

# Making Their Way Home from Brussels

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New Political Parties in European and National Elections

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Göteborg Studies in Politics 141

2015

Akademisk avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen i statsvetenskap som med tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakultetsnämnden vid Göteborgs universitet framlägges till offentlig granskning fredagen den 29 maj 2015, kl. 13.15 i Torgny Segerstedtssalen, Universitetets huvudbyggnad, Vasaparken 1, Göteborg.



**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

Blombäck, Sofie. 2015. *Making Their Way Home from Brussels. New Political Parties in European and National Elections*. Göteborg Studies in Politics 141, edited by Bo Rothstein, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, Box 711, 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden. ISBN 978-91-628-9429-0, ISSN 0346-5942

### **Abstract**

This thesis studies new political parties in the context of both European and national elections. It argues that the study of new political parties should not focus only on the national level. This is particularly true for new parties in Europe, since these can also aim for representation in the European Parliament. The thesis challenges the conventional wisdom that the European Parliament is an easy arena, that can serve as a short-cut into national politics. The thesis also challenges one aspect of the classical second order election theory, which does not expect that parties' results in the European elections should influence their fate in the national arena. The thesis instead argues that European elections can be important for new parties, but only for some parties, in particular circumstances. For parties in other contexts the European elections matter less. Gaining representation in the European Parliament may in many cases prove as difficult as, or even more difficult than, gaining representation in the national parliament.

The thesis consists of a comprehensive study of all new parties that have gained their first elected representatives in the European Parliament, from the first direct elections in 1979 to the elections in 2009. Additionally, data is gathered on the representation in both the national and the European Parliament after a full parliamentary term, as well as on the resources, political project and political opportunity structure for each party. These data are analysed both individually and using fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA). Finally, there is an in-depth study of four parties, two in the Netherlands and two in the United Kingdom.

One important finding of the project is that new parties entering the European Parliament is a comparatively rare phenomenon. While some new parties have gained representation in each European election, several Member States have not seen any successful new parties at all. Of those that do enter the European Parliament, a third also gain representation in the national parliament within five years. Of the rest, most have either disappeared or no longer take part in elections. When it comes to explaining why only some of the parties that try to enter the national parliament, after gaining their first representation in the European Parliament, are successful, three factors come out as particularly important. The new party needs experienced leadership, acceptance from the established parties, and advantageous electoral rules at the national level. The case studies show that for some parties being elected to the European Parliament can be very important. Both UKIP and the Green Party in the UK gained the chance to have their leaders being full time politicians, access to staff and other resources and time to develop both their organisations and political projects from their representation in the European Parliament.

**Key Words:** Political Parties, Elections, European Parliament, QCA, case studies