescu (Vice Chairman of Group); Viorica Moisuc; Petre Popeangă; Cristian Stănescu; Mircea Coșea (after initial observation status in The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats Group in the EP, he left the Romanian National Liberal Party to join ITS in March 2007 as an Independent)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 Radical Right representation in the European Parliament after the June 2009 elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>% of Vote</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Freedom Party</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>British National Party</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Northern League</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Jobbik party</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>Slovakian National Party</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>Greater Romanian Party</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>F’rland and Freedom Party</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>People’s orthodox rally</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>True Finns</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Danish People’s Party</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Freedom Party</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Front National</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Vlaams Belang</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 1: Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty Questionnaire (October 2008)
Survey conducted by Dr Nicholas Startin, University of the West of England

I would be grateful if you could take a few minutes to answer the following questions:

1) Why was Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty (ITS) formed as a political grouping in the European Parliament in January 2007?

2) What were the main aims and goals of the ITS group?

3) Who was instrumental in the formation of the ITS group?

4) How did the other groupings in the European Parliament react to the emergence of the ITS group?

5) How did the media in your country react to the formation of ITS?

[26]
6) How influential was the ITS group as a formation?

7) Why did the ITS group break-up in November 2007?

8) What are the advantages of trans-national political cooperation in the European Parliament?

9) What are the chances of a new political group emerging after the 2009 European elections, with a shared belief in issues such as Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty?

10) What are the main political issues facing a) your country today? b) the EU today?

11) Are you in favour of your country’s membership of the European Union? What changes would you make to the European Union to make it more efficient?

Only in France where Jean-Marie Le Pen’s support slipped from 16.86% in the 2002 Presidential elections to 10.44% in 2007, and his Front National’s (FN) dipped below 5% of the popular vote in the subsequent legislative elections, has there been a noticeable decrease in support for such parties. Elsewhere the rise in support is noticeable. In Switzerland the Schweizerische Reichspartei (SVP) share of the vote rose from 26.6% in 2003 to 29% in October 2007, confirming it as the largest party in the Swiss party system. In Italy the percentage of votes cast for the Lega Nord (LN) rose from 4.1% in 2006 to 8.3% in the country’s April 2008 general election. A few weeks later a former member of the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI) Gianni Alemanno of the Alleanza Nazionale (AN) was elected as the Mayor of Rome with 54% of the vote. Elsewhere in Austria in the September 2008 legislative elections, the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) popular vote increased by 6.5% (compared to 2006) to 17.54%, while the late Jorg Haider’s Bündnis Zukunft Österreichs (BZÖ) party’s share of the vote increased by 6.59% to 10.7%, giving the two Austrian radical right parties a combined share of the vote in excess of 28%.

In Belgium and Denmark the increase has been more gradual but nevertheless confirms the same trend. The Vlaams Belang’s (VB) share of vote in the Chamber of Representatives increased from 11.6% in 2003 to 12.0% in the June 2007 elections and from 11.3% to 11.9% in the elections for the Belgian Senate. The Fremskridtspartiet (DFP) share of the vote in the general election increased slightly, from 13.2% in 2005 to 13.8% in 2007. Even in the UK, a country with little history of Radical Right electoral politics, the trend is upward with the British National Party (BNP) polling 5.3% and winning a seat for the first time in the London Assembly at the May 2008 local elections. Similar trends with regard to the electoral rise of radical right parties are also evident in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) states. (See Mudde 2007)

This followed the arrest of a Romanian man on charges of raping and murdering the wife of an Italian naval officer in October 2007. As a result of this development Romano Prodi’s Centre-Left government passed a controversial emergency decree in the Italian parliament that would give Italian police emergency powers to deport EU citizens if they were in breach of Italy’s laws.

The research for this paper was conducted between October 2008 and January 2009. Given the small cohort of 23 ITS MEPs any meaningful quantitative analysis was not feasible. Due to limited resources I was unable to conduct face-to-face interviews so I decided to e-mail a qualitative survey (see appendice 1) to all of the 23 MEPs who were former members of the group. In my e-mail I also offered the respondents the possibility of responding to the questions in a telephone interview and as a result I conducted two, 30
minute telephone interviews with one respondent from Belgium and another from Austria. I also received full written answers to the survey by post from two anonymous MEPs. Collectively these four responses ensured a response rate of 17.39% which building on evidence from existing secondary data ensured a decent snapshot of former ITS members from which to draw conclusions of a qualitative nature. It should be noted that there were no responses from the parties representing the two CEE states within the group (Bulgaria and Romania) which gives the findings something of a pro-Western European bias.

The Union for the Europe of Nations (UEN) group was formed in July 1999, replacing the previous Union for Europe Group which existed between 1995 and June 1999. UEN was a pro-sovereignty, conservative, ‘soft eurosceptic’ group consisting between 1999 and 2009 which at its peak in numerical terms in 2008 consisted of 44 MEPs from 6 countries – Poland, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania and Denmark.

Upon its formation in 2004 The Independence and Democracy Group comprised 32 (largely single issue party) eurosceptic representatives from the, the Netherlands, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Sweden, Italy, The United Kingdom, The Czech Republic and Poland. The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) had the biggest representation within the group with 8 MEPs. Prior to this between 1999 and 2004 The Europe of Democracies and Diversities group comprised MEPS from Denmark, France, The Netherlands and the UK.

The culmination of this was the accusation by the The Republikaner leader, accusing Le Pen of being a racist (See Fieschi (2000: 523)

Euronat includes parties not represented in the EP between 1999 and 2004 such as the Swedish National Democrats, the British National Party, Democracia Nacional in Spain, Nieuw Rechts / New Right in the Netherlands) as well as the French Front National and Fiamma Tricolore in Italy. (see: http://www.euronat.org)

The one UK member Ashley Mote, was expelled from the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in December 2004, when faced with allegations of fraud and was convicted in August 2007 of Benefit Fraud and given a prison sentence of nine months of which he served three, before being released in November 2007 under the UK government’s tagging scheme. He remained in the EP as an Independent until June 2009.

Thus, Romania’s 35 representatives in the EP, including the 5 members of Vadim Tudor’s Partidul România Mare (PRM) were nominated as observers by the Romanian assembly on a temporary basis, based on the 13% of the votes cast for the party for the Chamber of Deputies and the 13.6% for the Senate in the 2004 Romanian legislative elections. Likewise Bulgaria’s 18 MEPs were in the initial instance
observers, nominated by the Bulgarian government and included Dimitat Stoyanov of Natsionalen Sąyuz Ataka (NSA), whose party had polled 9% of the vote at the Bulgarian legislative elections in June 2005.

xi 1) Recognition of national interests, sovereignties, identities and differences; 2) Commitment to Christian values, heritage, culture and the traditions of European civilisation; 3) Commitment to the traditional family as the natural unit within society; 4) Commitment to the freedoms and rights inherited by all; 5) Commitment to the rule of law; Opposition to a unitary, bureaucratic, European superstate; 6) Commitment to direct accountability of government to the people and transparent management of public funds.

xii The two other established far-right parties, Gianfanco Fini’s Alleanza Nationale and Alessandra Mussolini’s, Forza Italia merged with Berlusconi’s Il Popolo della Libertà, (PdL) party at the beginning of 2009.

xiii In Austria the late Jorg Haider’s BZÖ polled 4.7% of the vote, short of the 5% threshold required to elect an MEP. In France the FN vote was dented by a split in the party in the build-up to the election which resulted in the emergence of Carl Lang’s breakaway Parti de la France in February 2009. The dispute revolved around who should head the FN’s European list in the North-West constituency with Marine Le Pen and Carl Lang vying to head the list. Although Lang’s new party only polled 1.35% of the vote nationally, on the back of a poor set of local election results in 2008, their presence nevertheless impacted on the result of the FN. In Belgium the VB’s performance was affected by the emergence of the List Dedecker a less radical, pro-Flanders sovereignty party founded by former liberal party (VLD) senator Jean-Marie Dedecker in January 2007. The List Dedecker polled 7.28% of the vote with Derk Jan Eppink becoming the party’s sole MEP.

References


