The Scottish National Party's changing attitude towards the European Union

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Ordering Details

ABSTRACT

Minority nationalist parties have been considered for several years as the most pro-European parties. However, the concrete evidence and more recent studies have demonstrated that not all minority nationalist parties support the EU and the European integration process and that many of them, over time, have often changed their European positions. This paper concentrates on the study of one case: the Scottish National Party (SNP). It can be considered as a typical example of minority nationalist parties that, have, over time, adopted different European attitudes. The aim of this paper is to identify the main factors that explain the SNP's changing position towards the EU. In order to do this, the paper examines the historical evolution of the SNP's European positions and it particularly analyses the party's transition from euroscepticism to euro-enthusiasm at the end of the 1980's and its actual European position. Through the analysis of the different political contexts in which the party acts, the paper concludes that the SNP's previous and present European policy and perspective can be understood more in relation to the "structure of political opportunities" existent in the past in the UK and presently in Scotland, rather than in relation to opportunities offered at the European level.

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Introduction

The study of party attitudes towards the European Union and the Europeanization of party politics has attracted growing attention amongst scholars. Inside this wide thematic, the relation between minority nationalist parties and the European Union has remained, for several years, a relatively unexplored area. Recently many scholars have produced relevant research in order to fill this lacuna. The most widespread thesis, in this field, is that minority nationalist parties are usually some of the most pro-European parties. Some recent studies have shown, however, that the support for European integration is not a common characteristic among these parties and that they assume, instead, a wide range of positions. In addition to this, many minority nationalist parties, over time, have often changed their attitudes towards the EU.

This paper wants to contribute to the identification of the main factors that explain the variable attitude of minority nationalist parties towards the EU through the study of one case: the Scottish National Party (SNP). It can be considered as a typical example of minority nationalist parties that, over time, have maintained different stances towards the European Union and the integration process. Since the 1980s, it has linked its political claim for independence to the European Union, assuming a clear pro-European position and asking to become the political representative of Scotland as an independent European member-state. However, in its historical and political evolution, it is possible to discern at least four different attitudes: in the 1950s the party had a pro-European position; in the 1960s-1970s it was against the European integration process; in the late 1980s it changed radically by becoming one of the

most EU supportive and enthusiastic parties in the UK; and since the beginning of the 2000s until the present it has been and remains a pro-European party, but it cannot be defined as Euro-enthusiast, because it seems to show a "Euro-tepid" position [Lynch and De Winter 2008: 604]. Why did the SNP change its evaluation of the EU and the integration process? The aim of this paper is to try to answer this question and to explain what has been and continues to be the role of the European Union in the politics of the SNP as a minority nationalist party. In order to do this the paper retraces the evolution of the SNP's attitude towards the EU and the integration process. However, it concentrates particularly on the investigation of the transition from the second to the third phase (from 1960s-70s to 1980s), that is, on the SNP's choice to abandon its radical hostility in favour of great enthusiasm towards the EU, as well as on the analysis of the SNP's present position. The choice to focus the study on this period depends principally on the awareness that the SNP, during the Fifties, was not a very developed party, but it still showed the characteristics of a political movement. As a consequence, in those years, the SNP had a very restricted political agenda where the European dimension was a very marginal issue.

This paper is divided into various sections. The first section reviews the main research contributions to the study of minority nationalist parties and of their European attitudes. The second section describes the theoretical framework and the research questions that orient the empirical research. The third part examines the evolution of the party's position towards Europe, from the Fifties to the Seventies, using the related literature and the SNP's manifestoes and publications. Part four examines the modification of the party's European attitude since the beginning of 1980s and explains empirically the factors behind this change. The closing section analyses empirically the present position that the SNP has towards Europe. I propose to explain the changing SNP's European attitude through the concept of "structure of political opportunities" [Eisinger 1973, Kitschelt 1986 et al.].

Minority nationalist parties and the European Union

Minority nationalism is an old political phenomenon and its roots can be traced to the Nineteenth century. It is based on the centre-periphery cleavage [Lipset and Rokkan 1967], which refers to the existence of groups within the borders of many modern

nation-states that claim the right to self-determination. The request for self-determination is usually based on particular ethnic or civic elements which make the formation of a collective identity possible and which distinguish the claiming groups from the others inside the state [Keating 2001a]. Although minority nationalism is an historical phenomenon, it has grown particularly since the post Second World War period, becoming one of the main feature of the European states. Since this post war period, the "territory has re-emerged as an important element in political life" [Keating 2001a : 54].

The request for self-determination by ethnic or cultural minorities has been politically represented by minority nationalist parties. These have emerged in many West European states in different historical periods. "Some parties have late 19th century roots or can be traced to the 1920s and 1930s, and have been rewriting centuries of history in an attempt to legitimize demands for a right to national self-determination" [Elias 2009: 1]. However, they have acquired more visibility and a growing electoral support only in the second half of the twentieth century. Other minority nationalist parties "are clearly late twentieth century phenomena" [De Winter, Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro and Lynch 2006:13]. They have added to the historical ones, often inventing and creating distinct territorial identities.

Many terms have been used to define these parties: regionalist, new-regionalist, ethnonationalist, peripheral nationalists, sub-state nationalist parties and so on. This variety of terms is the result of the pluralistic meaning of their main political purpose: self-determination. The concept of self-determination is interpreted in several ways by every minority nationalist party. They pursue different constitutional solutions. Rokkan and Urwin have identified seven interpretations of the concept of autonomy: "separatism/irredentism, confederalism, federalism, regional autonomy, regionalism, peripheral protest and peripheral identity-building" [Rokkan and Urwin in Lynch 1996a: 5]. Furthermore, these parties exhibit various ideologies because the centre-peripheries cleavage constitutes "a distinctive axis, cutting across the main ideological axis in the European party systems" [Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro 2002: 6], different strategies and goals [Lynch 1996a]. However, despite their internal heterogeneity and the large number of terms used to define them, minority nationalist parties distinguish themselves from the other parties by some specific features: a sub-national territorial

border, an exclusive group identity and, above all, the "demand for political reorganization of the national power structures, or for some kind of self-government" [De Winter and Tursan 1998: 5-6].

Over time, many minority nationalist parties have tied their main goal of self-determination to the European integration process. National and regional autonomy have been redefined in order to include the European dimension [Lynch 1996a]. For this reason, they have started to develop strong links with the EU and, in comparison with other parties, have reserved a broader space to the European issues in their political agendas and programme. Although theoretically any kind of nationalism should be opposed to supranational integration processes, because of the difficulty to reconcile the request of self-determination with the sharing of sovereignty, many minority nationalist parties actually seem to show positive attitudes towards the EU. In the related literature they are usually described as strong European supporters. Ray, for example, through the comparative analysis of the parties' European attitudes, arrives at the conclusion that the minority nationalist parties are one of the most pro-European party families [Ray 1999]. Similarly, Hix and Lord define the minority nationalist parties as the most pro-European party family [Hix and Lord 1997].

The scholars have identified various reasons that explain the adoption by minority nationalist parties of pro-European positions. First of all, minority nationalist parties can consider the EU as an "ally" [Elias 2009] in the deconstruction of the traditional state order. In fact, if minority nationalism challenges the state from below, because it induces the state to transfer some political responsibilities to the sub-state actors, the European Union challenges the state from above, determining the cession of sovereign competences to the supra-national level. According to Keating, European integration "…undermines the traditional identity among sovereignty, territory, nationality, and function that is the essence of the traditional nation-state and opens the way to other conceptions of political authority and of public action" [Keating 2004: 368]. The European Union, not only involves the reduction of exclusive state competences, but it also changes the meaning of state sovereignty, because it creates a new constitutionalist pluralistic order. Furthermore, the supra-national integration offers minority nationalist parties a "third way between national separatism and regional devolution", because it allows them to leave the traditional conceptualisation

of exclusive sovereignty and favours the adoption of a "post-sovereignty" position. This concept is not the exclusive dominion of the state, but permits minority nationalist parties to pursue the achievement of a particular kind of sovereignty, based on the sharing of authority [Keating 2004: 368-369].

Furthermore, according to the scholars, minority nationalist parties tend to adopt a pro-European position because the European Union has offered them new opportunity structures useful for pursuing national self-determination [Lynch 1996, Keating 2001, De Winter and Gomez Reino Cachafeiro 2002]. The EU constitutes a large economic space that consents sub-state communities to develop economically, without losing their territorial autonomy. Finally, it allows the access of minority nationalist parties to the supranational level through representation in several institutions.

However, not only is the pro-European attitude not a totally common feature of all minority nationalist parties, but it is also not a permanent component in the history of single minority nationalist parties. According to Hepburn "European integration is interpreted differently, often inversely, in different contexts and at different times – either as a set of opportunity structures or constraints for realizing territorial interests. Most remarkably, whilst some regional parties viewed Europe as an alternative framework to the state to advancing their autonomy, others perceived integration as a threat, and sought to strengthen the state to prevent Europe from encroaching on their competences" [Hepburn 2008: 552]. She suggests four factors that shape their strategies towards Europe: access to the European institutions and organisations; local party competition; economic resources and constraint of state structures [Hepburn 2008: 549-542]. Finally, Elias explains that the differences between the positions assumed by various minority nationalist parties towards the EU as well as their changes over time are determined by party features such as ideology, as well as by elements linked to their domestic political systems. In addition to this, he also recognises the influence exercised by the evolution of the European Union and by supranational cooperation [Elias 2008].

As mentioned in the introduction, the Scottish National Party is an exemplar case of a minority nationalist party that has often changed its European attitude. In the following sections I will analyse the reasons that explain its changing attitude.

The SNP's changing European attitude explained through the concept of "structure of political opportunities"

In the political history of the SNP it is possible to recognise four distinct phases (1950s; 1960s-70s; 1980s-90s; 2000s) in which the party adopted various different positions in relation to the European Union and to the European integration process. These positions cover a wide spectrum of political attitudes that go from scepticism to enthusiasm. What are the reasons that explain this changing attitude? I intend to answer to this question by recurring (referring?) to the concept of the "structure of political opportunities" [Eisinger 1973, Kitschelt 1986, et al.]. The starting point is constituted by the theoretical approach according to which parties are organisations that compete in order to obtain offices, votes and policies. However, parties rarely have the capacity and the opportunity to reach all their goals simultaneously. For this reason, it is possible to distinguish between office-seeking, policy-seeking and vote-seeking models of party behavior [Muller and Strom 1999]. The concretisation of these objects is related and conditioned by the context in which the parties act. Specifically, their political goals, strategies and tactics are conditioned by the "political opportunity structures" [Eisinger 1973, Kitschelt 1986, et al.]. These structures can be "open" and therefore can facilitate the parties' participation and their political purposes; or on the contrary, they can be "closed" and consequently can constitute an obstacle to their conventional actions.

Starting from this theoretical base, I propose to explain the change of attitude of the SNP in relation to the structure of political opportunities. Through an analysis of the UK, European and the Scottish arenas in which the party acts, I intend to demonstrate how the SNP's variable European position has been determined more by the domestic structures of political opportunities than by those at the European level. I will reconstruct the entire evolution of the party's European policy, but concentrate particularly on the two most important changes, which happened respectively during the 1980's and at the beginning of the 2000s. I will analyse the reasons that motivated its unexpected euro-enthusiasm during the 1980s and its present tepid pro-Europeanism. Therefore, I will try to answer these two questions: why did the SNP become a euroenthusiastic party during the 1980s? Why, at the beginning of 2000s, did it moderate its enthusiasm in favour of a more tepid position towards the EU?

I will argue that the first change was a strategic political choice that the party assumed mainly on the basis of the closed structures of political opportunities existent at that time in the UK, more than on the basis of those open at the European level. Particularly, I will explain how the low level of the party's electoral representation in Westminster and its peripheral position in the UK political space played a more important role than its participation in the European Parliament, in the European Free Alliance and in the Committee of the Regions, in influencing the party's euro-enthusiastic conversion. In the second case, I will demonstrate how the Scottish structures of political opportunities, i.e. devolution and the acquisition of a mainstream position in the Scottish political arena, can be considered as decisive factors in modifying its position. The empirical investigation is performed through qualitative semi-structured interviews with some SNP MSPs and an analysis of party electoral manifestos and publications.

The Scottish National Party and the European Union: from support to hostility

During the 1950s the SNP supported the idea of European integration, asking for Scottish membership of the European Coal and Steel Community. According to Mitchell the SNP "…saw international organizations offering a stable environment for small countries in a potentially hostile world" [Mitchell 1998: 109]. The SNP realised a "reconciliation between sovereignty and integration" [Lynch 1996a: 29] maintaining that the European context was less threatening and more economically advantageous for the Scottish interest than the British government.

According to the literature, the reasons for this position can be traced to two elements: the scarce development of European integration and the party's will to differentiate itself from the British government. At that time, European integration was just beginning and concerned only two economic sectors: coal and steel. It was the beginning of economic European cooperation. European integration having these characteristics, was seen as more economically advantageous, "less threatening" and, above all, less invasive for Scottish identity than the British Union, which was "smaller, but more tightly organized" [Mitchell 1998: 11]. Secondly, by adopting a positive stance towards Europe, the SNP could distinguish itself from the British

government, which, at that time, certainly did not show an unconditional support for Europe. The positive European stance was also another useful issue with which to attack the British government. The party wanted to demonstrate that the British government was isolationist, whilst it was more internationalist [Lynch 1996a: 29]. Mitchell, for example, affirms that "the SNP called for separate Scottish representation in the ECSC and was critical of the British government for failing to support the French proposal for a European Defence Community in 1954" [Mitchell 1998: 110].

In the second phase (1960s-70s) the SNP radically changed its European position. In this period, it adopted a hostile attitude towards the European Community, justified by the fact that the achievement of Scotland's independence and the involvement in a supranational integration were two totally irreconcilable processes. The party was already fighting in order to obtain independence from London and it reckoned the transfer of competences and powers to Brussels was totally irrational. The accession of Scotland into the EC was considered possible only after the attainment of Scottish self-government. There were two main reasons to oppose the EC: firstly it was the centralistic, bureaucratic and elitist; secondly was the refusal to be represented in the negotiations for European membership by the British government, a government to which the SNP did not recognise any kind of legitimacy. Although this position was present in the 1960s, it started to become a more significant issue in the SNP's political activity in the 1970s. According to Lynch, the reasons for this scarce attention to the European dimension derive from the fact that, at that time, British membership was still uncertain [Lynch 1996a: 31].

SNP hostility towards the European Community became more evident in the 1970s. In these years the party started to introduce the European issue in its political manifestoes and in 1975 it campaigned openly against British accession to the EC. In this period the European Community was judged by the party as an entity that, on a larger dimension, showed the same centralising aspects both in the political and in the economic fields as the United Kingdom. From this point of view, the European Community and the European integration process implied domination by the powerful countries of Western Europe over the smaller nations, like Scotland. In a 1974 booklet the SNP described the Common Market as a "dangerous experiment in gross over-

centralisation" and it kept saying that "Scotland has suffered too much already from centralisation in Britain. Centralisation -Common Market style- could be a death blow to our very existence as a nation" [Scottish National Party 1974b :12].The negative conception of the nature of the Common Market, united with the refusal to be represented by the British government in the accession negotiations, led the SNP, in 1972, to oppose the UK's entry to the EC and in 1975, during the referendum on continued British EC membership, to campaign for a 'No' vote. The SNP campaigned under the slogans: "No vote, No entry" and "No- on anyone else's terms".

However the SNP's position during these years "was not without ambiguity" [Lynch, 1996a: 32]. In fact, in the SNP's 1974 general election manifesto, the party criticises the nature of the European institutions describing them as a threat to the economic welfare of Scotland, opposes UK membership in the EC, but, simultaneously demands Scottish participation in the Common Market:

The SNP opposed British entry, basically on political grounds of opposition to the centralist thinking inherent in the Treaty of Rome, and in the belief that, within the Common Market, not only Scotland, but the United Kingdom, would find its quality and standards of life deteriorating. The United Kingdom being in the EEC, the SNP will support moves for British withdrawal while continuing to demand Scottish representation in the organizations of the Common Market" [Scottish National Party 1974a :11].

In other 1970s leaflets and booklets the SNP, although continuing to criticise the Common Market and to oppose UK membership, proposes either the achievement of a "free trade agreement on the Norwegian model, negotiated between a sovereign Scotland and the Common Market" [Scottish National Party 1974c :7], or Scottish membership of the Common Market, in order to have representation in the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament and the other EEC institutions [Scottish National Party 1978].

The SNP interpreted the 1975 referendum on continued EC membership of the UK as a means to prove the illegitimacy of the British government and its policies in Scotland. The best result, hoped by the SNP, was that the opinions expressed by the Scottish people would be totally different from the rest of the UK and, above all, that

in Scotland there would be a clear majority that opposed EC membership. A similar outcome would prove that Scotland had the right to decide by herself about the links with the EC. However, the SNP's expectations were dashed, because the majority of the Scottish population expressed its support for continued membership. This result favoured a more positive evaluation of some aspects of the European Community. However the party adopted a pro-European stance only in the 1980s.

Why did the SNP, in the 1960s change its position, becoming strongly hostile towards Europe? Lynch has suggested two main reasons to explain this "volte-face on Europe" [Lynch 1996a: 30]. Firstly, when the European Community was created, Scotland was still inside the UK, but outside the European institutional context and the British government was negotiating European membership without allowing any kind of participation by Scotland's political representatives. Secondly, the EC appeared to the SNP as a centralist, elitist and undemocratic entity [Lynch 1996a :30]. Mitchell adds to these reasons, the impossibility for the party to distinguish itself from the UK government, once the latter had started to support membership [Mitchell 1998: 111].

Nevertheless, it is necessary to clarify that in these years the European issue was very marginal in the SNP's political agenda. The reasons can be found in the scarce development of the party's political programme at that time, because of its small electoral and membership dimensions and its nature, which was still not precisely defined and halfway between a political movement and political party. According to Lynch, it is only from the 1960's onwards that the SNP started to assume party features. Since this period, it has grown in terms of membership and electoral support and, above all, it has broadened and clarified its political goals and policies [Lynch 2002].

For the reasons just explained, the first transformation from a pro-European to eurosceptic attitude does not help very much in the identification of the main factors that explain the SNP's changing European attitude. Consequently the empirical analysis will concentrate particularly on the passage from the second to the third phase and on the present European attitude of the SNP.

The SNP's unexpected euroenthusiasm

1988 is usually portrayed as the year of fundamental change and of abandon of any kind of hostility towards Europe by the SNP. In fact, in 1988, during its party conference, the SNP clearly adopted the "Independence in Europe" policy and, since that moment, it has never left its pro-European position. Before the adoption of the "Independence in Europe" stance, the SNP remained formally committed against the European Community. In fact, the SNP's manifesto for the 1983 general election confirms a negative attitude towards the European Community. The European Community is described as damaging for the interests of Scotland. Instead of participating in the European framework, the party proposes to collaborate and cooperate with Scotland's European neighbours and, at least, to reach an economic agreement with the EEC. The SNP supported withdrawal, but, like in 1974, also in this occasion, proposed to submit the decision to the Scottish people [Scottish National Party 1983].

The formal adoption of a pro-European stance can be traced back only to the end of the 1980s, but, as many scholars have evidenced [Lynch 1996a, Mitchell 1998, Dardanelli 2003], the party started to moderate its European hostility from 1983. In fact, during the party's conference in 1983, the SNP leader, Gordon Wilson, proposed a more positive approach towards the EC. The change was not radical and rapid, but Wilson started to advance the idea that European membership would have helped Scotland to withdraw from the British Union without suffering any kind of economic disadvantage. In the manifesto for the 1987 general election, the SNP for the first time, recommends the achievement of Scotland's membership as an independent member-state. A similar position, according to the party, could have given Scotland the opportunity to contribute effectively to European affairs and to protect its interests, such as fishery, agriculture and industry. In this manifesto, the SNP expresses clearly its intension to work within the European framework, in order to create a "Europe of Nations" and to oppose new developments towards further EEC centralisation [Scottish National Party 1987:9]. In this period, "the party changed from hostility towards the EU, expressed as a commitment to withdraw an independent Scotland from the organisation, subject to a referendum vote, to making membership of the EU the cornerstone of its self-government policy" [Dardanelli

2003: 10]. The policy of "Independence in Europe" would have permitted Scotland to become independent from the UK and to be part of the European Community, using all the economic advantages deriving from the cooperation with the other member-states. Participation in European institutions would also give Scotland the chance to have a "voice" in order to protect her own interests. The conciliation of independence and participation in the European Union has been possible because the SNP has always described its desire for the EU to be a confederal entity, where the nation-states maintain their autonomy and cooperate to reach economic, political and security advantages.

The manifesto for the European election of 1989 makes this point clear by affirming that the SNP's vision of the EC is "one of a confederal family of nations working together to improve the quality of life of its constituent peoples. We reject the concept of a centralized United States of Europe but accept that as the Community develops there will be a voluntary pooling of sovereignty by member states on specific issues" [Scottish National Party 1989 :2]. In the 1990s the "viability argument" [Jolly 2007: 123] becomes stronger. In fact the SNP stressed the idea of the role of small nations in the European integration process, affirming that also Scotland, once entered in the EU, as an independent member-state, could have had the possibility to influence European policies and, more generally, European politics.

Although with some differences, the policy of "Independence in Europe" would orient the SNP's attitude towards Europe throughout the 1990s. In fact, all the 1990s manifestoes, national, European and regional, make it clear that "the EU is at the heart of the SNP independence strategy" [Jolly 2007:123].

In the SNP national manifestoes of the 1990s the "Independence in Europe" policy constitutes one of the most important issues. In fact the slogan of the 1992 manifesto is "Independence in Europe make it happen now". Furthermore, the achievement of independence in Europe is described as "the only policy which will bring stability to Scotland" [Scottish National Party 1992 :2]. Also in the 1997 manifesto an important position is reserved for the European issue. In this the advantages which the EU could give to an independent Scotland are underlined and it proposes the empowerment of the European Parliament. In the manifesto for the first Scottish Parliament elections,

the SNP introduces also the thematic of the European Single Currency, promising to "take Scotland into the European Single Currency at the earliest opportunity" and sustaining that "this will set out an assessment of Scotland's position regarding the Maastricht qualification criteria" [Scottish National Party 1999a :3].

The support of the EU as a consequence of the domestic political context

In this section I examine how the European position of the SNP, in the period between the end of the Seventies and during the Eighties, changed in relation to domestic political opportunities. In the next section I will consider, instead, the relation between the European attitude of the party and the European political opportunities, in the same temporal period.

In the domestic context two political opportunity structures played a fundamental role in influencing the SNP's European political strategy: its level of electoral representation and its position in the mainstream/peripheral dimension.

During the late Seventies and the Eighties, the SNP acted in an unfavourable internal political context. For the party, at that time, the political opportunity structures can be defined as closed. In fact, before the process of UK devolution and the creation of the Scottish Parliament, it had obtained few seats in Westminster; . it did not obtain any seats until 1970. Since this year, it has experienced fluctuating levels of electoral support. The party received the highest level of support in the 1974 general election, when it achieved 30.4% of votes and 11 seats.

SNP General Election Results in Scotland 1945-2001

Year	Vote %	Seats %	N°. Seats
1945	1.2		0
1950	0.4		0
1951	0.3		0
1955	0.5		0
1959	0.5		0
1964	2.4		0
1966	5		0
1970	11.4	1.4	1
1974	21.9	9.8	7
1974	30.4	15	11
1979	17.3	2.8	2
1983	11.7	2.7	2
1987	14	4.1	3
1992	21.5	4.1	3
1997	22.1	8.3	6
2001	20.06	6.9	5
2005	17.7	10	6

In 2005 the number of UK seats in Scotland was reduced from 72 to 59
Sources: Lynch in De Winter, Gomez Reino Cachafeiro and Lynch 2006

After this election, however, the party suffered a great electoral decline, becoming again a small and marginal political force. In fact, from the end of the Seventies until 1982, the SNP was also challenged in its own existence by internal ideological and constitutional divisions, conflicts and by renewed organisational weakness [Levy 1990, Lynch 1996a, 2002]. The negative electoral performances and the risk of losing any kind of political relevance led the party to revisit its policies and its organisation, realising what Jack Brand defines a "process of modernization" [Brand 1990 :24]. In other words, the closed nature of the domestic political opportunity structures, i.e. the difficulty to reach a substantial level of parliamentary representation, led the party to change its political strategy. In this context, the SNP acted as a vote-seeking party. As Strom and Muller explained, "contrary to office or policy, votes can only plausibly be instrumental goals. Parties only seek votes to obtain either policy influence, the spoils of office, or both" [Muller and Strom 1999 :9]. The SNP did not change its strategy to maximise its electoral support only for its intrinsic relevance. The attempt to increase its votes was clearly instrumental to the attainment of its main political purpose: the policy of Scotland's self-government. The change of its political strategy implied, also, the modification of its European attitude. As Mitchell notes, in these years, the

European policy still was not at the top of the party's programme, but it was an issue that was shared by members belonging to both the fundamentalists and the pragmatists [Mitchell quoted in Laible 2008: 107]. It started to recover an important role in the "process of modernization" undertaken by the party, because "party members were beginning to articulate thoughts about the value of the EC for the nationalist project as a whole" [Laible 2008: 107]. In fact, as sustained by Lyndsay, the SNP aimed at obtaining the majority of votes in Scotland in order to receive the recognition of the legitimacy of independence by the EC members and subsequently, as a consequence, by the UK. The EC started to play the role of an "external support system" [Keating 2004: 369] because "the route to independence would, therefore, not be dependent on Westminster decisions and England could be bypassed" [Lyndsay 1991 :88]. But, why could a positive attitude towards the European Union improve its domestic electoral success?

During the Sixties and Seventies the party suffered the accusation, by its political opponents, of being an isolationist and separatist party which wanted to cut off Scotland from the rest of the world. During the Eighties, many parties, in all European states, were participating in the construction of a supra-national project. The SNP was running the risk of appearing to the Scottish electorate as the only party without any constructive international proposal and without any international links. In this situation, the SNP saw the European Community as a means to demonstrate its European vocation to its political opponents and to the Scottish electorate. The EC was considered as an "escape route" [Lyndsay 1991: 89], as a means to respond to the separatist accusations of the political party's opponents. This strategy has been defined by Jolly as the "viability logic" [Jolly 2007 :114]. According to Jolly, since the first decades of its life, the SNP has followed this kind of logic. The party in the 1940s understood that isolationism was not a useful strategy and for many issues tried to maintain links with the rest of the British Isles. Since the 1980s the role of the rest of the British Isles was taken by the European Union. Only the strategy of "Independence in Europe" would render the SNP's political purpose really credible to the electorate and for the party's opponents. Certainly this political purpose "…seems less radical than straightforward separatism, and may dissipate fears of the economic costs of statehood" [Nagel 2004: 61]. According to Lyndsay, the "Independence in Europe" policy was mainly a way to limit the anxiety determined by the fear of

obtaining independence, and then remaining totally isolated. "It provided a formal guarantee against commercial discrimination in relation to other EC countries, especially England" and also "protected the image of being part of a larger entity" [Lyndsay 1991 :89-90].

Furthermore, as affirmed by a Scottish Parliamentary member of the SNP[1], at that time the party appeared to the electorate not only as separatist party, but rather as a "negative party", a party that opposed the UK government, NATO and also the European Community without any other propositional projects, except, naturally, the achievement of independence. The consequence was a decreasing electoral support. In the words of this SNP parliamentary member: "Effectively everybody was working on the European project, for peace and stability and a growing economy. The SNP wanted to isolate wars (?) and barriers between us and everybody else, although it was untrue, this was quite effective in terms of voters' views…the SNP, so has been against things, negative, anti-that, anti-that. That created problems for us in terms of electoral success". The European issue represented the means to change this image. Becoming extremely pro-European, the SNP could deconstruct its negative appearance and assume a positive image of the party that proposes concrete projects. Certainly this conversion did not change totally its international political position, but it gave the party the chance to give proof of its capacity to cooperate with the other European countries for a common purpose. The support for European integration was therefore a "straightforward tactical object[2]", a way to become more credible. The new attitude gave the party the necessary chance to reconstruct positively its image to increase its electoral support in the domestic context.

The second domestic political opportunity is constituted by the SNP's peripheral position in the UK party system. Following Sczerbiak and Taggart [Taggart 1998; Taggart and Sczerbiak 2002], it is possible to consider the peripheral position of the party and a component of its ideology, that is its national identity, as two aspects that partially can explain a tendency towards euroscepticism. SNP euroscepticism, in the Sixties and Seventies, can be seen both as the expression of its opposition to a supra-national institution, as well as an extension of its critique of the UK central

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[1] Interview with an SNP MSP(a), Edinburgh, 27th May 2009
[2] Interview with an SNP MSP(a), Edinburgh, 27th May 2009

government and as a means to differentiate itself from the other UK parties. However, as explained above, the image of the 'protest' and 'isolationist' party was not useful for it in relation to electoral support. The choice of the SNP to change its European stance was, therefore, motivated by the attempt to modify its position in the party system. In other words, the European policy was used as a means to appear to the Scottish electorate as a credible European mainstream party. Furthermore, it was also a strategy to maintain its difference to the UK Conservative government, which at that time was strongly eurosceptic. Changing its European vision, the SNP could assume the image of a positive, mainstream party, without altering its nationalist purpose. Effectively, as Dardanelli has evidenced, the new European vision implied the abandonment of the concept of exclusive sovereignty [Dardanelli 2003]. However, what made the change possible is, above all, a different interpretation of the European Union and of European integration. In fact, Flood underlines that the EU and more generally the 'European project' are flexible and malleable concepts. They can be interpreted by parties in pluralistic ways [Flood quoted in Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008: 257]. In our specific case, if previously Europe was described as centralistic and technocratic and thus as incompatible with nationalism, in the Eighties it was presented as an opportunity, because, being a confederal Union, it does not invade or reduce excessively the sovereign competences of the member-states.

The adoption of the pro-European strategy was possible also because, as already explained in the literature [Lynch 1996a, Dardanelli 2003, Mitchell 1998, Nagel 2004], during the Eighties, other changes happened both in the composition and in the membership of the party. Many people left the party, decisively reducing its membership, but also new people entered. The difference, according to an SNP Scottish MP, was that the old members "...came from a generation of the Second World War and so they had a natural concern about Europe, certainly a Europe led by Germany" while "people who came in the next generation effectively do not have that concern of World War things and therefore that changes the mood inside the party, the view of Europe[3]".

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[3] Interview with an SNP MSP(a), Edinburgh, 27th May 2009

During this period, the SNP leadership changed. Some leading figures who opposed the EU, because it was considered as centralistic, corporatist and as a threat to Scottish independence, either left the party or, at least, as a consequence of the internal political bargaining, changed their views. New people "more open in their attitude to European integration" [Mitchell 1998:118] acquired membership, assuming also relevant positions inside the party. The most evident and meaningful case is that of Jim Sillars, who is generally considered the "inventor of the formula" of "Independence in Europe" [Nagel 2004: 67]. He became a member in 1979 and played a fundamental role in the diffusion, inside the party, of a positive European attitude. As Lynch notes "Sillars pointed to a new Euro-nationalism that involved the sharing of sovereignty between nations within the European Community, with the intention of moving the SNP to an explicit pro-EC position that would distance it from the separatism and isolationism of the 1970s and utilised the EC and single market as mechanisms to avoid economic dislocation in the event of secession from the UK" [Lynch 1996a :39]. Other leading members also contributed to the attitude shift of the party. Some of these were people that had been in the party for a long time, like Winnie Ewing and then the leader Gordon Wilson. They changed their positions. But what is very important is that, as evidenced by Lynch, in the Eighties, the leadership became more united concerning the EC, particularly after the achievement of the reconciliation between gradualists and fundamentalists, and between groups with different ideologies. The reason for this can be traced to the adoption of a more pragmatic and diplomatic political attitude and in the instrumental consideration of Europe as a means to change the party's image. The new pragmatic leadership's position can be expressed through the words of an SNP Member of the Scottish Parliament "there is no point arguing about losing sovereignty to Europe, because we don't have any sovereignty[4]". The EU permitted the SNP to change its image, without abandoning the purpose of independence.

It is important to underline that in the party there have always been different positions on the European issue. The existence of these differences explains why, during the period of hostility, the party's claims often appeared ambiguous. In fact, as emerged through the analysis of the manifestoes, before adopting the Euro-enthusiastic

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[4] Interview with Alasdair Morgan SNP MSP, Edinburgh, 25th May 2009

attitude, the SNP criticised the nature of the European Community and opposed British membership. However, at the same time, it proposed negotiation with the EC in order to reach either Scotland's membership or some kind of external economic agreement. This position is evidently the outcome of compromises between the different internal groups. The shared enthusiastic stance, at the end of the Eighties, had been taken instead in order to grow electorally. After the Glascow-Govan election in 1988, where the party had the first good electoral results for many years, the relevance of the new pro-European strategy became evident. In a brief campaign paper[5], subsequent to the Govan election, and preceding the European election of 1989, the "Independence in Europe" policy constitutes the first point of the party's political strategy. This paper invites all the party's branches to act according to the new strategy, which is to "stress the benefits of Independence in Europe and to promote a positive image for Scotland. This will include the promotion of new and more comprehensive information and will have to withstand, and rise above, the coordinated attack on this policy from Labour, Tory and Liberal Democrats – who all see how important and attractive the policy is". Finally it stresses that "the Euro candidate and the theme of Independence in Europe, should be put up front on all possible occasions".

The constant predominance of the new European policy and the apparent absence of internal divisions, during the next decade, was due not only to the quest for electoral success, but, above all, to the new party leader: Alex Salmond. The interviews with the SNP's MSPs confirm previous research [Lynch 1996a, Dardanelli 2003, Mitchell 1998, Nagel 2004] about the relevant role covered by Alex Salmond, as a strong and influential leader, in maintaining and increasing European enthusiasm within the party. In the words of an SNP parliamentary researcher: "I believe that he is a pro-European leader and I believe that he has a very big influence on the party, because he is a very imposing leader…I don't know if imposing is the right word, but certainly he is a good leader from the point of view that he leads and people follow[6]". And also an SNP MSP recognised that Alex Salmond has more influence over the whole party in comparison with the previous leaders and affirms:

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[5] Michael Russel, Vice Convenor (Publicity), Alan McKinney, National Organiser, "Govan 10th November 1988 and after?"
[6] Interview with Toni Giugliano, SNP Parliamentary Researcher, Edinburgh, 26th May 2009

"I think that Alex took the leadership in 1990, was very important. Alex had a clear view of what was the tactic to take advantage. We don't have to take negative, isolationist ideas, we had to be pro-European, to be positive for a better future. I'm not saying Alex is better than the previous leader, I'm just saying he is very good, he is one of the top politicians in the UK, he is a class politician. I think he just understands how we should react to the political situations. Another leader may not have done that, there is no doubt to say that we are getting more from having him, than from having somebody else. I think he is the best leader for this party "[7].

The empirical analysis confirms how the domestic context had a fundamental importance in the articulation of the SNP's European strategy. Particularly the limited and closed domestic political opportunity structures led the party to the articulation of a new strategy which was electorally useful and could be used to modify its peripheral nature. Furthermore, the adoption and the maintenance of the new strategy, determined by the closed political opportunities, were made possible by the pragmatic attitude of the new members and by the new leader, Alex Salmond, who was able to keep internal coherence and cohesion.

The new strategy in the light of the European political opportunities

After having examined how the changes which occurred during the Eighties in the UK context impacted on the SNP's European strategy, it is necessary to verify if it is possible to find evidence also of some simultaneous effects generated by progress at the European level.

First of all, as evidenced by the literature [Lynch 1996a, Mitchell 1998, Dardanelli 2003, Laible 2008], the SNP adopted the new position in a period that corresponds to the crucial years in the evolution of the integration process. In fact, during the Eighties, at the European level it is possible to recognise some important advances that transformed what, during the Seventies, was fundamentally a trade organisation into an entity totally different from other international organisations. Through the realisation of the common market, elimination of the technical barriers and the

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[7] Interview with a SNP MSP(a), Edinburgh, 27th May 2009

facilitation of movement of capital and labour - the economic integration between the European members increased, and other countries negotiated membership. The entrance into the EC of new countries was decisive for the SNP, because the EC was losing many of what the party, a few years before, had portrayed as negative features; a centralistic and super-state nature, assuming the aspects of an intergovernmental organisation. The party made this point clear in its manifesto for the European elections, where it declared that the fears about the "new European despotism" were almost overcome because the bigger the EC became, the looser it became [SNP, European Election Manifesto, 1984, quoted in Lynch 1996a, p. 39].

The ratification of the Single European Act in 1987 proved the increasing importance of the EC, and became a central issue in the agendas of all member states. Finally, as Dardanelli notices, in the SNP's vision, the EC assumed a less capitalistic image [Dardanelli 2003]. This new party perception about the less capitalistic nature of the EC was due not only to the presence of the latest new comers, such as Greece, Spain or Portugal, characterised by less developed economies in comparison with the previous member-states, but it was also a consequence of the reform of the structural funds, which took place in 1988. These reforms envisaged two main instruments oriented towards the economic and industrial development of the regions: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). The difference with respect to the past was the introduction of the "partnership principle" by which the Commission would establish direct contacts with the local actors [Laible, 2008: 25]. Certainly these and other policies could be considered as incentives for the SNP to alter its perception of the EC, however as an SNP MSP specifies, what really contributed to the change of the party stance "does not reside in a specific policy or a specific decision but more properly in the evolution of the European Union[8]". Therefore, the factors that really impacted have been both the general development of European integration and, above all, the perception and the expectation of the future economic, social and political relevance that the supranational entity would assume. An SNP MSP affirms in fact that "we felt that

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[8] Interview with Jamie Hepburn, SNP MSP, Edinburgh, 26th May 2009

Europe was becoming increasingly important, economically, politically, socially. We wanted to be part of it in our own side"[9].

Furthermore, as evidenced by many scholars "during the 1980s and 1990s […] institutional incentives emerged for minority parties to enter the European political game" [Keating 2004: 376]. These "institutional incentives" or political opportunities are represented by offices (seats in the European Parliament and Committee of the Regions), policies (empowerment of regional actors, and development of an EU regional policy) and votes (following their pro-EU electorates) [De Winter and Gomez Reino Cachafeiro, 2002: 490]. According to the literature, the new political opportunities had the capacity to change the party elite's attitude, because they had overcome the limitations deriving from the process of Europeanisation. On this basis, I will evaluate whether the participation of the SNP in the European Parliament, in the European Free Alliance and in the Committee of the Regions, has had some effect in altering its European attitude.

The European Parliament, according to De Winter and Gomez Reino Cachafeiro, plays a fundamental role in influencing the minority parties' European attitudes. In fact, the European Parliament elections cannot be considered as secondary elections for the regionalist and nationalist parties. These elections rather "…are increasingly privileged as an arena in which to gain political visibility and legitimacy at the European level" [De Winter and Gomez Reino Cachafeiro 2002: 494]. This is also because the nationalist parties gain better results in European elections, rather than in state elections.

Certainly the SNP considered the EP as a useful arena in which to send Scotland's independence message to the rest of Europe, bypassing the UK government. Furthermore, as already underlined by the literature, the European Parliament was linked to the figure of Winnie Ewing, who was the only SNP MEP for many years, from 1979 to 1994. She initially had supported the anti-European position, but, from the end of the Seventies, she became one of the most pro-European within the entire party. Having been in the SNP for many years, she was also one of the most

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influential leading members and, for this reason, she had the capacity to induce a change in the organisation. In the words of an SNP MSP: "the party president, at that time, Winnie Ewing was the only member of the European Parliament and she said there is not hostility in the European Union like there is in London, a lot of people in the European Union are very much in favour of Scotland as an independent country in Europe. […] She sent the message that everyone in Europe was waiting for us…[to] come on board. So that had an impact because she was one of the leaders of the traditional wing, she was probably the most specific (? – enthusiastic?) on Europe. That infected the party with enthusiasm"[10]. Furthermore, Winnie Ewing was also one of the party politicians who received most media attention. Participation in the European Parliament was therefore considered important not only because it was an arena where the party could represent Scotland's interests and could communicate to the other European parties its political project, but it was also another means to achieve visibility in the domestic context. In the words of an SNP MSP: "In a sense Winnie Ewing's membership in the European Parliament, at that time, just kept at the top the party in terms of visibility, just kept us noticeable"[11] . The role of the European Parliament, became, therefore, fundamental when the party suffered electoral decline. Richard Lochhead, an SNP MSP, explains that, because Winnie Ewing was "an SNP legend" and also "the only one the people recognised and knew" the party saw in her participation in the European Parliament a way to have a "much greater profile" [12].

It is evident that participation in the EP assumed crucial importance especially because the domestic political context was not so favourable for the SNP. The EP, in comparison with the domestic political opportunity structures, was viewed as a more open political space in which to make Scotland's request for independence known to the rest of Europe. However, the party has always been aware of the impossibility of gaining independence through participation in this arena. The reasons for this can be found in the low number of European Parliamentary members that the SNP could have and in the limited powers that this institution held at that time. Along with these practical difficulties it is necessary to take into account more general, but also higher

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[10] Interview with Kenneth Gibson, SNP MSP, Edinburgh, 27th May 2009
[11] Interview with an SNP MSP(a), Edinburgh, 27th May 2009
[12] Interview with Richard Lochhead, SNP MSP, Edinburgh, 28th May 2009

obstacles to the party's project: the lack of a previous recognition of the unilateral secession of a region in the history of the European integration as well as the firm opposition of many European states to the independence claims of minority nationalist parties. Nevertheless, in the party's perspective, the EP was a helpful arena to enhance its symbolic relevance towards the Scottish electorate and towards its political competitors.

In the literature, the European Free Alliance is seen as an important European political opportunity for minority nationalist parties, because its birth has permitted these parties, that are ideologically different, to create a party family able to act collectively. Furthermore, it has increased the parties' reciprocal influence and has reinforced the legitimacy and the visibility of their claims. To sum up: "the EFA membership has a high correlation with support for European integration" [De Winter and Gomez Reino Cachafeiro 2002: 497]. However, from the interviews it emerges that participation in the European Free Alliance, instead, had a minor role in influencing the SNP's position.

As Lynch and other scholars have evidenced, for the SNP it has always been difficult to cooperate with other minority nationalist parties and the EFA because of the differences related to their self-government purposes. The SNP, contrary to many regionalist parties that only pursue the achievement of a higher level of autonomy for the communities that they represent, is committed to the full independence of Scotland. This factor explains why, until 1989, the party, in the European Parliament, was involved in the political group with the Gaullist RPR and the Irish Fianna Fail. However, from the middle of the Eighties, the SNP increased its links with the EFA and in 1989 entered the Rainbow Group, formed by regionalist and green parties, within the EP. According to De Winter and Gomez Reino Cachafeiro the cooperation of the SNP with other minority nationalist parties in the EFA framework led it from a eurosceptic to a eurorealistic position [De Winter and Gomez Reino Cachafeiro 2002: 493]. Certainly the party took into account the EFA as another useful platform for it to increase its voice in Europe and to confirm its European attitude. In the words of an SNP MSP: "I suppose that the establishment of a formalised structure is a good thing, but I don't over-estimate its value. This is a tactical advantage for increasing our

voice"[13]. However, the choice to enter the EFA seems not to be the outcome of enthusiastic expectations about the cooperation with other European minorities. In fact an SNP MSP explains that the presence of the party in the EFA was "a pragmatic decision to be taken at that time, because you have to be member of a group within the European Parliament and clearly it being incompatible for us to be with the Labour Party or the Conservative Party. But they are a very loose federation for practical reasons"[14]. The cooperation with the other minority nationalist parties can be defined, therefore, as the only chance the party had in order to receive the advantages deriving from participation in a formalised group within the EP. Through the interviews with the SNP MSPs, it has also emerged that the party has created durable political relations with only some minority nationalist parties, but that often these relations have nothing to do with the EFA. For example its European cooperation with Plaid Cymru, the Welsh minority party, is the extension of the previous reciprocal support found between the two parties in Westminster. Naturally there are forms of cooperation with other minority nationalist parties, like the Catalan or the Basque parties. However, the contact between them is not so frequent and they usually do not imply the exchange of political strategies or policies. Furthermore, in the European Parliament, in the European group formed by the EFA and the Greens, the SNP tends to share political similarities and opinions on different issues more with the Greens than with the other regionalist/nationalist parties. There are many reasons that explain this apparent anomaly. First of all, the SNP has always reserved a considerable space for the ecological and environment policies in its political agenda. Secondly, it pursues a different self-government purpose in comparison with the other minority nationalist parties. Lastly, the general association with some European minority nationalist parties was conceived by the SNP as a possible threat for its image in the domestic context. In the words of an SNP MSP: "there are other nationalist parties in Europe with which frankly we don't have anything in common; nationalist parties based on race or some superiority complex. It happened in the past, that there have been groups like that who wanted be part of it (EFA). The press here is always trying to link us to these other groups"[15]. In this case, it seems evident that reference is to the short inclusion in the EFA of the Lega Nord, the minority nationalist party in Italy,

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[13] Interview with an SNP MSP(a), Edinburgh, 27th May 2009
[14] Interview with Richard Lochhead, SNP MSP, Edinburgh, 28th May 2009
[15] Interview with a SNP MSP(a), Edinburgh, 27th May 2009

known for its anti-immigrant rhetoric and for its participation in the Italian government in a right and neo-fascist coalition.

On this basis, it is difficult to recognise an influential role for the EFA. Certainly, for the SNP it has been helpful in strengthening its international attitude and responding to the political accusations about separatism. However, considering the differences in the purposes of these parties, the aspiration of the SNP to sit in the EP with other European groups and the practical reasons that motivated its choice to take part in this federation, it is difficult to think that through participation in this group it became more sympathetic towards the EU. To sum up, from the interviews, there does not seem to emerge any evidence of the "socialization effect" [Ladrech 2002, Elias 2009] on the SNPs European politics.

As explained above, the cooperation of the SNP with the Green parties is based on the presence of green and ecological issues in its political agenda. This factor, even if to a limited extent, seems to have concurred with the consolidation of a positive European attitude. The ecological component together with the "civic" [Keating 2001a] nature of its nationalism consents to collocate (?) it on the GAL pole of the GAL/TAL dimension. This ideological dimension has been described by Marks, Hooghe and Wilson, as a new non-economic, cultural and new politics dimension that has arisen in Western Europe since the 1970s. The Gal pole refers to ecology, alternative politics and libertarianism; contrary to the TAN pole which combines support for traditional values, opposition to immigration and defence of national communities [Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002]. The authors assert that the parties that support GAL values, in comparison with those near to the TAN pole, tend to be more sympathetic to the EU. The attention reserved by the SNP for the environmental issue can be evaluated as another element that oriented its perception of some aspects and policies of the European Union in a positive way. However, it was an additional factor, but certainly not one of the most important ones.

The Committee of the Regions, often considered another political opportunity for the minority nationalist parties, did not have any kind of influence on the choice of the SNP to change its stance. First of all, it is an institution that was created after the SNP had changed its attitude. Secondly, the decision to enter this institution was strongly

opposed by some of its members. In fact, if from one point of view it was considered as an adjunctive platform, although extremely weak, from which the party could strengthen its voice, from the other side, it was seen as a threat to the achievement of Scotland's independence, because it confined Scotland to cover the same role as regions do. Finally, at that time, the SNP, having scarce representation both in Westminster and in the Councils, had also few opportunities to participate in the Committee.

The Committee of the Regions, an attempt by the EU to empower the regional actors through the introduction of the principle of subsidiarity, does not have an effect on the SNP. Certainly Scotland took advantage of the reform of the structural funds and of other European regional policies. Nevertheless, the SNP always looked with suspicion upon any actions directed to assign to Scotland a sub-state position, because they were seen by the party as "part and parcel of unionist strategy to keep Scotland subordinated within the United Kingdom" and to condemn it to a "powerless position in the EC" [Laible 2008, 114]. Therefore, the "Europe of the Regions" and all correlated policies cannot be considered as determinant factors.

In comparison with the domestic structures of political opportunity, those at the European level seem to have had a lesser influence on the party's European strategy. As just explained, the participation in the EP has been an additional incentive for the party's change. The party has evaluated this institution as a strategic and visible platform from which it could communicate its political project, both in the European and in the national contexts. However, the initial weakness of the EP and the constant limited number of parliamentary members have always reduced the expectations about the real changes that could derive from activity in this institution. The relevance covered by the European Parliament, as a new political opportunity, is visible principally in relation to the domestic context. The European Parliament is particularly important in the period in which the domestic political opportunities for the SNP are closed. It constitutes a new "window", but it is, above all another means to increase the political visibility of the party in the domestic-national context, rather than in the European one. The EFA and the Committee of the Regions, instead, do not seem to have had a significant role in changing the party's attitude. Nevertheless, it is

also true that the party used every platform in order to appear as an alternative and credible antagonist in domestic politics.

In conclusion, the empirical analysis shows how the SNP's unexpected support for the EU is a strategic choice, determined mainly by the closed domestic political opportunities, rather than by the "open" European ones. The new strategy was finalised towards electoral growth and to the acquisition of a less peripheral position in the UK context, necessary to reach the *raison d'étre* of the party: Scotland's independence. Certainly, other factors contributed to the change. First of all, as evidenced at the beginning of this section, a certain level of importance has to be attributed to the development of the integration process and to the SNP's expectation about the future evolution of the supranational entity. To a limited extent, the party's participation in the EP and some party features (new membership, leadership and support for GAL values) can be considered as additional factors. However, the main incentives to change derive from the domestic context. In fact, an SNP MSP specifies that "...Europe was never the most important thing. Westminster was always the priority. If you do not get MPs you will never be mentioned in the newspaper."[16] The choice to change their political orientation towards the EU seems to be dependent more on the national context, rather than the institutional opportunities of the EU in itself.

Critics and scarce attention to the EU after devolution

At the moment, the SNP is part of those minority nationalist parties that have a pro-European stance. It is a party that supports the European Union, but which opposes further integration increasing the powers and the competencies of the supra-national institutions. It supports a con-federal European model, where the nation-states keep their sovereignty and protect their national interests. According to the party's vision, the final aim of the integration process should be the strengthening of cooperation between member-states only in those fields that do not affect the particular interest of states. These fields are those where the national policies, considered the international interconnection between countries and sectors, are inadequate and it is necessary to reach common decisions and act collectively, for example protection of the

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[16] Interview with Kenneth Gibson, SNP MSP, Edinburgh, 27 May 2009

environment or common defence, as well as peace-keeping and economic cooperation. An SNP MSP, in fact, affirms that "what we have to watch in Europe is that Europe does not turn into some sort of super-state, so the individual states have to keep a lot of their own powers and not allow Europe to become a sort of United States of Europe[17]". The SNP's con-federal vision of Europe certainly is not new. The party, in fact, since it became pro-European has supported and articulated this political position. This position was necessary to reconcile the aspiration for Scotland's independence with the European vocation. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the 2000s the SNP's stance towards the EU cannot be defined as identical to that of the previous decade. In fact, in the passage from the 1990s to the 2000s, the party's enthusiasm towards the EU decreased and consequently it is possible to affirm that this marks the start of a new phase. The difference does not reside in the kind of position assumed by the party, but in the level of relevance that it reserves for the EU and in the level of European enthusiasm. According to Hepburn, in recent years, in the party's rhetoric a more critical attitude towards Europe is visible [Hepburn 2008: 543]. In fact, the manifestos from 2000 onwards, tend to underline the European aspects and the policies that the SNP doesn't share. In the 2001 manifesto the party supports participation in the EU and it recognises the advantages which derive from it, but it also expresses its refusal of a "European super-state" and lists the fields in which it supports a stronger national involvement, like natural resources, taxation and the constitution [Scottish National Party 2001]. In the 2003 manifesto for the Scottish Parliament, it is proposed to make Scotland an "independent nation in the mainstream of modern Europe" [Scottish National Party 2003], but there are no other references to the European Union and to the role of Scotland in the European framework. The evidence of how the enthusiasm towards Europe has given way to a more critical attitude is demonstrated also by its initial opposition to the single currency and to the European Constitution in 2005 as well as in the proposal to hold a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty.

The reason for the opposition to the draft Constitution lies partially in the fear about the possible advance of integration towards a supra-national entity different to a con-federal organisation and in opposition to a complete European regulation of the

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[17] Interview with David Thompson, SNP MSP, Edinburgh, 27 May 2009

fisheries policy. Similar developments would imply the end of the compatibility between nationalism and the support for supra-national integration. However, there are also other elements that motivate this attitude. First of all, the party in those years had to face some difficulties. In fact, after the UK's devolution, the SNP became the second party in Scotland, but, in the second regional election its electoral support decreased.

SNP Scottish Parliament Election

Year	Constituency Votes%	Constituency Seats	Regional Votes%	Regional Seats	Total Seats	Whole Seats%
1999	28.7	7	27.3	28	35	27%
2003	23.7%	9	20.9	18	27	20.9%

Sources Lynch in De Winter, Gomez Reino Cachafeiro and Lynch 2006

In addition to this, in 2004, John Swinney, the party's leader for only four years, was replaced by the former leader Alex Salmond. The change of leadership and the unexpected electoral decline led to an internal debate about different policies, including the European policy and to the revelation of internal divisions, between the supporters and the opponents of the EU. It is important to underline, in fact, that although the leadership of Alex Salmond, during the Nineties, had been able to reconcile the internal different European visions, a eurosceptic minority is still present in the party. The SNP has been defined by some SNP MSPs as a "broad church". This expression refers primarily to the presence of members that believe in centre-right values and members that, on the contrary, are ideologically oriented to left wing ideas. Nevertheless, the concept of "broad church" means also that the party is still formed by members with different ideas about the modalities to achieve independence, about the meaning of independence, and consequently with different positions and attitudes towards the EU.

The critical attitude of the party towards the EU is clearly visible when the European Union becomes a debated thematic and the party has to take public decisions, like in the case of the European Constitution.More generally, the SNP tends to give scarce prominence to the European issue. In comparison with the past, this is a noticeable change. According to Szczerbiak and Taggart "whether or not parties use the European issue as an element of inter-party competition and how much prominence

they give to it, is […] determined by a combination of (electoral) strategic and (coalition) tactical factors. A party's electoral strategy is, in turn, determined by a number of variables" [Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008 :257]. In the case of the SNP the variables that determined the adoption of the new strategy and consequently the loss of relevance of the European issue are many.

First of all the European Union actually is a sensitive issue for the party. As seen in the case of the Constitution, there is not a general consensus about the European Union in the party. Secondly, there are particular European policies that increase the internal divisions and that are perceived as hardly electorally winning. An example of these policies is the single currency. This thematic has been recently reintroduced by Alex Salmond, but it still receives strong opposition from some groups inside the party. Also in relation to the thematic of European social policies there is not a definite official party position and there are different internal visions about it. From the interviews it has emerged that there are some party members who would like "a stronger social Union"[18], and others on the contrary, think that the final aim of integration should be economic cooperation, and others that in principle maintain the development of the European social dimension, but that, at the same time, see it as a problematic process that needs to proceed slowly. An SNP MSP for example says: "I personally think Europe is getting itself into difficulties because, to the extent it develops more policies in this area (social), it is more likely to threaten the national parliaments and to interfere more with the action of the people. It is going to impact more in the people's lives. I know that they want to impact for good reasons, the danger is in interfering bureaucracies that stop what people normally have done. I think it has to be handled very careful, very slowly"[19].

The lack of total intra-party consensus and the fear of losing electoral support led the party to give little prominence to the European issue and to avoid, when it is possible, to take formal positions in relation to specific European policies.

Furthermore, there are also institutional, structural and electoral variables that explain this strategy. In the previous sections, I defined the euro-enthusiasm of the SNP as a

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[18] Interview with Jamie Hepburn, SNP MSP, Edinburgh, 26th May 2009
[19] Interview with Alasdair Morgan, SNP MSP, Edinburgh, 25th May 2009

strategy determined predominantly by the political opportunities existent in the Eighties in the UK. I demonstrated, in fact, how the UK context, in comparison with the European level, was decisively more important for the SNP. However, after UK devolution, the SNP's political choices must be explained principally in relation to the Scottish context. The reasons of this affirmation can be easily found if we compare the political opportunities available for the SNP in the three different political arenas. At the UK level, they can be defined as static, because the party continues to occupy a peripheral position and to have a low level of political representation. Also at the European level, despite the considerable progress which has occurred in economic and political integration, the political opportunities available for the party are substantially the same. On the contrary, since devolution, which happened in 1998, new opportunities have emerged in Scotland. Since 1998, the Scottish Parliament has constituted and continues to be a new space where the party can pursue its political aim, getting visibility and political relevance. What is more important is that the new political arena is the nearest to the Scottish electorate. Since its creation, it has been clear that the Scottish Parliament was the only assembly where the SNP could aspire to keep "offices" and to become the majority party in the Scottish government. For these reasons, since the creation of the new institution, the SNP has focused all its political resources towards competition in the new context. This has implied the formation of new priorities and consequently the European issue has rapidly lost its previous centrality. Simply, Europeanism previously had been the "breaking issue", the new policy that had permitted the party to renew its political image and to propose itself as a credible political opponent in Westminster. Once the Scottish Parliament had been created, the European policy gradually lost relevance in the party agenda. This effect is due to the necessity to give priority to local problems that directly and, above all, more visibly impact on the daily life of the Scottish citizens. Since devolution, the arena where it can reach votes, policies and offices has become the Scottish Parliament. In contrast to the Scottish Parliament, the European Parliament, instead, remains an institution scarcely "visible" to the electorate and hardly politically or electorally remunerative.

Effectively "after the Parliament was actually established in 1999, the new institution became the most popular single option, attracting around 50% support" of the Scottish citizens [McCrone and Paterson 2002: 1]. Furthermore, in the period between 1999

and 2006 the majority of Scots would have liked to have had a more influential devolved Parliament concerning the way that Scotland was run. In the period between 1999 and 2006, the citizens that recognised some influence of the EU over how Scotland was run, oscillated between 4% in 2000 and 11% in 2006. But what is more important is that from 2000 to 2006 only 1% of them maintained that the EU should have had more influence in the way in which Scotland was run [Sources: Scottish Social Attitudes, 2000-2006, in Curtice 2008: 221-222, in Devine 2008].   As McCrone evidences it is not possible to affirm that Holyrood constitutes for the Scottish citizens "a 'second-order' parliament" [McCrone, 2002]. On the contrary it is considered the main institution from which to obtain concrete policy outcomes. This position of the majority of the Scottish citizens is perceived by the party, in fact an SNP MSP affirms: "If I were to knock on a hundred doors and ask people what was the most important thing, what do you think they will say to me? Well obviously jobs, housing and they will say public transport, they will also say crime, nobody is going to say the European Union. But all these things are important in Europe, and Europe has an important role to play in all these things, because it is so distant, people don't see these things close to them. The Scottish Parliament is more important to them because it is closer than London. People see that the future in Scotland has to be settled by here and here in Edinburgh, by winning a referendum on independence in Scotland and then… we would think more about Europe" [20]. The existence of the new Scottish political arena and the perception of the interests of the Scottish electorate explain the new party strategy and why an SNP MSP affirms: "the most important elections for us are the Scottish Parliament elections, the second most important are the Westminster elections, the third most important are the Council elections and the fourth most important are the European elections. And the only reason why the European elections are the fourth, is because there are not five elections"[21].

To the domestic political opportunity structures it is necessary to add also the low level of representation in the European Parliament. This decreases the relevance given to the European issue in the party discourse and increases the critics. If in the past the EP represented an additional and also an "open" arena where the party could have representation, a "voice in Europe" and a "second front of pressure on

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[20] Interview with Kenneth Gibson, SNP MSP, Edinburgh, 27th May 2009
[21] Interview with Kenneth Gibson, SNP MSP, Edinburgh, 27th May 2009

Westminster"[22], now the opportunity to have only few European Parliamentary members is deemed as realistically no longer sufficient. The interviews with the SNP MSPs have evidenced how the SNP sees the representation in the EP as too weak and not adequate to send the message to the rest of Europe about the independence aim of the party. The dissatisfaction with the level of European representation has become stronger after EU enlargement. In fact, the SNP supports the enlargement, also because this makes the possibility that the European Union will become a federal state more remote, but, at the same time, it evidences how small independent countries, similar in geographical dimensions to Scotland, can have more European representatives. It is not a case that presently it "…pays greater attention to its potential representation effectiveness within the EU for an independent Scotland compared with a region of the UK, in terms of Commissioners, members of the European Parliament, and the Council of Ministers" [Jolly 2007: 123]. In the past, the positive performances of the small countries in the European context could be seen as an additional element for supporting European integration, but today the "demonstration effect" [De Winter 2001] increases the dissatisfaction related to a sub-state status. In fact, in the last few years the *leitmotif* of the SNP has been the request for a stronger voice in Europe, of the right to "a seat at the top table of Europe" [Scottish National Party 2009a].

Especially since 2007, when the SNP became the party of government, the dissatisfaction due to the weak role of Scotland in the European institutions, has become more evident. In fact, now the SNP has the priority to hold a referendum about independence and, in order to extend the citizens' support for this constitutional option, which still is not very great amongst the citizens, has to demonstrate to the electorate that it is the only party that can defend and represent Scotland's economic and political interests in all institutional arenas. For this reason, it underlines how independence could give Scotland the capacity to protect better its interests in different policy fields that are conditioned by the European Union, as for example the fisheries, agriculture, energy and the fiscal policies. In the most recent white paper about the constitutional future of Scotland, the SNP recognises "the importance of the European Union to Scotland", but affirms that: "given the European Union's role in

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[22] Interview with a SNP MSP(a), Edinburgh, 27th May 2009

many areas of government, Scotland needs adequate representation within the European Union to negotiate directly for its own interests" [Scottish National Party, 2009b: 107-108]. To a certain extent, the necessity to protect Scottish interests in many fields that are regulated by the European Union, through policies that the party considers as inadequate for Scottish economic development, is used as another reason to achieve independence.

In conclusion, currently the party shows a more critical position towards some aspects and policies of the European Union and this attitude emerges particularly in some occasions. However, the usual prevailing strategy is to marginalise the European thematic, in order to maintain the formal pro-European stance and to avoid eventual internal divisions.

Conclusion

It has often been argued that the process of Europeanization is particularly important for minority nationalist parties, because European integration impacts directly on the centre-peripheries territorial cleavage from which these parties originate. The self-determination aims have been Europeanised on the basis of the opportunities, incentives and constraints offered by the European Union. Particularly, it has been affirmed that the opportunities overcome the constraints. The EU offers them the chance to act in supranational arenas, to obtain recognition and to increase their power. On this basis, minority nationalist parties tend to be extremely pro-European. The eventual differences between their attitudes and the increasing euroscepticism of some of them have been interpreted mainly as a response to the frustration deriving from the missed realisation of their aims at the European level and to some policies that have threatened their territorial interest. Furthermore, scholars have evidenced the important role played by many factors in determining the attitudes of minority nationalist parties towards the EU. These scholars have described parties' positions as the result of ideology and strategy and of a mix of domestic and European factors.

This study of the attitude of the SNP towards Europe, being only one case, does not permit us to propose generalisations. However, from this research it is possible to advance some general hypotheses about the relationship between minority nationalist parties and the European Union.

From this study of the SNP it emerges that its attitude towards the European Union and the process of European integration historically has been strategically oriented. A component of its ideology, nationalism, is certainly an important element that helps to explain its general approach to the EU. However, its changing attitude is mainly the result of strategic and tactical considerations. The party has used different interpretations of the concept of the European Union and of the integration process on the basis of its needs and aims linked to the domestic electoral and political competition. These needs have changed in relation to its domestic political opportunity. The initial hostility towards the EU was clearly the result of its radical nationalism, but also a strategy of a marginal party that extended its protest from the UK to the supra-national level. However, the static condition of marginality and the scarce level of internal representation led the party to change its European strategy, in order to maximise its votes and policies. The fervent Europeanism of the Eighties, is, therefore, predominantly explained by the party's attempt to become a "positive" mainstream party, able to increase its electoral support and consequently its "voice" in the domestic arena. This strategy was particularly advantageous in an internal context, where the European consensus, amongst the major parties, was strictly limited.

Certainly the choice of the party to adopt a pro-European stance is linked also to the institutional evolution of the integration process, and to the access to the new arenas at the supra-national level. Certainly the EU was considered a means to increase its symbolic relevance, especially in a period in which the integration process was developing rapidly. However, once having obtained a more visible and relevant role in the Scottish context, the party has rapidly marginalised the European issue, becoming often indifferent to the specific policies and activities at the supranational level and considering the European elections as secondary and scarcely remunerative. In addition to this the SNP has become more critical towards some aspects of European integration.

On the basis of this research about the SNP's European attitude it is possible to propose that the support of minority nationalist parties to the European Union depends on the institutional features and the opportunities of their domestic context more than on the opportunities offered by the European Union. Particularly, it is possible to

advance the hypothesis that the fewer and more "closed" are the domestic opportunities the greater will be the support for the European Union.

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