

Kurt Richard Luther (Keele)

Towards Stratarchy? European Integration and the Intra-party Power of Austrian MEPs and Delegation Leaders

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Auswirkung der EU-Mitgliedschaft auf die binnenparteiliche Macht österreichischer MEPs und Delegationsleiter. Er bietet eine erste Bewertung der österreich-spezifischen Daten der ersten systematischen und multinationalen Untersuchung der organisatorischer Anpassung sämtlicher „relevanter“ politischer Parteien Westeuropas an die europäische Integration. Die hauptsächliche Datenquelle bildet der vom Autor zwischen 2004 und 2005 durchgeführte österreichische Teil der standardisierten Umfrage eines multinationalen Projekts. Die Befunde werden weiter mittels Einsichten verdichtet, die der Autor aus mehreren für dasselbe Projekt mit österreichischen Parteieliten durchgeführten semi-strukturierten Interviews gewonnen hat (ebenfalls zwischen 2004 und 2005). Der Aufsatz befasst sich vor allem mit der Selektion von MEPs und Delegationsleitern, mit ihren politischen Karrieren vor und nach Aufnahme ihrer EU-Rolle sowie mit der Autonomie, die sie gegenüber ihren Parteien haben, wenn sie auf EU-Ebene tätig sind. In diesem Zusammenhang werden u.a. die ex ante und ex post Verantwortlichkeitsmechanismen sowie ihre Handlungsfreiheit untersucht. Der Artikel kommt zu dem Ergebnis, dass MEPs und Delegationsleiter, wenn sie auf EU-Ebene tätig sind, gegenüber ihren parteilichen „Principals“ beträchtliche Autonomie genießen, diese jedoch nur selten in breitere innerparteiliche Macht umwandeln können.

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1. Introduction¹

Robert Harmel (2002) has identified three “theory islands” in the literature seeking to explain why, notwithstanding their general aversion to change, parties may nonetheless decide to adapt their organizations. Of relevance for this study is in particular what he terms the “system level trends” approach, i.e. that which seeks to explain organizational adaptation by reference to “dramatic changes in the relevant environments of parties” (Harmel 2002, 122). Accession to the European Union (EU), in which ever more decisions are made beyond the nation state, certainly qualifies as such a change. It introduces a supranational level of political decision-making that impacts directly upon in particular two of the three goals which the party literature (e.g. Müller/Strøm 1999) ascribes to political parties, namely, policy and votes. This not only alters the hitherto predominantly state-centric paradigm of party competition, but introduces a number of new actors whose role is primarily focused on that level of activity.

One of the hypotheses of the first systematic cross-national study of national political parties’ organizational adaptation to European integration² was that European integration would

enhance the intra-party power of these “EU specialists”, “a heterogeneous group of actors who are characterised by the fact that a considerable part of their political activity is related to the process or substance of European governance” (Carter/Luther/Poguntke 2007, 12). Prominent amongst them are MEPs and delegation leaders. The core theoretical reasoning here is analogous to the system-level trends approach underpinning the “electoral-professional party” posited by Panebianco (1986). He argued that party actors with expertise in an emerging and highly complex external activity that is of increasing relevance for parties’ realisation of their core goals are likely to become more numerous, acquire greater resources and to experience an increase in their intra-party power.

Following Max Weber, the project conceptualised power as the “ability to achieve a desired outcome, even against resistance” (Weber 1980, 218). To ascertain whether party adaptation to European integration had permitted these new EU specialists to exercise intra-party power and if so, whether that power had increased over time, it was necessary *inter alia* to establish their scope for autonomous decision-making and what resources they might have at their disposal to permit them to overcome resistance to their desired outcomes. The project initially focused on six member states (including Austria). To investigate formal and informal change in all of their “relevant” (Sartori 1976) political parties it examined a wide range of party documents, but relied above all on in-depth semi-structured elite interviews. Their underlying logic was that of “process-tracing” (Brady/Collier 2004; George/Bennett 2005) designed to reveal causality by asking interviewees directly about how the EU-related roles of EU specialists and party elites had impacted upon their position and the position of others in the party organization. The seven target interviewees were the parties’ current or recent leaders; general secretaries; parliamentary party chairpersons; their chief representatives on their national parliamentary European Affairs committee; their European Parliament (EP) delegation leaders; EU-specialist staff and international secretaries.

The project also administered a standardised postal questionnaire (available at www.data-archive.ac.uk) across all 15 pre-2004-enlargement member states. Conceived as a form of expert survey, it was targeted in the main at the party actor categories listed above and sought to elicit respondents’ evaluation of the party as a whole, rather than of their specific role within it. The 37 questions addressed a wide range of matters, including the overall intra-party influence of specific positions; key party actors’ impact on MEP candidate and delegation leader selection and on the drafting of party manifestos, as well as the degree of autonomy from their parties enjoyed by EU specialists and party elites when active in EU-level bodies. Some 334 questionnaires were returned from 86 different parties in 15 countries. Of the 26 questionnaires distributed between November 2004 and June 2005 to Austrian party actors that fitted the above mentioned categories, 22 were returned. There were six each from the SPÖ (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs*) and Greens (*Die Grünen – Die Grüne Alternative[Grüne]*) and five from the ÖVP (*Österreichische Volkspartei*) and FPÖ (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*). Although these numbers are small and it is therefore necessary to treat the results with caution, it is also important to stress the quality of the respondents. They included the leaders of three of the four parties; three caucus chairs; three delegation leaders, as well as all the parties’ international secretaries.

This paper provides a preliminary evaluation of the Austrian elite survey as it relates to the intra-party power of MEPs and delegation leaders. Those findings will be complemented by insights derived from 31 in-depth interviews the author undertook between July 2004 and June 2005 with about 90% of the above mentioned target interlocutors in the SPÖ, ÖVP, FPÖ and Greens,³ as well as from a study of party documents. In a previous publication (Luther 2007) a number of potential sources of EU specialist power were analysed, including presence on key

party bodies; personnel resources (i.e. regularised access to staff); material resources (particularly money); information resources and EU specialists' impact on their party's policy positions via their role in manifesto formulation.⁴

The present assessment of the intra-party power of MEPs and delegation leaders will be structured around three interrelated themes. The first is how the selection of these EU specialists is organised and in particular, who the key actors in that process are. Careful selection can, in the language of principal-agent theory, militate against future agency loss and thus be an important *ex ante* mechanism in the chain of accountability (Bergmann et al. 2000; Strøm 2000; Strøm et al. 2003; Müller 2000). That does not mean agency loss will necessarily be prevented, not least since MEPs frequently deal with EU-related issues well before their domestic parties are fully aware of them and/or their implications. None the less, establishing to whom MEPs and delegation leaders are most accountable should provide clues as to which if any intra-party actors are strengthened by their selection process. Assuming MEPs and delegation leaders intend to seek re-election, it should also hint at the party actors whom they are likely to want not to alienate.

The second theme concerns the career paths of MEPs and delegation leaders. The first question is the extent to which their EU specialist careers are preceded by significant party and/or public office at the national level. Prior activity can provide the selectorate with useful screening information and thus clues to help protect against adverse selection and moral hazard (Müller 2000). A second question will be how long they exercise their EU-specialist role. The longer they remain in the EP, the more EU-specialised they can be assumed to become and that growing expertise might enhance their value to their national party. Yet it could also conceivably simultaneously isolate them from the latter's control and make it more likely for them to develop divergent EU-related policy preferences (Franklin/Scarrow 1999; Scully 2005). The third question concerns the subsequent career trajectory of MEPs and delegation leaders (Scarrow 1999). There are at least three possibilities here. First, the EP may prove to be a career dead end. Conversely, it might offer an opportunity for the pursuit of career paths that do not follow the traditional national route, but instead constitute a sort of parallel, or "detached" path focused on the supra-national level. The final option – and the one that would be most in keeping with the project's hypothesis – is that it might serve as a springboard from which MEPs can return to significant party or public office at the national level.

This paper's final theme concerns (change in) the degree of autonomy enjoyed by MEPs and delegation leaders. In the language of principal-agent theory, the key question is the strength of the chain of their accountability to the party for their actions at the EU level. We will consider both *ex ante* and *ex post* mechanisms designed to counter agency loss, namely, the degree of prior instruction and the requirement for *ex post* explanation. We will also report on our interlocutors' assessments of the "discretion" (*Handlungsspielraum*, or room for manoeuvre) enjoyed by MEPs and delegation leaders acting at the EU level. If our hypothesis is correct, we would expect to find increases over time in reported discretion, though given that the period under discussion is relatively short, any such change is unlikely to be dramatic.⁵

2. MEP candidate and delegation leader selection

The survey asked respondents to indicate how influential in practice they thought various party actors were in determining MEP candidate selection. Table 1 shows a clear disposition to rate party leadership influence more highly than that of the two "two party-on-the-ground" (Katz/Mair

1993) actors, but also considerable party variation. All ÖVP and FPÖ respondents rated their leadership influence as “very high”. The elite interviews suggest the ÖVP leadership’s very strong role is predicated on an agreement party leader Wolfgang Schüssel obtained upon becoming leader in 1995 that he would be permitted to determine the two highest-placed candidates on the list. In the FPÖ, MEP candidate selection was until 2004 virtually monopolised by Jörg Haider. Survey respondents’ supplementary comments and the author’s elite interviews indicate that whilst the ÖVP and SPÖ leaderships have greater scope to determine the selection of MEPs than of MPs, MEP election lists still need to reflect the claims of their (large) provincial parties and respective interest groups (e.g. the ÖVP’s “Leagues” and social-democratic trade unions). Green respondents alone indicated a significant *de facto* role for the party congress. This reflects this “new politics” party’s statutes, which permit the national executive committee to nominate candidates, but stipulate that the party congress can propose additional names and ultimately determines the party’s list.

Formally, it is MEPs who determine who will lead their respective EP delegation, but the survey suggests most party leaderships play a significant role here also (Table 2). Indeed, ÖVP respondents (and to a marginally lesser extent those of the FPÖ) tended to rate the influence of their leadership more highly than that of their MEPs. Elite interviews suggest the explanation

Table 1: MEP candidate selection: influence of party leadership and party-on-the-ground

Party	Actor	<i>“In practice, how influential are the following in deciding who becomes a candidate for the European Parliament elections?”</i>					N
		0 Not at all	1	2	3	4 Very	
Greens	Leadership			17%	33%	50%	6
	Congress		17%			83%	6
	Local or Provincial Party	50%	50%				6
SPÖ	Leadership				17%	83%	6
	Congress	50%	50%				6
	Local or Provincial Party		33%		67%		6
ÖVP	Leadership					100%	5
	Congress	50%	50%				4+
	Local or Provincial Party	20%	20%	40%		20%	5
FPÖ	Leadership					100%	5
	Congress	40%		20%	40%		5
	Local or Provincial Party	20%	40%		40%		5‡
TOTALS	Leadership			5%	14%	82%	22
	Congress	33%	29%	5%	10%	24%	21
	Local or Provincial Party	24%	38%	10%	29%		21

Note: Notwithstanding the small number of responses (indicated in the final column) it was decided for ease of comparability to present them as percentages. Following an examination of the hard copies of the returned questionnaires, one original dataset response (“+”) was recoded from “not applicable” to “not at all” and another (§) from “0” to “3”.

for why this was not the case with SPÖ respondents has much to do with party leader Viktor Klima's failed 1999 attempt to impose upon the delegation a non party member (Hans-Peter Martin) whom he had levered onto the top of the party list. That the lowest party leadership influ-

Table 2: Delegation leader selection: influence of MEPs and national party leadership

Party	Actor	<i>"In practice, how influential are the following actors in deciding who becomes your party's delegation leader in the European Parliament?"</i>					N
		0 Not at all	1	2	3	4 Very	
Greens	Leadership			40%	40%	20%	6*
	MEPs				20%	80%	6*
SPÖ	Leadership			33%	17%	50%	6
	MEPs			17%	33%	50%	6
ÖVP	Leadership					100%	5
	MEPs		20%	60%	20%		5
FPÖ	Leadership				20%	80%	5
	MEPs			60%	20%		5
TOTALS	Leadership			19%	19%	62%	21
	MEPs		5%	19%	33%	43%	21

Note: Percentage figures indicate proportion of party respondents. In each asterisked case, one respondent answered "not applicable" and that response has not been included in the percentage calculation.

Table 3: MEP candidate and delegation leader selection: party leadership influence change ca. 1995–2005

Party	Selection of	<i>"In practice, has the party leadership's influence in the selection of the following individuals changed over the last 10 years or so?"</i>									N
		-4 Less	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4 More	
Greens	MEPs					33%		33%	17%	17%	6
	DL					40%	20%	20%	20%		6*
SPÖ	MEPs					83%				17%	6
	DL			33%	66%						6
ÖVP	MEPs					25%	25%		50%		5*
	DL					20%	40%			40%	5
FPÖ	MEPs					60%		20%	20%		5
	DL					60%		20%		20%	5
TOTALS	MEPs					52%	5%	14%	19%	10%	21
	DL			9%	18%	29%	14%	10%	5%	14%	21

Note: Percentage figures indicate proportion of party respondents. In each asterisked case, one respondent answered "not applicable" and that response was not included in the percentage calculation or totals.

ence rating should come from Green respondents is unsurprising. It reflects the delegation's size and the incumbent's high-profile prior career (see below).

Table 3 reports respondents' views as to whether their party leadership's influence upon selecting MEP candidates and delegation leaders changed in the preceding 10 years. The only actor in respect of whom the responses indicated reduced party leadership influence was the SPÖ delegation leader, which reflects the consequence of Klima losing the battle over Martin. Elsewhere, respondents consistently reported their leadership's influence was unchanged, or had increased. ÖVP respondents were most likely to record increased party leadership influence (especially regarding delegation leader selection), but similar levels were to be found amongst FPÖ respondents. This might hint that when in government, party leaderships are especially keen to determine the leadership of their EP delegation. However, it is worth noting that although the weakened FPÖ was able to impose its candidate list in 2004, the order was effectively overturned by the markedly Eurosceptic party fundamentalists' well run campaign of preference voting, which resulted in their candidate (Andreas Mölzer) moving from third place on the list to take the only seat due to the party. Although the level of Green leadership influence is comparatively low (see above), Green respondents also report an increase over time. Elite interviews suggest this relates to the leadership's greater willingness to lobby in favour of the national executive committee's MEP candidate nominations.

To summarise, only in the Greens does a party-on-the-ground actor play a major role in MEP selection. In all other parties, MEP candidates are beholden for their party list position above all to their party leaderships (though in the case of the ÖVP and SPÖ to a lesser extent also to their territorial and functional groups). The national party leaderships of the ÖVP and FPÖ have also played a key role in determining the head of their party's EP delegation. Taken together, this suggests the selection processes for these two EU specialist actors has strengthened the intra-party position of party leaderships, particularly in the ÖVP and FPÖ. *Ceteris paribus*, one might thus expect EU specialist behaviour in these two parties to manifest greater congruence with the preferences of the party leadership than in the other two parties. Yet as will be explained below, in the FPÖ this was undermined by the selection of MEP candidates with no prior party history.

3. MEP and delegation leader careers

3.1. Prior careers

The author has undertaken a detailed study of the public and party(-related) offices of all 47 MEPs that held seats for the Greens, SPÖ, ÖVP or FPÖ between 1.1.1995 and 31.12.2007.⁶ As the Greens' delegation has comprised at most two persons, it would be unwise to draw wider conclusions from the career paths of its MEPs, but it is worth noting that Johannes Voggenhuber, its delegation leader since 1995 (and sole MEP until 1999) had held provincial governmental office, served as national caucus chair and been the Greens' general secretary and spokesperson. From 1999 to 2004, he was joined by someone with no record of prior party or public office, though in 2004 that seat was taken by a former provincial party leader (Evelin Lichtenberger), whose public office experience included membership of a provincial parliament and government, as well as of the Nationalrat. All five FPÖ MEPs appointed in January 1995 had held local political office and been members of the Nationalrat or Bundesrat. One of the three that resigned

during that first term (Mathias Reichhold) had even been the party's general secretary and held provincial government office. Thereafter, however, the overwhelming majority of FPÖ MEPs had little or no record of public office – even at provincial or local level – and were in some cases not even party members. The main exceptions are the post-1997 delegation leader (Daniela Raschhofer), who had been a Landtag member, and the current MEP (Mölzer), who had been in the Bundesrat and run the party "academy", by virtue of which he had also been a member of the FPÖ's national executive.

From 1995 to 1996, the SPÖ delegation contained one former federal minister (Hilde Hawlicek) and from 1999 to 2004 a second (Harald Ettl). Whilst the whole initial cohort had prior experience in the Nationalrat and/or Bundesrat, this applied to only one of the subsequently recruited new MEPs (Albrecht Konecny) and he was only in the EP from July 1995 to November 1996. Most MEPs elected from 1996 have held public office at the provincial level, or in auxiliary associations such as the ÖGB, or youth organisation. An analogous pattern is to be found amongst ÖVP MEPs. All those delegated in 1995 had been in the Nationalrat or Bundesrat and one (Paul Rübiger) had also been a Landtag member. The former characteristic applied to two of the four new ÖVP MEPs elected in 1996. One of them (Hubert Pirker) remained until 2004 and returned in 2006, whilst the other (former federal minister Marilies Flemming) served until 2004. The two others had no experience of party or public office whatsoever and one – Ursula Stenzel, the delegation leader since 1996 – was not even a party member. In 1999, one of the two neophytes was replaced by a former party general secretary (Othmar Karas). Finally, a characteristic of most ÖVP MEPs' prior careers is a significant position within one of the party's three constituent Leagues, all of which are themselves linked to provincial party organisations.

Although the time frame and number of cases are too limited to permit firm conclusions, it is perhaps worth noting that all three MEPs who abandoned their parties (Martin, Peter Sichrovsky and Gerhard Hager) had no prior party career whatsoever. This might suggest that screening based on previous party activity may well help prevent adverse selection and moral hazard and thus militate against agency loss.⁷

3.2. MEP and delegation leader longevity (1995–2008)

Table 4 summarises the degree of continuity in the composition and leadership of Austrian parties' EP delegations. Although the period being reviewed is short, at least four points are worth noting. First, MEP turnover was predictably high in 1996, since many MEPs delegated from the Nationalrat or Bundesrat in January 1995 only ever intended a temporary stay in the EP. Second, until 2006, the infrequent subsequent mid-term departures resulted mainly from resignations by MEPs recruited without a prior party history (or at times even a party membership). For example, in February 2003 two of the FPÖ's five MEPs resigned from their party. Third, there has also been an overall increase in continuity across EP terms, notably within the delegations of the SPÖ and ÖVP. The marked drop in the case of the FPÖ reflects not only the party's declining share of the vote, but also intra-party conflict. Finally, until 2006, there appeared to be a trend for the tenure of delegation leaders to increase. Continuity has been 100% in the case of the Greens, but the ÖVP and SPÖ were not far behind, with each having had a single delegation leader for about eight years. In 2004, the SPÖ's delegation leader was replaced by his deputy, who herself resigned in January 2007, whilst the ÖVP delegation leader continued until January 2006. Though the FPÖ was by 1997 on its third delegation leader, she remained in situ until 2004.

To summarise, the Greens' minute delegation has since 1995 been dominated by a single individual, whom Green interviewees report having often contradicted his national party on EU-related matters. The FPÖ delegation has exhibited the lowest continuity in personnel, but here too, interviewees noted considerable policy tensions vis-à-vis the national party. After 1996, the national party leadership perceived the delegation to be increasingly "decoupled" from the former's more Eurosceptic line. Though this divergence declined once an incumbent FPÖ had

Table 4: MEP and delegation leader longevity 1995–2008

Parties' originally elected MEPs by EP term (abs. no.)	Number of originally elected MEPs who served the following percentage of the full EP term				Number of MEPs re-elected	Outgoing delegation leader re-elected?
	0–25	26–50	51–75	76–100		
1.1.1995–11.11.1996						
Greens (1)				1		
SPÖ (8)		1		7		
ÖVP (6)			1	5		
FPÖ (5)			3	2		
11.11.1996–20.7.1999						
Greens (1)				1	1	Yes
SPÖ (6)				6	3	No
ÖVP (7)				7	3	No
FPÖ (6)				6	3	Yes ^a
20.7.1999–19.7.2004						
Greens (2)				2	1	Yes
SPÖ (6)				6 ^b	4	Yes
ÖVP (7)				7	6	Yes
FPÖ (5)			2 ^c	3	3	Yes
20.7.2004–20.8.2009						
Greens (2)				2	1	Yes
SPÖ (6)			1	5	4	No ^d
ÖVP (5)		1		4	4	Yes ^e
FPÖ (1)				1	0	No
MARTIN (2)				2	2	Yes

Source: Parlamentsdirektion, party documentation and interviews conducted by the author with party actors.

Notes:

a) Re-elected delegation leader replaced in early February 1997 by Daniela Raschhofer.

b) However, Martin resigned from the SPÖ (but not the EP) on 12.2.04, i.e. 91% into the EP term.

c) MEPs Hager & Sichrovsky resigned from the FPÖ (but not the EP) on 15.02.2003, i.e. 72% into the EP term.

d) Having assumed a leadership role in the PES group, the SPÖ's re-elected delegation leader (Hannes Swoboda) was replaced by Maria Berger, who on 10.1.2007 (50% into the EP's full term) herself left to become Federal Minister of Justice in the new SPÖ/ÖVP government.

e) Following her success at Vienna's municipal elections of October 2005, Ursula Stenzel resigned on 31.1.2006 (31% into the EP's full term) to become Chair (*Bezirksvorsteherin*) of Vienna's First District.

attenuated its Euroscepticism, until 2004, conflict remained with the predominantly Europhobic party-on-the-ground. The greatest degree of continuity has been in the delegations of the SPÖ and ÖVP, which interviews suggest have enhanced their EU specialisation and become well integrated into EU-level politics. Though there are cases where SPÖ and ÖVP MEPs conflict with their national parties' position on EU-related policy, such occasions have until recently been infrequent, not least because both parties were generally positively disposed to EU integration. Since the SPÖ left national government in 2000, however, it has occasionally adopted a more critical position on EU integration and this has led to more frequent disparities in the EU-related position of the party and its EP delegation.

3.3. Subsequent careers

Formal and informal changes to party rules (Luther 2007, 33–35) mean MEPs automatically become members of their national party caucus and party congresses. Most delegation leaders are also *ex officio* members of their national executives. Presence on the latter (but even more so on the national executive committee) may provide a basis for exercising intra-party influence, though the extent to which that potential can be realised relates *inter alia* to EU specialists' degree of dependence upon their party leaderships, as discussed above. Cases of MEPs holding further significant national party and/or public office roles subsequent to entering the EP are infrequent. Three former FPÖ MEPs did so, but on closer examination, the moral of their stories is that becoming an MEP does not bode well for political careers within the FPÖ.⁸ All three were appointed in 1995 and had left 16 months later. Speaking of one of these three MEPs, a senior FPÖ interviewee claimed that once that person had realised becoming an MEP meant the loss of significance within the party, they immediately sought to leave the EP 'at all costs'. Moreover, not a single FPÖ MEP has subsequently obtained national public office and only two acquired (largely symbolic) positions within the national party.⁹ Until recently, it seemed that becoming an SPÖ or ÖVP MEP was also unlikely to promote career progression at the national level. To date, the SPÖ has had two MEPs who had been previously held ministerial office at the national level (Hawlicek and Ettl) and the ÖVP one (Marilyn Flemming). In all three cases, their MEP role appears to have been the last major position of their political career. On the other hand, both parties have had MEPs who resigned during the first EP term (i.e. 1995–1996) and went on to hold national public office, albeit mainly of a modest nature.¹⁰ In 2006, the ÖVP's delegation leader (Stenzel) resigned to become chair of Vienna's First District. More significantly, however, in January 2007 SPÖ delegation leader Maria Berger resigned to become Federal Minister of Justice. Conversely, in both parties there is evidence of MEPs pursuing career paths at the European level, in particular within the wider EP groups of which their delegations are a part.¹¹ In sum, the experience of Austrian MEPs is mixed. For some, the EP has been the final arena of party or public office. For others, however, being an MEP has launched a supranational career path largely detached from the national party. Though infrequent, there are also examples (including as recently as 2007) of MEPs proceeding to significant national party and/or public office. In sum, the evidence tends to underscore Scarrow's (1997) conclusion that it would be inappropriate to dismiss the EP as a 'pre-retirement home' for time-served politicians.

4. MEP and delegation leader autonomy

4.1. Levels of autonomy

Table 5 details survey respondents' assessments of the extent to which MEPs and delegation leaders are subject to *ex ante* and *ex post* mechanisms of accountability in respect of "issues of importance" to their party. It also reports their judgements of the "discretion" (*Handlungsspielraum*) these actors enjoy on such issues, i.e. their overall degree of autonomy. The table clearly shows that parties make relatively infrequent use of *ex ante* instruction. It is least prevalent in respect of the Green delegation and most likely in the ÖVP. By contrast, the requirement for *ex post* explanation is relatively high, notwithstanding the fact that no national party has formal rules requiring MEPs to report back to them.

The interviews produced a number of interesting insights into the operation of MEP accountability. It is in all cases the delegation leader who undertakes the most frequent and detailed reporting to the national party. Formal reporting occurs in party bodies, the politically most important and regularly attended of which are the national executives. The EU is routinely a significant agenda item in those of the Greens and ÖVP, and one on which their delegation leaders are expected to speak. Delegation leader reporting has in recent years been more *ad hoc* in the SPÖ's national executive. In the Eurosceptic FPÖ's executive committee, many EU-related issues were placed at the end of the agenda and nodded through, but those with the greatest domestic political resonance were the subject of protracted and often heated debate. A second site of institutionalised linkage are national caucuses, though timetabling issues mean delegation leader attendance tends to be infrequent; for example, it averages once every two months in the

Table 5: Autonomy of MEPs and delegation leaders

Table 5.1: Amount of prior instruction

Party	Actors	"When making decisions on issues that are important to your party, how much prior instruction would you say the following receive from their party?"					N
		0 No instruction	1	2	3	4 High degree of instruction	
Greens	MEPs	33%	50%	17%			6
	DL	50%	33%	17%			6+
SPÖ	MEPs		50%	33%		17%	6
	DL	17%	33%	50%			6
ÖVP	MEPs			40%	40%	20%	5
	DL		40%		40%	20%	5
FPÖ	MEPs	20%		60%	20%		5
	DL		40%	20%	40%		5
TOTALS	MEPs	14%	27%	36%	14%	5%	22
	DL	18%	36%	22%	18%	5%	22

Greens and only two or three times a year in the ÖVP. The third potential site of institutionalised linkage are meetings of the party in national executive office. This applies to the SPÖ from 1995

Table 5.2: Ex-post explanation required

Party	Actors	<i>“After they have made decisions on issues that are important to your party, to what extent do the following actors in practice have to explain their actions to the party?”</i>					N
		0 Not at all	1	2	3	4 Must explain fully	
Greens	MEPs		33%	17%	33%	17%	6
	DL		25%	75%			6**
SPÖ	MEPs		33%	17%	17%	33%	6
	DL			50%		50%	6
ÖVP	MEPs		20%	40%	20%	20%	5
	DL		40%	40%	20%		5
FPÖ	MEPs		20%	40%	20%	20%	5
	DL			40%	40%	20%	5
TOTALS	MEPs		27%	36%	18%	18%	22
	DL		15%	50%	15%	20%	20

Table 5.3: Amount of discretion

Party	Actors	<i>“When making decisions on issues that are important to your party, how much discretion would you say the following actors have?”</i>					N
		0 No discretion	1	2	3	4 High discretion	
Greens	MEPs		50%	33%	17%		6
	DL			20%	60%	20%	6*
SPÖ	MEPs			50%	50%		6
	DL			33%	67%		6
ÖVP	MEPs		25%	50%	25%		5*
	DL		20%	60%	20%		5
FPÖ	MEPs			40%	40%	20%	5
	DL		20%	20%	40%	20%	5
TOTALS	MEPs		19%	43%	44%	5%	21
	DL		10%	33%	48%	10%	21

Note: Percentage figures indicate proportion of party respondents. Following an examination of the hard copies of the returned questionnaires, one original dataset response (“+”) was recoded from “not applicable” to “no instruction”. In each asterisked case, one respondent answered “not applicable” and that response has not been included in the percentage calculation.

to 2000, to the FPÖ from 2000 until 2004 (usually via the vice-chancellor's office).¹² Given the ÖVP has been in national government ever since Austria joined the EU, meetings of the party in national executive office have been a relevant and frequently used site of institutionalised linkage throughout. In sum, *ex post* accountability mechanisms – end especially those by the parties' delegation leaders – primarily link MEPs to the public office “face” of the national party, rather than to the “party on the ground” (Katz/Mair 1993). To be sure, “ordinary” SPÖ MEPs do engage in *ex post* reporting to the executive committees of their respective provincial party organisations. For their part, ÖVP MEPs undertake analogous reporting to their provincial parties, as well as to the party Leagues in which most are embedded. Yet such *ex post* explanations is rarely directed to party-on-the-ground actors.

In line with our expectations, respondents assessed the discretion enjoyed by MEPs and delegation leaders as relatively high. Indeed, they were more likely to rate it higher than that of MPs. The highest levels of autonomy were reported in respect of the Greens' delegation leader. That high levels were also reported for the FPÖ's MEPs is hardly surprising, since two of the five elected in 1999 left the party in early 2003 and the sole FPÖ MEP elected in 2004 was a party dissident (see above). ÖVP survey respondents were more likely to report lower levels of MEP discretion and this finding was mirrored in the elite interviews. One ÖVP interviewee even asserted not only that the ÖVP's delegation leader had in respect of virtually all important issues received voting guidance from the party leader(ship) and sought to comply with it, but also that there had been numerous cases of “pre-emptive compliance”.

4.2. Change in autonomy

Table 6 shows respondents' perceptions of change since 1995 in the amount of MEP and delegation leader autonomy. Overall, two thirds of respondents judged there to have been no change in the level of prior instruction. The main party variation relates to the ÖVP and FPÖ, where some judged there to have been an increase, whilst SPÖ respondents were more likely to conclude there had been a decrease. The elite interviews suggest the explanation for this variation may relate to incumbency. That is to say, once the SPÖ's left office in 2000, it was less concerned to instruct its MEPs. Conversely, after it entered government in 2000, the FPÖ was more likely to seek to do so.

The survey generated very clear results in respect of change in the need for *ex post* explanation. Not a single respondent felt there had been a decrease. Just over half concluded there had been no change, whilst the remainder believed that the need for *ex post* explanation had increased. The interviews provide useful insights into the background of these raw figures. In the case of the FPÖ, incumbency increased demand for regular reporting on MEPs' EU activities, not least since the party for the first time had government ministers appearing in EU-level executive bodies. Some Green and SPÖ interviewees reported an intention on the part of their national parties to make reporting more regularised and intense. In the case of the SPÖ, this reflects the fact that having lost office and the excellent EU connections this entailed, the party placed greater value upon the information its MEPs could provide on current EU affairs. Given their small size, the Greens are even more reliant upon their MEPs' information on EU affairs.

Table 6.3 bears out our expectation of a moderate increase since 1995 in MEP and delegation leader discretion. The frequency of reported increase was greater in respect of the SPÖ. This is consistent with the above mentioned struggles between the delegation and the party leadership.

It also reflects the fact that the party had spent the preceding five years in opposition. However, the majority of ÖVP respondents also judged discretion to have increased, albeit only marginally and from a somewhat lower baseline.

At first sight, it appears paradoxical that the survey should report increases over time both in accountability mechanisms and in EU specialist discretion. For it might be assumed that the

Table 6.: Change in MEP and delegation leaders autonomy ca. 1995–2005

Table 6.1: Change in prior instruction required

Party	Actors	<i>“Has the amount of such prior instruction changed over the last 10 years or so?”</i>									N
		-4 Much less	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4 Much more	
Greens	MEPs					67%	33%				6
	DL					80%	20%				6*
SPÖ	MEPs				40%	40%	20%				6*
	DL				40%	60%					6*
ÖVP	MEPs					80%			20%		5
	DL					80%			20%		5
FPÖ	MEPs					60%		40%			5
	DL					60%	20%	20%			5
TOTALS	MEPs				10%	62%	14%	10%	5%		21
	DL				10%	70%	10%	5%	5%		20

Table 6.2: Change in ex post explanation requirement

Party	Actors	<i>“Has [the] need of explanation [by the following actors after they have made decisions on issues that are important to your party] changed over the last 10 years or so?”</i>									N
		-4 Much less	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4 Much more	
Greens	MEPs					50%	17%	17%		17%	6
	DL					25%	50%	25%			6**
SPÖ	MEPs					60%		20%	20%		6*
	DL					60%		20%	20%		6*
ÖVP	MEPs					80%	20%				5
	DL					80%		20%			5
FPÖ	MEPs					40%	20%	20%	20%		5
	DL					40%	20%	20%		20%	5
TOTALS	MEPs					57%	14%	14%	10%	5%	21
	DL					53%	16%	21%	5%	5%	19

Table 6.3: Change in discretion

Party	Actors	“Has [the] amount of discretion [of the following actors ... vis-à-vis your party] changed over the last 10 years or so?”									N
		-4 Much less	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4 Much more	
Greens	MEPs			17%	17%	33%	17%	17%			6
	DL			20%		20%	60%				6*
SPÖ	MEPs					17%	33%	50%			6
	DL					17%	33%	17%	33%		6
ÖVP	MEPs				20%		60%	20%			5
	DL					40%	40%	20%			5
FPÖ	MEPs			20%		40%	40%				5
	DL				20%	40%	40%				5
TOTALS	MEPs			9%	9%	23%	36%	23%			22
	DL			5%	5%	29%	43%	10%	10%		21

Note: Percentage figures indicate proportion of party respondents. In each asterisked case, one respondent answered “not applicable” and that response was not included in the percentage calculation or totals.

more a principal subjects an agent to such mechanisms, the narrower the agent’s scope to exercise autonomy would become. Yet it is worth noting that the reported increase in accountability measures relates above all to *ex post* mechanisms, rather to attempts to issue *ex ante* instruction. Whilst the latter mechanism seeks to bind an agent, the former is more about providing explanation and justification. Indeed if one adapts Andeweg’s (2003) recent argument about overall trends in representative democracy, some *ex post* MEP explanation might increasingly have what he terms “*ex alto*” characteristics. That is to say, it might best be regarded less as a mechanism by which agents are constrained by their principals, than as an opportunity for agents who have developed their views to put those to their principals with a view to trying to persuade the latter of the agent’s position. Indicative of this kind of logic (but by no means typical of MEPs’ *ex post* explanation) is a Green interviewee’s suggestion that the Green delegation leader’s of late somewhat more frequent appearances at national executive meetings should be regarded more as opportunities for him to secure the national party’s endorsement for positions he proposes to adopt, than as occasions at which he is held to account.

There is of course another plausible interpretation of the simultaneous increase in accountability mechanisms and in MEP discretion. Since EU specialists appear to have been able to maintain and in some cases increase their EU-level autonomy despite increased resistance (especially via *ex post* accountability mechanisms), they have enjoyed the hypothesised increase in power.

5. MEP and delegation leader overall intra-party power

To answer our overall research question, it is necessary to consider not only whether MEPs and delegation leaders have the benefit of power at the EU level, but also whether they are able to

exercise broader intra-party power. In seeking answers to this question, the questionnaire avoided the direct use of the word “power”, not least because of the negative associations it was likely to elicit. Instead, it employed the word “influence” as a surrogate.¹³ The evidence from the survey is that there had in preceding 10 years been an increase in the intra-party power of MEPs and delegation leaders, albeit only a modest one (Table 8). Yet our research also suggests that the level of intra-party power exercised by MEPs and delegation leaders remains rather

Table 7: MEP and delegation leader intra-party influence

Party	Actors	<i>“How influential are the following positions within your party?”</i>					N
		0 Not at all	1	2	3	4 Very	
Greens	MEPs			67%	33%		6
	DL			33%	67%		6
SPÖ	MEPs		33%	67%			6
	DL		17%	33%	33%	17%	6
ÖVP	MEPs			80%	20%		5
	DL			20%	80%		5
FPÖ	MEPs		60%	30%	20%		5
	DL			80%	20%		5
TOTALS	MEPs		23%	59%	18%		22
	DL		5%	41%	50%	4.5%	22

Note: Percentage figures indicate proportion of party respondents.

Table 8: MEP and delegation leader intra-party influence: change ca. 1995–2005

Party	Actor	<i>“Have the following party positions become more or less influential within your party over the last 10 years or so?”</i>									N
		-4 Less	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4 More	
Greens	MEP			17%		17%	17%	50%			6
	DL				20%	40%		20%	20%		6*
SPÖ	MEP				17%	17%	17%	33%	17%		6
	DL				17%	17%	17%	17%	33%		6
ÖVP	MEP					20%	60%	20%			5
	DL					20%	40%	40%			5
FPÖ	MEP				20%	60%	20%				5
	DL				20%	20%	40%	20%			5
TOTALS	MEP			5%	9%	27%	27%	27%	5%		22
	DL				14%	24%	24%	24%	14%		21

Note: Percentage figures indicate proportion of party respondents. In the asterisked case, one respondent answered “not applicable” and that response was not included in the percentage calculation or totals.

limited. Asked to judge the intra-party power position of various party actors (Table 7), respondents' overall rating of MEPs came out as marginally lower than that they attributed to MPs.¹⁴ The intra-party power rating of FPÖ MEPs was significantly lower. Delegation leaders' ratings were higher than those of MEPs, especially in the ÖVP. They also marginally exceeded those of MPs. Unsurprisingly, however, they were way below those of caucus leaders (arguably their national functional equivalent), to whom virtually every respondent gave the highest possible rating.

The interviews pointed to a considerable disparity between the intra-party power of parties' "ordinary" MEPs and that of their delegation leaders, especially at the national level upon which the focus of this project was primarily directed. In the case of the ÖVP and SPÖ, ordinary MEPs' power is generally exercised at the provincial level, or within the parties' auxiliary associations. In the Eurosceptic FPÖ, MEPs have since 1996 tended to have very little internal party power whatsoever. Indeed, one FPÖ interviewee maintained that both the party's MEPs and its delegation leader were at times so negatively perceived that the incumbents' scope for exercising broader intra-party power was reduced to "below zero". Within the Greens, where Euroscepticism has receded and interest in the EU grown, EU specialisation has become more valued, especially where it relates to core party issues such as nuclear energy and transit traffic. Yet it remains of limited intra-party value for two reasons in particular. First, the party has not yet held national office, and so has not been forced to engage with the breadth of the EU's agenda. Second, the small scale of the Greens' national party organisation and the limited number of national office holders places a premium on generalists. By contrast, the larger parties attach much greater value to EU specialisation, in part because they have been much more Europhile in recent years, but also because their size and close links to Austria's neo-corporatist "chambers" permit them this luxury. The consequences of this are visible above all in the two large parties, but perhaps especially so in the ÖVP, which was not only in government throughout the period being examined, but also consistently held many of the key EU-related ministries.

6. Conclusions

Before proceeding to our summary and conclusions, a number of caveats are in order. As this analysis of Austrian parties' organisational adaptation to European integration covers only a relatively short period, it is impossible to be sure if the highlighted features and trends will endure, not least because European integration is itself in constant flux. Second, the Austrian political class is relatively small and the number of MEPs and delegation leaders minute. Notwithstanding the process-tracing logic underpinning our interviews, it is therefore impossible to completely disentangle the effect on individuals' intra-party power of their EU specialisation from factors such as their personal political biographies. Moreover, given the data and method it employs, this study was never intended to offer an 'objective' measure of power such as might have been attempted via a detailed analysis of one or more individual decisions at specific points in time. Instead, its aim was to provide a longitudinal perspective of the development of EU specialists' intra-party power by drawing above all on the detailed knowledge of an exceptionally well-informed selected group of party actors. That knowledge was accessed through semi-structured interviews and a cross-national elite survey. Utilising both types of data helps ensure that the study's approach to answering the research question combines breadth with depth.

This paper finds that most parties' MEPs – and in particular their delegation leaders – do exercise a significant degree of autonomy at the EU level. They do so not only in routine EU business, but also in respect of issues of importance to their party. Though modest, that autonomy appears to have increased over time, notwithstanding the simultaneous expansion of in particular *ex post* accountability mechanisms. Conversely, although the evidence suggests MEPs do exercise some broader intra-party power and that this has in some cases also grown modestly, the level of that power remains rather limited. We thus conclude that whilst MEPs enjoy increased ability to achieve their desired outcomes at the EU-level, few can convert that supranational autonomy into an analogous level of broader intra-party power. There are a number of possible explanations for this. One is MEPs' geographic distance from national party decision-making. Another is that whilst EU specialists were highly valued (particularly in the two main parties) in the years immediately prior to accession and in the first few years thereafter, as EU expertise became more widespread within these parties and beyond, so the intra-party status benefits of that specialisation declined.

The parties' variable organisational responses to European integration can in part be explained by party size: in the two largest, functional differentiation and thus EU specialisation are intrinsically easier. Closely related to this point is the parties' relative entrenchment within Austrian neo-corporatism, proximity to which facilitates access to considerable EU-specific policy expertise. This again distinguishes the SPÖ and ÖVP on the one hand from the FPÖ and Greens on the other. The individual parties' traditional model of organisation is also important. The ÖVP's complex dual structure and very significant functional leagues militates in favour of a technocratic orientation to EU-related issues. By contrast, the Greens comprise a 'new politics' party. Here, the principle of the individual mandate favours at times idiosyncratic behaviour on the part of holders of public office, but the principle of internal democracy as yet militates against the consolidation of a party elite. A further factor is the parties' fundamental orientation to European integration. European integration has had the most destructive effect on the organisation of the FPÖ, though it is possible that this has been due less to the party's overall Euroscepticism than to the growing gap between the orientation of the party on the ground and the party in public office (nationally and supranationally).

The increased autonomy which MEPs and delegation leaders enjoy at the supranational level means the potential for them to engage in activities amounting to "leisure shirking", "dissent-shirking" or "political sabotage" (Müller 2000, 320ff.) has grown. However, there are a number of mechanisms in place that militate against this. These include a selection process in which their party leaderships often play a key (albeit not always successful) role in screening out candidates who might threaten agency loss. In addition, there are regular *ex post* reporting mechanisms. Moreover, whilst there is some evidence of MEPs pursuing EU-level political careers that are significantly detached from their national parties, it seems to be the case that those few MEPs or delegation leaders who have subsequently held significant national party or public office had all been very loyal to their party leaderships. Indeed, a *prima facie* plausible conclusion is that one of the main impacts of the emergence of these new categories of EU specialist upon intra-party power has been to strengthen the position of the party leaderships. This would reinforce a project hypothesis not addressed in this paper, but which other research (e.g. Poguntke/Aylott/Carter/Ladrech/Luther 2007) appears to confirm, namely that European integration would increase the intra-party power of party elites.

The traditional study of party organizations can be traced back as far as Michels (1911), who conceives of intra-party power as a zero-sum phenomenon, organised within a single-hier-

archy. Viewed in these terms, the intra-party power of Austrian MEPs and delegation leaders is very modest. After all, we have shown that the recruitment and national level political career progression of most MEPs and delegation leaders is significantly determined by those at the pinnacle of their respective party's single hierarchy. Yet this article's findings are not that clear-cut, but point instead to a more asymmetrical development of MEP and delegation leader power. Above all, it has demonstrated that these EU specialists do exercise power at the supranational level. To do justice to this more differentiated picture, there may be merit in summarising the article's findings by reference to the party literature that conceive of intra-party power in more nuanced terms. Eldersveld (1964), for example sees intra-party power as comprising not a single hierarchy, but a stratararchy, i.e. in a multiplicity of simultaneously existing vertical hierarchies that engage in greater or lesser degree of horizontal co-operation. As previous publications emanating from this project have argued, (Luther 2007; Poguntke/Aylott/Ladrech/Luther 2007; Poguntke/Aylott/Carter/Ladrech/Luther 2007) the executive bias of the EU has – in the language of Katz and Mair – further strengthened the party in public office at the expense of the party on the ground. It has also promoted a “disaggregation” of the party in public office by privileging the party in government office at the expense of the party in parliamentary office. This study of the impact of EU integration on the intra-party power of Austrian MEPs and delegation leaders suggests that the party in supranational parliamentary office is increasingly decoupled from both elements of the party in national public office. If MEPs maintain their supranational autonomy and continue to develop detached supranational level political careers, we might well conclude that one impact of EU integration on national party organizations might well have been to promote a shift in the relations between MEPs and their national parties towards greater stratararchy.

NOTES

- 1 The author would like to thank Gemma Loomes for her assistance with the Austrian survey data.
- 2 “The Europeanization of national political parties”, ESRC Grant No R000 239793, awarded to Thomas Poguntke, Nicholas Aylott, Robert Ladrech and Kurt Richard Luther. The project ran from 2003 to 2007 and was also funded via the Keele University Research Investment Scheme. For details of the study's theoretical underpinnings and research design, see Carter/Luther/Poguntke (2007). For an overview of the findings of the primarily qualitative first stage, see Poguntke/Aylott/Carter/Ladrech/Luther (2007), as well as Poguntke/Aylott/Ladrech/Luther (2007).
- 3 A further interview was conducted in October 2007.
- 4 In nutshell, the findings were that there has been a growth in EU specialists, whom all four parties have guaranteed *ex officio* presence on national party bodies via formal statutory change. The resources allocated to EU-specialist activities have increased, though overwhelmingly from external bodies such as the EP, neo-corporatist interest groups and government ministries. EU-specialist involvement in manifesto formulation has grown, but remains limited above all to (the albeit growing range of) EU-specific topics.
- 5 Unless indicated otherwise, our comments on all three themes will relate to the period from January 1995 until the end of 2005.
- 6 This excludes Martina Gredler and Friedhelm Frischenschlager, Liberal Forum MEPs from 1995–1999 and 1996–1999 respectively. Also not considered is Karin Resetarits, elected to the on the ‘MARTIN’ list in 2004.
- 7 A counter example would of course be the ÖVP delegation leader. She also had no prior party career, but turned out to be very loyal to the leader who had recruited her.
- 8 Once (Karl Schweitzer) was FPÖ general secretary from 2001–2001; acting chair of the party's national caucus from 2002–2003 and finally a junior minister in the Federal Chancellors office from 2003–2007. A second (Mathias Reichhold) returned to the Nationalrat until 1998 before serving as deputy governor of Carinthia (1998–2001) and then as Federal Minister for Transport Innovation and Technology (2002–2003). Finally, he had an extremely short (42-day) and politically ultimately fatal period as party leader. The most glittering career was arguably that of Susanne Riess-Passer. She remained in the political sidewater of the Bundesrat until 1998 before being elected to the Nation-

- alrat in October 1999, only to leave it in February 2000 to become Vice-Chancellor of Austria and Federal Minister for Public Service and Sport. Her party offices included those of deputy and then acting party leader (1996–2000), as well as the leadership itself (2000–2002).
- 9 In 1999, delegation leader Raschhofer was elected deputy party leader, albeit primarily in the hope this would enhance the party's EP election prospects. Another MEP (Sichrovsky) was party general secretary for external relations from 2000–2002, but this brought him no significant internal party power.
 - 10 One ÖVP MEP (Friedrich König) had three more years in the Nationalrat, whilst another (Milan Linzer) served in the much less prestigious Bundesrat until 2000. The subsequent career of a third MEP (Michael Spindelegger) has been more impressive. He has been a *Nationalrat* ever since leaving the EP in 1996 and served as (deputy) chair of a number of important parliamentary committees, including (since 2006) the Standing Sub-Committee on EU Affairs. From 2000 to 2006 he served as deputy caucus leader in 2006 was elected Second President of the Nationalrat. He also advanced within the large Lower Austrian branch of the ÖVP's Employees' League, which he has led since 2000. One SPÖ MEP (Elisabeth Hlavac) remained in the Nationalrat until 1999, returning a year later. She shifted to the much less prestigious Bundesrat for 18 months from 2003 and 2004, but has been back in the Nationalrat ever since. Another SPÖ MEP (Albrecht Konecny) has since 1996 chaired the party's Bundesrat group and was until 2007 the SPÖ's international secretary.
 - 11 Examples include the SPÖ's Hannes Swoboda and the ÖVP's Othmar Karas.
 - 12 This refers to the period from 2000 to Mölzer's election in June 2004. When the BZÖ was formed (April 2005), the FPÖ effectively left government.
 - 13 Operating on the same logic, the project team's lengthy semi-structured elite interviews also avoided the word 'power' in favour of 'influence'. This minimised potential normative issues. At the same time, it permitted us successfully to probe into our interlocutors' assessment of the outcomes desired by the various party actors discussed, the resistance those actors encountered and the extent to which they were able to overcome it. In sum, substituting 'influence' for 'power' did not prevent our interlocutors from providing assessments that matched our project's conceptualisation of power. Accordingly, the author feels justified in interpreting the responses contained in Tables 7 and 8 as indications of the respondents' views of the actors' intra-party power.
 - 14 It is worth noting that researchers have consistently rated as generally rather low the intra-party power of Austrian MPs (e.g. Müller et al. 2001).

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AUTHOR

Kurt Richard LUTHER teaches at Keele University, UK. He convenes the Keele European Parties Research Unit (KEPRU). His research interests include party organization, right-wing radical parties, consociational democracy, Austrian political parties and party systems.

Mailing address: Keele European Parties Research Unit (KEPRU), Research Institute for Law, Politics & Justice; Keele University, Keele, Staffs. ST5 5BG, United Kingdom.

E-mail: r.luther@keele.ac.uk