

**Politics and Globalization: Bringing
Parties In**

**Göran Ahrne, Jens Rydgren, and
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Abstract

In discussions of national politics, the problems of political parties are discussed and lamented as a crisis of democracy, whereas on the global level nobody seems concerned about the absence of political parties. In this article we discuss why there are no successful mergers of political parties, and why political parties do not try to spread to other countries in order to act globally. We argue that the lack of popular representation at a global level may be understood in organizational terms. We distinguish three arenas of global politics that emerged, and discuss the absence of political parties on these arenas. Then we look at some instances of cooperation between parties across national borders. However, since political parties as organizations are strongly related to the nation state for gaining power, there are few incentives in the short run for political parties to work outside the nation state. Links to parties in other countries could even threaten the legitimacy of a national party. At the same time social movement organizations have little interest in relating to political parties. Although many political parties have ideological links and similarities with parties in other countries the preconditions for the organization of parties work against the realization of their potentially global cooperation.

Keywords: democracy – globalization – organization – political parties – social movements

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Global politics	6
Parties across borders	9
<i>Diaspora politics</i>	9
<i>Internationals</i>	10
<i>The European Parliament</i>	11
Obstacles to global politics	12
<i>Maximizing power</i>	13
<i>Legitimacy</i>	14
<i>Party systems</i>	15
<i>Contagious parties</i>	15
Conclusions: from politics to policy	17
References	20

Introduction

During the last decade or so the increasing scale of transnational socio-economic and cultural processes have been summarized by the term *globalization*. It seems to affect all social phenomena and as a result now dominates much of the discussion in the social sciences. Globalization, however, is far from a unitary process, and it affects different social spheres in different ways. The preconditions for globalization vary substantially between different social sectors and social relations. While some kinds of social action such as business, tourism, sports, and terrorism seem to prosper under globalization, others, like politics, seem to be almost provocatively slow to change and develop global forms. As a result, globalization has meant a significant shift in the balance of power between two main types of social spheres: markets and politics. We will argue that this shift may be understood in terms of the specific preconditions for organizing, which in part hinders political parties from expanding beyond the territory of the nation state.

The exact meaning of the term globalization is not particularly clear. Scholte has distinguished five different meanings: internationalization, liberalization, universalization, westernization, and deterritorialization. Each term may catch some aspect of increasing transnational processes, but only the concept of deterritorialization “gives globalization a new and distinctive meaning” (Scholte 2000: 3). From this perspective, globalization can be understood as “a significant change in the organization of social space,” and the “notion of supraterritoriality gives ‘global-ness’ a distinctive meaning” (Scholte 2000: 41). When social relations are globalized their dependence on territory is greatly reduced. We believe that this is the most relevant and probably the most common notion of globalization today.¹

Globalization is largely driven by the spread of organizations across the world, and by increased exchange and cooperation between organizations in various parts of the world. This is, for example, the case with economic globalization, which largely results through the spreading of traditional business enterprises to new parts of the world, for instance by mergers or acquisitions, but also by the establishment of new enterprises. Most business enterprises are easy to move and not dependent on territorial location. There are of course exceptions such as mining or forestry, but most business enterprises are able to move. Globalization also favours several other types of organization that represent other spheres of social life. One of the most striking examples is sports, where globalism has arguably been the key driving force behind the rapid spread of sports and sports organizations, for instance through the ability to arrange competitions worldwide and to crown world champions.

However, politics does not seem to thrive under globalization. Traditionally, inclusion and exclusion criteria for political participation have been based on national boundaries. With few exceptions this is still the case. During the last few decades we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of international regimes and transnational organizations designed to manage different forms of transnational activity, perhaps most notably trade. Nonetheless, these have not been based on transnational popular participation, but have mostly been governed by representatives of nation states (Held 1995: 107). This poses a number of pertinent questions concerning the nature of constituency, the meaning of representation, and the proper form and scope of political participation (Held 2000). Moreover, the vast number of international NGOs (so-called INGOs), which have received much attention in the globalization literature (e.g., Boli & Thomas 1999; Tarrow 2001), do not typically involve much popular transnational participation (Lawson 2002). Most of these international voluntary associations have organizational and not individual members (Ahrne & Brunsson 2005).

The lack of popular representation within politics at a global level has so far been discussed mainly by theorists and philosophers of democracy (e.g., Holden 2000). The many merits of this discussion notwithstanding, there is a strong bias toward international law, whereas concrete discussion of the *organization* of transnational political activity is largely absent. This is somewhat puzzling given the central role of organization in classical definitions of politics (e.g., Weber 1994). Furthermore, one of the conditions for democracy mentioned, for example, by Habermas (2003: 88–89), is that there "must be an effective political apparatus for the execution of collectively binding decisions." Unfortunately, contemporary theorists on global democracy typically leave out the organizational aspects of politics and are thus, we will argue, unable to understand properly the mechanisms of the globalization of politics.

Even more conspicuous is the total absence of political parties in this discussion. For Max Weber (1994: 335), "the organization of politics is necessarily an organization run by interested parties in all political associations of any magnitude" – and few would deny the central role played by political parties in contemporary democracies. Robert Dahl, for instance, singles out political parties as "one of the most fundamental and distinctive political institutions of modern democracy" (Dahl 2000: 88). In our opinion there are no good reasons to assume that the need to organize political activity through indirect representation – and in practice through some kind of party politics – would be less on a global than on a national scale. As Dahl (2000: 110) has argued,

The smaller a democratic unit, the greater its potential for citizen participation and the less the need for citizens to delegate government

decisions to representatives. The larger the unit, the greater its capacity for dealing with problems important to its citizens and the greater the need for citizens to delegate decisions to representatives. ... I do not see how we can escape this dilemma.²

In our reading this implies that political parties would be even more important in a global than in a national arena. Yet, standard works on globalization such as Held et al. (1999) do not even have an index entry for “political party” or “party politics,” and edited volumes such as Holden (2000) set out to understand the future of “global democracy” without discussing political parties. Nor does Rosenau (1990: 114-140) include political parties in his analysis of actors in world politics.

One can easily imagine many advantages of transnational or global parties. First, global parties could formulate and raise similar demands and propositions across a large number of states, and at the same time present them and argue for them from bases of local popular support. Global politics would thereby gain a stronger local connection. One can imagine that such cooperation between similar parties in several countries could result in transnational processes that are closer to ordinary voters than could transnational cooperation that rests solely upon cooperation between states. Furthermore, in cooperation between states, the ideological dimension of politics is lost or hidden. Global parties could be expected to increase awareness of common interests and values among groups of people with similar interests in many countries. Finally, global parties could gain in strength by pooling resources and people. They could, for example, mobilize more resources in electoral campaigns in various countries and deploy their most popular speakers in many countries following elections in each state.

In this article, we will discuss why there are no successful transnational mergers of political parties, and why political parties do not try to spread to other countries. We will relate the lack of global political party activities to the preconditions for the organizational forms of parties and social movement organizations. First, we will distinguish three arenas of global politics that have emerged, and discuss the absence of political parties on these arenas. Then, we will look at some instances of cooperation between parties across national borders. None of these efforts have, however, yielded any really global or even transnational political parties. In the next section of the paper we will examine some of the obstacles to global parties. We will summarize our arguments in a discussion about the lack of global political parties. Foremost, we will claim that despite the possible advantages, there are few incentives in the short run for political parties to work outside the nation state, while social movement organizations have little interest in relating to political parties.

We will argue that the lack of parties in global politics is a problem that should not be overlooked, and we will raise some questions that we think need to be discussed further. Is it the case that politics and parties are just a bit slow in adjusting to a globalizing world and will eventually catch up – or are the obstacles to global parties insurmountable? If the latter, what is lost in a politics without parties, and are there other institutions or organizations that can replace traditional political parties in a globalized world?

Global politics

According to Sartori's (1976) minimal definition, a political party "is any political group that presents at election, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office." While relying on this definition, we will in this paper use a somewhat more expansive definition: a political party is (1) an organization that runs in public elections and thereby (2) seeks to maximize its influence on policy outcomes in accordance with the core ideas and values embedded in its party ideology and which (3) usually deals with a broad spectrum of political issues and thus aggregates interests (cf. Rydgren 2005; Ware 1996: 5).

For the purposes of this paper, this definition has the merit of clearly distinguishing between political parties and social movement organizations, as social movement organizations do not present candidates in public elections, nor do they usually deal with a broad spectrum of political issues (but rather concentrate on one or a few).

The fact that parties run in public elections does not necessarily preclude cooperation between similar parties across national borders, or even the idea that the same party would run in elections in different countries. The existence of global parties does not presuppose a global state. However, such cooperation does not yet exist. What exists at a global level is politics undertaken at three different kinds of arenas, where political parties are rarely active or even invited.

First, there are intergovernmental organizations (IGOs). Some of these, for example the European Union (EU), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) can conduct politics in the sense mentioned by Habermas (2003), where a political apparatus executes collectively binding decisions. However, many IGOs cannot conduct this kind of politics. The strongest political weapons that organizations such as the United Nations, Council of Europe, and WHO have are agreements, which, if violated, have no formal repercussions (cf. Mörth 2004). Popular representation by political parties is only indirect within both types of organizations in this arena, since they only allow state representatives, not political representatives, from participating countries.

The second kind of arena takes the form of transnationally active non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social movement organizations (SMOs) that cooperate and network (cf. Boutros-Ghali 2000; Falk 2000; Kaldor 2003). The most prominent and inclusive example of this kind of arena is the World Social Forum (WSF, established in 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil), and several regional and thematic forums. Generally, political parties are not welcome in this arena; contacts with parties are frequently even avoided. Party representatives may, for example, be invited only as guests to the social forums, but they cannot arrange activities of their own. In comparison to the IGOs, the forums and the cooperation between NGOs and SMOs cannot be seen as a political arena in the sense that collectively binding decisions or multilateral agreements among states are hammered out. However it is an arena where political action is staged and activities undertaken to make changes at a collective level, although they are not always directed at national or intergovernmental organizations (cf. Sörbom 2002). World opinion and economic organizations may well be the main addressees, along with states, governments or party representatives.

Economically based organizations such as transnational corporations that cooperate and network on social matters constitute the third arena. Typical of such organizations is the World Economic Forum (WEF), based in Switzerland, but the arena also consists of lobbying groups and think tanks linked to transnational corporations (cf. Sklair 2001). Like the WSF, these organizations are political only in the secondary and weaker sense. No binding decisions or agreements are made, but political activities are undertaken to enhance economic and social development. Participants at the WEF are generally economic actors -- CEOs and other executives from national and transnational corporations. Apart from them, state representatives and representatives from larger NGOs are invited as guests. Party representatives are not invited as such.

It is clear that political activity at this global level is quite rare. Actual politics takes place only in intergovernmental organizations such as the WTO; organizations in the other two arenas are political only in the sense that political activities are staged there. Furthermore, in none of the arenas are political parties in the centre. In fact, political parties are actively avoided by NGOs and SMOs. The World Social Forum Charter of Principles clearly states that political parties are not welcome. This means that even if such state representatives as President Lula of Brazil or Chavez of Venezuela have been invited as speakers, they were so as opponents of neo-liberalization, and not as representatives of their own parties. In spite of the oft-recognized fact that a social movement may need a political party at the national level to enhance their political power, this quite negative view of political parties has become common at the global level. One

reason for this, visible in the internal discussions of the World Social Forum, is that political parties often are seen as divisive, jeopardizing the much desired multitude of voices and a broad inclusion of participants (cf. Gupta & Pukayastha 2003).

During the past ten to fifteen years, though, the lack of popular representation has become a larger problem in all three arenas. This is most obvious in the case of the WTO, the World Bank, and similar organizations, which have been strongly criticized for their democratic deficits. These organizations are now trying to incorporate national local representatives in their work. Interestingly enough, these representatives rarely come from political parties. Instead, NGOs are included (cf. Kaldor 2003). The same goes for the WEF, which in later years has turned increasingly to NGOs to work toward what is called “the Davos equation,” stating that no economic development can be secured without social development (www.weforum.org). In this work they are turning towards the NGOs, not political parties from individual countries. A probable reason for the interest in NGOs, and not political parties, on behalf of organizations such as the WTO, the World Bank and the WEF is that NGOs are seen as better fit to talk in the name of those who do not perceive themselves as being represented by the government. Furthermore, NGOs have been used with reference to their local knowledge, and by choosing them as partners for cooperation it is possible to bypass inefficient or authoritarian state regimes (cf. Kaldor 2003). For example, the World Bank motivates its collaboration with what it refers to as civil society in terms of the latter’s superior capacity for “contributing local knowledge, providing technical expertise and leveraging social capital” (www.worldbank.org/civilsociety). Furthermore, NGOs may represent specific and local interests, something that political parties generally cannot do.

However, the lack of popular representation has caused a growing debate even within the NGOs. Although few would argue that global political parties are needed for their work, some problematize the fact that people active at the global level cannot speak for anybody other than themselves. They would like to be able to speak for a constituency – a people, or the social movements of the world – to make stronger demands. Some have called for an international organization of social movements (cf. Lövy 2004). Others see the multitude of organizations and individual actors as a good thing (cf. Whitaker 2004). Inspired by the writings of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), they argue that this arena should be characterized by a multitude of subjects, not by formal representation. According to this view, trying to arrange a formally representative body of the arena, perhaps in the form of an international of social movements, would sap it of vitality.

Parties across borders

Parties are conspicuously absent in all the three arenas of global politics. However, parties that do work across borders do exist, even though they cannot be seen as working globally. One example is what we may call Diaspora politics, where a national party exists in several countries, but its politics is solely directed toward one country and one state. Another example is efforts of cooperation between similar parties in different countries, first in the form of political internationals, and then in the European parliament. Still, such forms of cooperation are very limited, and our aim in looking at them is to see whether they can yield clues to the obstacles obstructing the establishment of truly transnational or global parties.

Diaspora politics

In a sense, politics has become increasingly transnational as a result of growing international migration. As substantial Diaspora populations have established themselves over the globe, maintaining strong links and emotional attachment to their countries of origins (Sheffer 1995; Safran 1991), the connection between territoriality and political participation has blurred. Diaspora populations often participate in the political life of their former home countries – and in its party politics when appropriate – by contributing financial aid and sometimes by voting in general elections. There are numerous examples of the strong impact exerted by Diaspora populations on the political development of their countries of origins. The role of exiled Croats in establishing the Tudjman regime is the most notorious example in recent times (Anderson 1998: 73–74; Tarrow 2005).

The potential political role of Diaspora populations has incited some political parties to mobilize support across national borders. We found one interesting example of such political parties as “global organizations” where we least expected it: in US party politics. As Dark (2003) shows, US party organizations, which are very weak compared to their West European counterparts, “have taken the first steps to become ‘global’ organizations” (Dark 2003: 241). Both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party have created chapters, Republicans Abroad (RA) and Democrats Abroad (DA), that work overseas. DA was founded in the early 1960s, and today has approximately 10,000 members. RA was founded in the late 1970s, and is smaller (although it claims several thousands members) but better financed. The aims of RA and DA are to mobilize overseas citizens to register as voters, and to encourage them to vote for the party’s candidates. This global activity of American political parties is not a trivial matter. The estimated number of Americans living abroad is over six million, which means, “the size of the American population abroad is larger than the separate populations of 24 of the 50 [U.S.] states” (Dark 2003: 243).

Given how tight the 2000 and the 2004 presidential elections were, these votes may become crucial.

With growing Diaspora populations all over the world – many of which retain a strong interest in their home country’s political affairs – globalized political party organizations may well become more important in the future, possibly along the lines of the RA and DA.

Internationals

The idea of organized cooperation between political parties in different countries more or less coincided with the establishment of social democratic parties in several European countries. The First International, which was founded in 1864, was an organization for these parties. The main objective of the First International was to cooperate to win political power for the working classes (Marlière 1999).

The First International existed for little more than ten years, and was followed by a Second International that held together until World War I. The Third International, which was established in 1919, was dominated by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and came to be known as Comintern (McDermott & Agnew 1996).

Despite the many failures of the various socialist internationals, the notion of forming internationals and the idea of cooperation between political parties sharing the same ideology continues. The current Socialist International was founded in 1951, and rests on the idea of democratic socialism. Today this international has around one hundred member parties. There is also, for instance, a Liberal International, which was founded in 1947, although some forms of cooperation between liberal parties started much earlier. The Liberal International has about sixty full members. There is also a Christian Democratic International, founded in 1961 under the name of “Christian Democratic World Union,” which currently has 78 full members.

The goals and ambitions of these modern internationals are, however, much more restricted than the internationals before World War II. Cooperation mainly focuses on general and ideological problems. These new internationals do not try to make decisions on particular political issues, although these are not without importance. Through their access to financial support, several party internationals have actively backed new parties in emerging democracies. One important mission of this new generation of party internationals has been to “socialize parties into ways of thinking promoted by the most active, and well-funded, members” (Smith 2001: 60).

Tensions, similar to those that split the first socialist internationals have been evident in the liberal or Christian democratic internationals, which demonstrates the problematic character of cooperation between parties from different states. In the cooperation between Christian Democratic Parties, for instance, there has been a reluctance to make such cooperation public (Smith 2001: 64). And it is certainly so that cooperation between parties in the form of internationals is hardly made public knowledge and is rarely discussed, even if it is not secret. The national parties do not present their membership in an international as a reason to support them in national elections. Being a representative in an international is not seen as a position that enhances a career as a national politician. And there is definitely no cooperation going on between the grass roots or ordinary members.

The European Parliament

The Euro-parties are the best-known contemporary examples of transnational cooperation between political parties. There are currently seven Euro-parties: the European People's Party (EPP – Christian Democrats), the Party of European Socialists (PES), the European Liberal Democrats (ELDR), the European Green Party, the European Free Alliance (EFA – nationalists and ethno regionalists), the European Left Party (democratic left and communist parties), and the Alliance for Europe of the Nations (Euro-sceptic parties). All Euro-parties can be seen as umbrella organizations that consist of parties from each of the EU member states (Day & Day 2005).

Although the Euro-parties play a role in EU governance, their importance is highly limited (e.g., Day & Day 2005; Johansson & Raunio 2004), and the European political system is far from being a representative democratic system. There are ongoing political and academic discussions about efforts to facilitate the emergence of “real” Euro-parties, that is, parties that are transnational in government, in the electorate, and as organizations. Philippe Schmitter (2000), for instance, has proposed that existing European party formations in the European Parliament should be “given control over one-half of the EU electoral funds allotted for each member,” and that these funds should be “distributed in support of national lists in which one-half of the candidates would be nominated by these very same ... parliamentary parties” (Schmitter 2000: 58). Similarly, members of the Party of European Socialists (PES) and European Liberal Democrats (ELDR) have put forward the idea of reserving a certain number of seats in the European Parliament for election from a transnational list. The hope of the ELDR is that “such an innovation would encourage the development of truly European political parties without which the Parliament will always find it difficult to connect with the public” (Day & Day 2005: 11).

We agree that such electoral reforms could be good incentives to increase the “transnationalism” of the Euro-parties, which would make them more apt to play the role as representative of a European “people” – not of national political parties. But to create strong European transnational parties, these measures would have to be complemented by shifting a great deal of power from the Council of the European Union to the European Parliament. On the other hand, transnational parties would not necessarily emerge solely because of the European Parliament. There are other ways for political parties to become more global or transnational, and they could cooperate without first thinking about representation in the European Parliament.³

One could imagine a scenario, for example, where the EPP uses organizational resources to help the Swedish Christian Democrats (KDS) in national electoral campaigns. An electoral success for the KDS would affect Sweden’s EU policy in a direction closer to EPP’s positions – especially if the KDS became one of the ruling parties, able to send representatives to the Council of the European Union. Similarly, on an even grander scale, global party organizations could play a role even without the emergence of a global demos by investing resources (money and activists) in strategically selected national election campaigns to promote candidates that may influence the country’s policy in a desired way (concerning any policy of global importance, including, e.g., the environment, international trade, etc.).

If cooperation between parties in the European Parliament is problematic because of the lack of power of this parliament, we have not really found any *other* substantial cooperation between parties either. Cooperation is very weak in the political internationals, and it is also played down. In Diaspora politics, it seems that the people of the Diaspora only direct their interest toward their countries of origin, and it is therefore hard to see such politics as a first step towards globalization. That would at least require that the parties of the Diaspora made strong links to or cooperated with parties in the country of the Diaspora. Thus, we have to ask why global cooperation between political parties is so difficult and hard to find when “everything else” is becoming global.

Obstacles to global parties

In our introduction, we outlined some of the potential advantages of global parties, but because instances of strong and lasting cooperation between parties across borders are rare, there seem to be many obstacles toward such cooperation. These obstacles seem at present to outweigh possible gains. Here we will discuss four such obstacles that we argue are among the most important. They can all be deduced from the strong relations between parties and states. This, however, does not imply that global parties necessarily presuppose a global state (see above). First we discuss how parties get their power from a

particular state, and how their activities are related to what that state can and cannot do. Second, we focus on the threat this poses to the legitimacy of a national party when it is linked to a party from another country. Third, we point to the importance of strong links between parties within national party systems because of their relationship to the same state. Fourth, we look specifically into the risks NGOs and SMOs face in transforming themselves into political parties, nationally and globally.

Maximizing power

According to Max Weber (1994), politics has to be understood in connection to its forms. Politics is a matter of form rather than of content. Politics is related to the state and its power, which rests upon its monopoly on violence and its legitimate use of physical power (Weber 1968: 54). Since the notion of politics is so intimately related to the state, we must conclude that political parties are also strongly related to and dependent on a state. Everything that is discussed or accomplished in any political party is predicated on its potential to wield the power of the state. Parties may, at least to some extent, be understood as outgrowths of the state, at the same time as they are entries to the state. The most legitimate way to gain power in a state is through a political party. It is hard to think about parties without states, but historically there have been many states without parties. Even revolutionary parties that have come to power have had to adapt old state apparatuses.

As organizations, states can be defined both according to territory and citizenry (Weber, 1968: 56). States are completely bound to a certain territory. A state is an organization that cannot choose where to operate nor choose the number of its affiliates nor who those affiliates are (cf. Ahrne 1994). Since parties are so closely related to states, they are also closely connected to a certain territory. This strong relationship between parties, the state, and the territory is the formal determiner of politics. In terms of content, however, this view of politics is extremely open. Politics can be about almost anything that pertains to a state, its citizens, and its territory. The origin of the state as a form of organization may be understood in terms of the necessity to create some coordination in the activities among people who share a certain territory (Tilly 1990; De Swan 1988). Historically one can hardly think of any type of human activity that has not at some time or other been organized by a state. States are continually involved in organizing education, religion, culture, production, entertainment, etc. (Weber 1994). Thus, a state can do almost anything, although not always in the best or most efficient way (Lindblom 1977). Consequently, political parties have to deal with a wide array of issues. A political party that seeks to be represented in a parliament or government has to take positions on all questions that may be on the agenda of that parliament or government. It is virtually

impossible for a party to concentrate on some issues and ignore others. Thus, like states, parties become multipurpose organizations.

Likewise, traditional political ideologies such as conservatism, liberalism, or socialism are all constructed in relation to the nation-state as comprising one society or the society. The main content of these ideologies pertains to assumptions and normative statements about what the state should or should not do in relation to the territory that it controls, that is, how much of what goes on in this territory. In this respect ideologies formulate or express radically divergent standpoints, but in other respects the traditional political ideologies are remarkably similar in that they have little to say about relations *between* states or *between* ethnic groups.

Legitimacy

The strong relationship between parties and the state implies that connections between parties in different countries may be perceived as threats to the autonomy of the state. Since a political party may become an entry into the state and its government, any relations with other countries may threaten the legitimacy of the party. Moreover, to attract the interest of voters a party has to claim that they are different from other parties, and that they can offer something that other parties do not. Rarely does a party try to gain support by proclaiming membership in a political international or some other form of cooperation with parties in other countries. To gain confidence among voters, a party must be regarded as independent and autonomous. Any suspicion about ties to parties in other countries may be used against a party – even worse is the suggestion of outside financial dependence. This probably explains why cooperation between parties in political internationals is weak and kept secret.

Although an empirical question to which no definite answer has been given, it seems that global political ideologies are mostly not spread directly through parties, that is, from one party in one country to another party in another country. Instead ideologies are spread primarily by intermediaries such as academic institutions or scholars, journals or books. One example from our own research is the ideology that drove the Front National (FN) in France and had a certain success there. On occasions, the FN spread this ideology to other countries by direct contact with other parties, but surprisingly often this was not the case. In Denmark, for instance, where this ideology has had an important impact and was adapted by the Danish People's Party, it was introduced by an organization called The Danish Association (Rydgren 2004). Such intermediaries may be called *think tanks*. A think tank is defined as a relatively autonomous policy research institute, but many think tanks in fact have ties to parties or other interest organizations. It is crucial for such think tanks to strive for and claim intellectual independence. Their credibility is derived from their

scholarly credentials. The number of transnational think tanks has grown fast during the last ten to twenty years and they often act as agents of policy transfer (Stone 2001: 122). The rapid growth of think tanks can be interpreted as one obvious sign of the growing gap between the increasing global political agenda and the incapacity of political parties to act on a global scale.

Party systems

Parties within a country adhere to divergent and often contradictory ideologies. Fraternal or analogous parties in other countries will, however, tend to share these ideologies. Thus, in terms of ideology, political parties in one country have more similarities with fraternal parties in other countries than with their political opponents in the same country. However, the ideological similarities between conservative or social democratic parties in different countries may be overemphasized if one looks only at their ideology. In terms of practical politics and the values and norms of its members, parties with the same ideology may differ substantially, depending on the situation in each country. It has been said that conservative parties in Scandinavian countries are like liberals or even social democratic parties in many other countries, if you look at their practical positions on questions involving family policy, the welfare state, and taxation, among other things.

All parties in the same country have to address specific issues that come up in the day-to-day politics, and have to start from the particular circumstances that have evolved in that country, including its political history and state structures. Thus, there is a strong contingency and context dependence in practical politics. The politics of each party is also shaped in competition with the other parties in the same country, and they can be said to form a party system (Mair & Mudde 1998: 218). The parties in the same country are dependent on one another. This party system also reflects the “cleavage structures” peculiar to that country (Lipset & Rokkan 1967; cf. Smith 2001).

The similarities between ideologically similar parties in different countries are easily overemphasized, as are the differences between ideologically different parties in the same country (cf. Tjernström 2004). These tendencies may lead to a notion and perhaps feeling that ideologically similar parties in different countries have more in common than they really have. Thus, we may conclude that the contextual dependence between parties and a particular state creates a system of dependence between the parties in that country, which constitutes an obstacle to any far-reaching cooperation between parties in different countries.

Contagious parties

A fourth obstacle relates to NGOs and SMOs and their interest in political parties. Political parties are nobody’s favourite at the global political level. They

are more or less excluded from all the three global arenas. In particular, social movement organizations generally shun them. Partly this might be due to the different tasks given to political parties relative to social movement organizations.

Through the strong interdependence between parties and states all political parties are forced to deal with and have an opinion concerning a whole lot of issues. In social movements it is just the opposite. Social movement organizations are started in relation to specific issues, and they only deal with limited problems concerning their specific issue, be it some part of environmental questions, women's issues, peace, human rights etc. The issues they deal with are not unimportant, but the point is that other problems and questions are outside of their agenda and discussions. Social movement organizations do not have to have an opinion on all issues on the political agenda. To muster strong support for their own issues, it is essential that they not become involved in other matters.

The worldview of social movement organizations is that their issues are "the most important issues," and this can legitimate their lack of involvement in other issues. Moreover, the opponents or "enemies" of a movement are not necessary other movements, but other kinds of organizations (e.g., IGOs, multinational corporations). Moreover, there is no system of movements analogous to party systems. Movements do not want to have competitors within their area of interest; instead movements try to find niches within which they can act.

If a social movement organization were to associate itself with a political party, which would mean that (at least indirectly) it took a position in many other issues of lesser interest and importance to them, possibly also on ideological matters that are not central to the movement's agenda. Political parties are contagious in this sense. Since a movement may engage people with rather different views on general political issues, association with or support for a political party could drive away supporters who do not share the positions of that party.

It has, however, happened that movements have recognized the need for a political party. That was the case of the Workers Party in Brazil, which grew out of the landless movement (MST), and in many countries the environmental movements have done the same. The examples show that it is possible for political parties to grow out of movements, but that the success or failure of such attempts seems to be dependent on, among other things, a parliamentary system in which it is possible to act. At the global level, no such system exists. Therefore, it is difficult to see how global parties can develop from the NGOs or

SMOs active today at the global level, even if they reconsidered their positions on political parties.

Conclusions: from politics to policy

Although many political parties have ideological links and similarities with parties in other countries the preconditions for the organization of parties work against the realization of their potentially global cooperation. The potential power of parties is linked to the power of the state, which means that their legitimacy rests upon their autonomy and that they are bound to take a stand in all questions that pertain to what a specific state is doing. Moreover, they have to compete with and adjust to the agendas of opposing parties within the same territory and thus they are bound in a party system. These obstacles to closer cooperation or mergers between similar parties in different states, however, are not insurmountable. The dependence between parties and states does not necessarily make global parties impossible. As we stated at the beginning of our paper, we do not believe that the establishment of global or transnational political parties presupposes a world state of some kind. Obviously, however, these obstacles are still big enough to prevent the establishment of any solidly functioning cooperation or strong relations between similar parties in different countries. Our understanding of this is that the risks to parties of losing power as a result of strong relations with parties in other countries are perceived as greater than the potential for gaining power. Such a perception of risks is largely dependent on the short time horizon of parties, which is usually not longer than the next election. Parties in democratic states cannot afford to take such risks. Nor are there any short-term incentives for social movements to transform themselves into parties.

It is impossible to predict whether situations will emerge when at least some parties will perceive incentives to cooperate, which, if it led to visible gains, would tip other parties into following their lead. Perhaps the nascent forms of cooperation among parties in the EU will lead in that direction. It is too early to tell. In the long run, and depending on the experiences of globalization, the need for cooperation may rise – and with it probably a certain legitimacy.

It is not too early, however, to argue that this retardation of political parties in global politics constitutes a problem that needs to be addressed. As we noted in the introduction to this paper, virtually all writers on issues of global politics or global democracy simply neglect the question of the role of parties in global politics. In discussions of national politics, the problems and even crisis of political parties are discussed and lamented as a crisis of democracy, but on the global level nobody seems concerned about the absence of political parties. But how can an institution that is seen as one of the foundations of democracy

suddenly become obsolete in a global world? Instead, this absence needs to be seen as a problem both to be explained and discussed.

Referring back to the discussion by Dahl on the need to delegate decision-making to representatives when political communities have reached a certain size, it is obvious that a globalization of politics without parties means a loss of power for large former constituencies. Actors in these arenas do not represent anyone but themselves, or at most their state governments. They do not have the legitimacy that comes from being elected in general elections. They have appointed themselves or been appointed by relatively narrow political communities (such as social movement organizations). Furthermore, this might drive a privatization of politics in which personality becomes more important, and the issues of representation and accountability decrease in importance.

Without parties, some of the most fundamental qualities of democratic politics are lost, and it is not obvious how they can be compensated for. Without idealizing party politics, we will just point out a few of these qualities. First, without parties, important channels for the mediation of political questions and priorities between citizens and their representatives and leaders are lost, both in terms of representation and accountability. Here two basic models have been distinguished: democracy as interparty competition and democracy as intraparty participation (Müller & Strøm 1999: 304). Both of these models presuppose the existence of parties that deal with a broad scope of issues and compete with other parties in elections. Since, as we noted above, parties become multipurpose organizations as a result of their relations to states, they are also involved in discussing the importance of various issues by their members. Political issues are ordered according to political ideologies, and members are involved in determining the program of a party. Even if there are major impediments to well-functioning party democracy, these possibilities exist. And in a multiparty system, citizens are at least able to choose between different programs and leaders and different sets of issues.

In social movements, both of these qualities are missing. The issues that movements deal with are consciously limited and focused on certain issues. Furthermore, as discussed above social movements do not compete with each other in the same transparent way as parties do. Hence, movements are less reliable and flexible instruments for popular participation and representation in a general sense than are parties.

Globalization is not a widening of territory but a breaking up of territory. This transformation of the meaning of territory affects global politics much more than global business. The proportions between political and economic actions switched in favour of markets. Whereas economic activities like trade and

business have probably gained in the process of globalization, political activities have not kept pace. What we do see is a trend toward informal politics based in think tanks, social movements, Diaspora parties, and transnational corporations, sometimes working together with IGOs such as the UN or the World Bank. Since these actors cannot be seen as political in the sense of having the ability to make internationally binding agreements, we would argue that this trend is one from national politics to global policy making. Yet, the potential for political participation outside the nation state seems to be growing. Social movements are opening the global political sphere for the public by creating arenas for political participation at a global level. But social movements cannot compensate for the lack of political parties in terms of democratic qualities and popular participation. And this is a problem that has to be addressed.

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¹ It is, for example, not far from Giddens' definition: "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens 1990: 64).

² The reason for this lies in what Dahl (2000: 109) calls the law of time and numbers: "The more citizens a democratic unit contains, the less that citizens can participate directly in government decisions and the more they must delegate authority to others."

³ In fact, the emergence of truly globalized political parties might help creating transnational demos. This has been noted in the discussion on Euro-parties, where the emergence of "true" transnational Euro-parties has sometimes been seen as a prerequisite for the development of the EU into a fully democratized system (for references, see Johansson & Raunio 2004: 15). As Day and Day (2005: 6) argue, "if the EU is to develop as a non-state polity with a legitimate constitutional basis, transnational parties will play a vital role in this by providing representational linkage with European citizens. They will thereby contribute to the formation of a European demos which in turn cannot develop fully without the representational outlets offered by some form of party democracy."