6 On the Relationship of Political Opportunities to the Form of Collective Action: the Case of the European Union

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Among the hotter topics in the social sciences these days is that of 'globalization'. Consistent with this emphasis, movement scholars have begun to freely use terms such as 'transnational social movements' and 'transnational social movement organizations', implying that here too we are witnessing wholly new phenomena born of some more general globalizing trend.

We remain sceptical of most of the broad brushstroke portraits of globalization being advanced today. But there is at least one contemporary phenomenon that does raise the issue of transnational social movements in a fundamentally different and, in our view, more viable sense than the way the term is generally used. We are referring to European integration and the ongoing metamorphosis of the European Union. Here instead of referencing trends in the social movement sector, we are focusing on changes in the structure and organization of institutionalized power. While there is much debate over the extent and significance of these changes, there is general agreement that the changes have, in fact, undermined the monopoly over political sovereignty once enjoyed by the member states and led to the creation of a 'multi-level polity' in which institutional power is increasingly distributed over a host of EU, national and even sub-national bodies, commissions and other decision-making agencies.

Given our view that social movements – and indeed, all of the organizational forms of popular politics (e.g. parties, unions, etc.) so familiar to us in contemporary democracies – developed in response to the rise of the modern democratic state, the trend away from national sovereignty is potentially highly consequential. Our general argument is straightforward: to the extent that European integration results in the replacement, or, more likely, the decline in the importance of the nation-state as the exclusive seat of formal

institutional power, we can expect attendant changes in the forms and dynamics of social movement activity. To theorize these changes, we turn to the social movement literature and the work that has been done on 'political opportunity structures'. We begin with a brief discussion of that work, note two problems with the political opportunity concept and then seek to remedy those problems as a precondition of using the concept to help make sense of the changing locus and forms of movement activity that we discern in the European Union.

I. THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

Over the past 15–20 years the concept of 'political opportunity structure' has become a staple of social movement scholarship (Eisinger 1973; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; McAdam 1982, 1996; Tarrow 1994; Tilly 1978). The basic assumption underlying the concept is straightforward: movements emerge and develop in response to shifts in the broader political environment that render their opponents (both in and out of government) more or less vulnerable to challenge. The concept has been used successively to help account for the rise or fate of a wide range of movements, including the American women's movement (Costain 1992), liberation theology (Smith 1991), peasant mobilization in Central America (Brockett 1991), the nuclear freeze movement (Meyer 1993), and the Italian protest cycle (Tarrow 1989).

   For all its utility, however, use of the concept continues to be plagued by a host of troubling theoretical issues. We take up two such issues in this chapter. The first centres on the failure of movement scholars to distinguish between very different *types* of political opportunities, implicitly representing opportunities as a single continuous variable, rather than as a cluster of distinct categorical variables. In this chapter, we seek to identify four distinct dimensions along which political systems can facilitate or impede mobilization by challenging groups. Second, we aim to extend the concept of political opportunity by assessing its relationship to a somewhat understudied dependent variable: *form of mobilization*.[1] In our view, the form of mobilization adopted by an emergent challenging group would appear to be yet another variable that owes, in part, to differences in the nature of the opportunities that set groups in motion.

   Having offered these 'friendly amendments' to the concept of political opportunity, we then seek to demonstrate their analytic utility in regard to a contemporary phenomenon of considerable substantive and scholarly importance: collective action in the context of the European Union. We begin by assessing the applicability of our four-fold typology of political opportunities to the European Union. That is, we ask which of the four types of opportunity we distinguish are present at the level of the EU. Having done so, we then

spend the bulk of the chapter discussing the link between the available EU-level opportunities and the forms of collective action that have developed in the Union. We conclude by speculating about what the future might hold and whether we are likely to see a broadening of the types of opportunities available to challenging groups and, by extension, an expansion in the forms of collective action evident in the European Union.

I.1   Refining the Concept of Political Opportunity: Transcending the Single Variable View

The bulk of the scholarship on political opportunities betrays a single variable view of the concept. Political systems are characterized as being more or less vulnerable to challenge or more or less open to insurgents. This 'more or less' formulation implies a unidimensional understanding of political opportunities. But, as Tarrow (1988: 430) noted some years ago, 'political opportunity may be discerned along so many directions and in so many ways that it is less a variable than a cluster of variables – some more observable than others.'

   In an effort to bring more analytical clarity to the concept, various authors have, of late, sought to specify what they see as the relevant dimensions of a given system's 'structure of political opportunities.' Among those who have offered such schema are: Charles Brockett (1991); Kriesi et al. (1992), Dieter Rucht (1996) and Sidney Tarrow (1994). Synthesizing across these four approaches yields the following highly consensual list of dimensions of political opportunity:

1. the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system;
2. the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity;
3. the presence or absence of elite allies, and;
4. the state's capacity and propensity for repression.

   The first dimension merely underscores the importance attributed to the formal legal/institutional structure of a given polity by all of the authors. Similarly, items two and three speak to the significance attached, by all authors, to the informal structure of power relations characteristic of a given system. The only difference between our formulation and some of the others centres on our effort to distinguish that enduring set of elite alliances (i.e. labour and the Democrats in the American context) that tends to structure political systems over time from the more ephemeral presence or absence of elite allies. Included in the latter category would be routine administrative transfers – Labour replacing Conservatives in Britain, for example – that grant greater or lesser entree to all manner of challenging groups.

   Finally, let us offer a few comments about two dimensions that we omitted from our list. The first is Brockett's inclusion of 'temporal location in the cycle

of protest' as one of his five dimensions of political opportunity. We certainly concur with Brockett's judgement regarding the importance of this factor. However, as consequential as this factor may be in shaping the timing and fate of a movement, we fail to see what makes this a form of *political* opportunity, as opposed to a more general temporal facilitator of (or constraint on) movement activity. For this reason, we have omitted it from our list.

The second omission involves Rucht's inclusion of a system's 'policy implementation capacity', which he defines as 'the power of authorities to implement adopted policies, regardless of internal or external resistance.' This factor bears a strong family resemblance to Kitschelt's (1986) stress on the critical importance of 'the capacity of the political system to effectively meet demands'. We omit this dimension for the same reason that Brockett does in his conceptualization of political opportunity. This factor, writes Brockett (1991: 254): 'is often one of the decisive determinants of outcomes.... However, the determinants of outcomes of political conflict often differ from those of collective action; therefore the position taken here is that it is more useful not to conflate and confuse the two discussions.'

Brockett's point is an important one. The dimensions of political opportunity vary depending on the question one is seeking to answer. This brings us to our second refinement of the concept of political opportunity.

Extending the Concept: Assessing the Relationship between Political Opportunities and Movement Form

The concept of political opportunity structure has been used as a key explanatory variable in regard to two principal dependent variables: the timing of collective action and the outcomes of movement activity. Ostensibly the earliest use of the concept was in regard to the first of these questions. Seeking to understand the emergence of particular movements, proponents of the political process model sought to link the initial development of insurgency to an 'expansion in political opportunities' beneficial to the challenging group (Costain 1992; McAdam 1982). Ironically, however, Eisinger's (1973) initial use of the concept was motivated by a desire to explain variation in riot intensity across a large sample of American cities. Thus, the recent spate of comparative works analysing strength of movement activity across a number of national polities (cf. Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi et al. 1992; Rucht 1990) is really more in keeping with Eisinger's initial use of the concept than the nominally 'older' tradition of single case studies of movement emergence.

In our view, however, these two dependent variables fail to exhaust the range of movement phenomena that are profitably viewed as owing to the effects of political opportunities. Among the other features of a movement that would appear to owe, in part, to differences in the nature of available opportunities is the relatively understudied aspect of movement form. If we array movements along a continuum from the narrowest of institutionalized

reform efforts on the one pole to revolutions on the other, we think we can discern a general relationship between type or form of movement and changes in the dimensions of political opportunity specified above. Changes in the legal or institutional structure that grant more formal political access to challenging groups are apt to set in motion the narrowest and most institutionalized of reform movements. By narrow we refer primarily to the tactics one can expect such movements to employ. To the extent that the movement has mobilized in response to specific changes in access rules, we can expect it to act primarily to exploit that new crack in the system. So, for example, Ross Perot's independent candidacy in the 1992 American presidential election sought to take advantage of newly liberalized procedures and guidelines structuring the mobilization and operation of third party campaigns.

The emergence of new allies within a previously unresponsive political system is again likely to be linked to the rise of a narrow and generally institutionalized reform movement. Most of the movements that fit the imagery of the classic resource mobilization perspective would seem to be of this type. So the anti-drunk driving movement, with its single-issue focus and stress on institutionalized tactics, was born of the sponsorship of the National Transportation Safety Agency and other allies in the Reagan administration. Similarly, the Nixon administration helped initiate the US environmental movement through its active sponsorship of the first Earth Day in 1970. And although radical environmental groups such as Earth First continue to receive a disproportionate amount of media attention, the movement as a whole continues to adhere to the generally institutionalized reform approach embodied in such 'industry leaders' as Sierra Club and the Nature Conservancy.

As we move to the more radical or even revolutionary end of the movement continuum, the other two dimensions of political opportunity come increasingly into play. A significant decrease in either the will or the ability to repress tends to be related to the rise of non-institutionalized protest movements, of the sort exemplified by the chronologically first of the two movements described by Elena Zdravomyslova in an interesting 1996 article. The group, The Democratic Union, was founded in Leningrad/St. Petersburg in 1988, largely in response to the Gorbachev inspired 'thaw' in public discourse and the attendant relaxation of social control by state authorities. Note, however, that this decline in repression did not grant dissidents greater *institutionalized* access to the system. The movement thus remained amorphously radical in its aims and *non-institutionalized* in its means.

Finally, as virtually all major theorists of revolutions have argued, the development of significant divisions among previously stable political elites is among the key precipitants of this very special and consequential form of collective action (Goldstone 1991; Skocpol 1979). It should be noted that the rise of broad-based, political reform movements such as the American civil rights movement (McAdam 1982), have also been attributed, in part, to the

collapse of enduring elite alignments. The point is, the simple distinction between reform and revolution becomes blurred at this point. The distinction only makes sense in retrospect. Revolutions, by definition, are associated with generalized system transformations; broad reform movements are not. In other words, the distinction owes less to internal differences between the movements and more to the relative strength or weakness of the systems they seek to challenge. In their internal form most revolutions and radical reform movements look the same. They espouse a wide range of goals and use a mix of institutionalized and non-institutionalized strategies to pursue them.

The purpose of this section was not to sketch a full-blown theory of movement form, but simply to call attention to the fact that the structure of political opportunities available to challenging groups is likely to do more than simply shape the timing and fate of collective action. Organizers are also very likely to tailor their efforts to the specific kinds of changes they see taking place in the political systems they seek to challenge. In particular, *where* and *how* they seek to press their claims will reflect their view of where the system is newly vulnerable or receptive to their efforts. This latter point has important implications for understanding the actions of challenging groups in the context of the very real and dramatic changes in the locus and structure of institutional power that have occurred in recent years in the European Union and its member states. Drawing on these observations and our earlier typology of political opportunities, we aim in the next section to make sense of the kinds of transnational claims making we see developing in the EU.

II. GROUP STRATEGY AND POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Observers of group mobilization in the EU find that there is relatively little social movement activity there. If one is looking for the kinds of unconventional activities associated with social movements in national states – marches, mass meetings, public protests – one sees relatively little evidence of mobilization (Imig and Tarrow, this volume; Tarrow 1995).

This is not to say, however, that social movements are absent from the European arena. Alongside the many thousands of interest groups organized there, one finds a significant number of social movements, including environmental groups, farmers' groups and trade union federations. But, by and large, these groups do not act in Brussels as they do in their national contexts. Instead of demonstrating their grievances before the mass media, they lobby Commission officials, engage consultants to write impact reports, coordinate policy papers among themselves, instruct lawyers to pursue cases before the European Court of Justice, and, only on occasion, organize public protests outside the European Parliament building in Strasbourg.

The contrast between group activity at the European level and in national states suggests that group strategy is flexible rather than fixed and that it is sensitive to group resources and structures of political opportunity across different political arenas. We observe, in short, a plasticity to group activity that escapes any hard-and-fast conceptual distinction between social movements and interest groups, as represented by their separate literatures.

Rather than draw a line between social movements and interest groups based on presumed essential differences in their organizations and goals, we attempt to explain variations in how groups of all kinds pursue their political goals, diverse as these may be. In the context of the European Union the master question for group strategy concerns the relative absence of unconventional activity, i.e. relatively uninstitutionalized, symbolic or mass protest taking place outside established political channels – and the predominance of conventional activity, i.e. institutionalized, elite lobbying taking place continuously within established political channels.

The reasons for this take us to the heart of the relationship between the opportunities a group has for influence in a political system and the strategy it pursues. We begin by comparing the contrasting conditions of effective unconventional and conventional political activity, and then examine elements of the EU political context, including particularly major decision-making institutions.

The effectiveness of non-coercive public protest depends, minimally, on two sets of variables: an instrument of political pressure, usually the mobilization of significant numbers of individuals at a particular time at a particular place; and a target of pressure, in this case, political decision-makers who are responsive to a public which can be informed of the protest event and its significance via mass media. The instrument and target of conventional political activity are quite different: the instrument is the mobilization of information, legitimacy, and political-economic resources by lobbyists on behalf of a particular constituency; and the target is political decision-makers who are responsive to the resources that lobbyists wield.

There are several reasons for why unconventional claims making seems to be relatively poorly suited to the EU.

In the first place, to the extent that it is expensive in time and money to transport activists to Brussels, so the EU is a less receptive venue for mass protest. It is far easier to set up a lobbying effort at the decision-making centre of the EU than it is to mobilize large numbers of individuals for a demonstration. It makes little difference for a national pressure group if lobbying takes place in London or in Brussels if they have the financial resources to employ a representative or representatives. Mass protest, in contrast, is territorially rooted (Reising 1997).

This is not so much of a problem for those living in the vicinity of Brussels or Strasbourg, nor is it a problem for unconventional activity that involves just

a few professional activists (as is often the case for Greenpeace). But geography is certainly a keen constraint for labour-intensive unconventional activity for those living in the outer territories of the EU – northern Scandinavia, the UK, Ireland, Denmark, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Greece, and Italy – where costs of travel to the centre remain relatively high.

Second, public discourse is deeper at the national level, in individual member countries, than it is in Europe as a whole. Individual attachment remains considerably stronger to territorial communities at the local, regional, and national levels than at the EU level. A Euro-barometer survey conducted in November 1991 found that citizens were, on average, midway between 'fairly' and 'very' attached to their respective local, regional and national communities, but slightly less than midway between 'not very' and 'fairly' attached to the European Union (Marks and Haesly 1996). We shall return to the subject of attachments later, but the essential picture up to the present is one of a significant gap between the sense of territorial community at the national and subnational levels vis a vis the supranational level.

The relative weakness of attachment at the EU level is matched by the relative absence of news media spanning Europe. With the exception of sports and music cable television, mass media in Europe are still mostly pitched to distinct national audiences rather than to an overarching European audience. There is now a newspaper – the *European* – that is explicitly oriented to Europe as a whole, and the *Economist* and most other newspapers and magazines across Europe give much more attention to EU events than in past years. However, the creation of a European-wide political discourse bumps up against continuing diversity of language. A social group that wishes to gain attention for its cause will, therefore, tend to operate at the national level, within a clearly defined territory of discourse, than in the European 'Tower of Babel'.

Finally, and most importantly, the structure of political opportunity in the EU is decidedly more open to conventional than unconventional activity. There are four key policy-making institutions in the EU – the Commission, Council, Court, and Parliament – and only the latter occasionally provides a juicy target for a strategy of unconventional political activity.

The European Commission is a hybrid executive/civil service formally responsible for initiating and drafting legislation, which it submits to the European Council of Ministers and the European Parliament for approval (Marks, Hooghe and Blank 1996). Its responsibilities cover the gamut of policy-making in the EU from its original mandate under the Treaty of Rome, which encompassed agriculture and the EU budget, to diverse policies covered under the Single European Market (SEA) initiative of 1986 – competition, capital flows, international trade negotiations, free movement of labour, visa policy, regional industrial policy (cohesion policy) – to new or enlarged competencies specified in the Maastricht Treaty of 1993, covering,

e.g. the environment, social policy, energy, and transport and communication networks. The Commission is organized into 24 separate directorate generals, for agriculture, regional policy, the environment, social policy, etc., each with its own administration. In addition to its agenda setting responsibilities, it serves as the think tank of the EU, with responsibility for investigating the feasibility of new policies. In this capacity it produces 200–300 reports, papers, studies and communications annually (Ludlow 1991).

Commission administrators are extraordinarily open to input from affected groups if they believe they will gain useful information. The Commission's vaunted openness is partially a response to the fact that it lacks resources to independently collect information about the impact of proposed legislation for each member state. In relation to its responsibilities, the resources of the Commission are minuscule: in 1995 it employed 24,000 personnel in Brussels of whom 6,500 were professional administrators, which makes it comparable to one of the 96 French Départements or one of the smaller German Länder (McLaughlin and Greenwood 1995). While national governments are always ready to teach the Commission its job, for obvious reasons the Commission is intent on gaining additional sources of information beyond those supplied by national governments.

The Commission is open, far more open than most national administrations, but it is highly selective. It has a bias towards information that will enable it to formulate legislation that can sustain majorities in the Council and the Parliament. It listens carefully to major economic groups, particularly if they represent interests that have already been aggregated to the European level, but it is relatively insulated from unconventional pressures. Since the response to the Maastricht Accord of December 1991, the Commission is deeply concerned about its public image, but it remains an unelected bureaucracy. The Commission is a sensitive political organ, but it is tuned to politically relevant, often highly technical, information rather than unconventional claims making.

The European Council of Ministers, composed of representatives of member state governments, is the most important legislative body in the EU. It is an intergovernmental body, and the path to pressure its decision making runs through individual member states. When intergovernmentalists studying the EU conceptualize decision-making as a nested game they chiefly have in mind the Council of Ministers. At the EU level there is an insulated process of negotiation among the 15 national governments; within each member state there is a separate, nested game determining the policy position of the national government.

The logic of the Council for unconventional political activity, indeed political pressure in general, is clear: operate within respective member states rather than at the European level. However, the Charlemagne building which houses the Council is a symbol of European decision making and it has

exerted a lure for some unconventional protest, as when Greenpeace surrounded the building with a fishing net in a dispute about the legal size of drift nets in 1994 or when animal rights activists protested the crating of calves in transit from Britain to the Continent.

The European Court of Justice is a specifically European institution in that it is not determined by national governments, but it is not at all open to unconventional claims making. It is involved primarily with technical adjudication of disputes concerning the balance between market liberalization and environmental, health, and social concerns that constrain free trade. The 15 Justices vote in secret and, as is the case for high courts in most democracies, they are well insulated from unconventional politics.

To the extent that there is a logical target for unconventional political activity at the European level, it is the European Parliament. The Parliament is the only directly elected decision-making body in the EU, and over the past decade it has come to exercise real power over significant areas of policy-making. The SEA and the Maastricht Treaty established cooperation and co-decision procedures which have transformed the legislative process from a simple Council-dominated one into an complex balancing act between Council, Parliament and Commission. Since the Maastricht Treaty, the two procedures apply to the bulk of EU legislation. Under the cooperation procedure, Parliament (if it has the support of the Commission) has the ability to make the Council a take-it-or-leave-it legislative offer which can only be overruled if the Council is unanimous. Under the new co-decision procedure, an absolute majority of the Parliament can veto legislation. A conciliation committee composed of representatives of both the Parliament and Council would then try to achieve a compromise, but this too must gain a Parliamentary majority (Tsebelis 1994, 1995).[2]

The accessibility of the European Parliament for unconventional activity is enhanced because its members are not insulated from external pressures by strong party organization. The 11 transnational party fractions in the Parliament are gradually becoming more institutionalized and more cohesive, but by the standards of European political parties they remain relatively loose organizations with little control over the voting of their members.

However, on the other side of the ledger, Members of the EP are only weakly accountable to their respective electorates for their voting records. Voting in European elections is mainly oriented to domestic rather than EU issues. Only on the most salient issues are groups able to threaten MEPs with the electoral consequences of their votes. The source of this loose accountability is the relative shallowness of media and public attention to unconventional activity at the European level, noted earlier.

EU political institutions, in particular the Commission, the Court and the Parliament, provide multiple channels for group influence at the European level. In terms of the framework set out above: the institutional structure of

decision-making in the EU does grant groups formal political access, though the Commission and the Court place institutional hoops which groups must jump through if they are to be effective; groups operating in the EU have variable opportunities to gain political allies (for a discussion of this, see Marks and McAdam 1996), though all groups are pressured to pose their claims in ways that are commensurate with market building which has been the chief project of European integration over the past decade; and finally, there is little repression of social movements at the European level.

Morton Grodzins coined the term 'multiple crack' to describe the multiplicity of opportunities for group influence in the American political system, and one might be justified in borrowing the term for the EU (1967).[3] A wide variety of groups, including those that have refined unconventional claims making, have mobilized at the European level. The last published count of groups in Brussels estimated that their number had increased to 3000 by 1992 (McLaughlin and Greenwood 1995). At this time of writing, in early 1996, experts reckon that the figure is in excess of 5,000.[4]

Our point of departure in this chapter is that political opportunities do not merely serve to provide sets of incentives for groups to make claims in certain arenas, but they shape the way in which groups make claims. Given the context of communications, media attention and political attachment in the EU, along with its formal political institutions, we are not at all surprised to find that there is a decided bias towards conventional and against unconventional political activity.

The decisive test for this line of hypothesizing is to examine the extent to which groups that engage in unconventional claims making at the national level turn to more conventional activity at the European level. We cannot do this systematically in this chapter, but the scattered evidence we have, and more systematic evidence gathered by others, suggests that this is indeed the case (Scott 1997).

Greenpeace, for example, operates a small office employing eight people in Brussels.[5] Its chief function is to convey information about forthcoming EU legislation to its national organizations and to muster information from those organizations to influence EU policy. Greenpeace representatives in Brussels are in daily contact via the net with national organizations, and they perceive that their own effectiveness depends on their ability to communicate in both directions. Given the skeleton staffing of the Brussels office, it finds it useful to (a) bring Greenpeace experts to Brussels for short stays to lobby the Commission and Parliament on particular issues; (b) hire external consultants to write technical reports that question the conclusions of Commission reports;[6] (c) collaborate in a division of labour with other environmental organizations, including, particularly, the Climate Network Europe, European Environmental Bureau, the European Federation for Transport and

Environment, Friends of the Earth Europe and the World Wide Fund for Nature (Rucht forthcoming).

Greenpeace has organized unconventional actions in Brussels and Strasbourg, the most publicized of which was a campaign against legislation concerning genetic research that came before the European Parliament in March 1995 and which was eventually vetoed despite the fact that the legislation came out of the EP/Council Conciliation committee. But, up to this point, such activity has not been the focus of Greenpeace strategy. It pursues a mainly conventional claims-making strategy in the EU.

III. UNCONVENTIONAL ACTIVITY IN DYNAMIC CONTEXT

The group strategies we have described are liable to change as the conditions which gave rise to them change. The institutional shape and policy competencies of the European Union are the object of an intense and many-sided political struggle among national governments and other actors at the European level and within national states (Hooghe and Marks forthcoming). While the outcome of such struggle is unpredictable, we believe that it is possible to diagnose the consequences of alternative outcomes for group claims making.

Given the sharing of powers among EU decision-making bodies, the more competencies that are shifted to the European level, the greater the inducement for affected groups to mobilize there. Up to the present the main thrust of European integration has been economic – tariffs and agriculture under the Treaty of Rome; the single market and cohesion policy under the SEA, and monetary union under the Maastricht Treaty – and these policy foci have induced economic rather than social claims making at the European level. Environmental and social concerns have slipped onto the EU agenda, largely because they are connected to market-making, but this has been a recent development. If we assume that it takes time (measured in years rather than months) for groups to learn about and adapt to changes in their political world, this would help explain the extraordinary depth and breadth of representation of economic interests in Europe in comparison to that of social and environmental groups. By the same logic, the early expansion of EU responsibility into agriculture is consistent with the preponderance of agricultural groups in overviews of unconventional claims making in Europe (see Inig and Tarrow, this volume).

Political institutions in the EU are changing almost as rapidly as the scope of policies for which they are responsible. Unlike its member states, the EU has no fixed constitution. It is essentially an *ad hoc* set of institutions that have accumulated over the past four decades in a series of incremental bargains among an expanding number of national state executives. The EU was never designed to be a coherent representative polity, though it exerts the kinds of

responsibilities that we associate with such polities. If pressures on the part of democrats and integrationists for creating a federal polity based on strong representative institutions succeed, then the scope for unconventional claims making should correspondingly increase. Indeed, proponents and opponents of parliamentary empowerment assume such a link. Neo-liberals, who wish to sustain an overarching market and segmented governance in nation-states so as to limit the capacity of any government to regulate market outcomes, oppose giving more power to the Parliament because they want to limit the ability of social groups to press legislators to regulate European markets. Many integrationists, on the other hand, believe that strengthening Parliament is a step in the direction of a 'Citizens' Europe' in which legislation is oriented to welfare, environmental and social concerns as well as market integration.

To the extent that European public discourse, media coverage and political attachment are constraints on group claims-making, so one should conceive of group strategy from the standpoint of continuity rather than abrupt transition. Each is rooted in cultural and linguistic factors that change only slowly. But it would be mistaken to think of European public space as a fixed element of a group's political firmament, for there is clear evidence that attachment and attention to the European Union have deepened over the past two decades in response to the creation of institutions which make decisions affecting Europeans and which provide some opportunity for individual participation (Euro-barometer 1970–93). European integration has progressed over the past four decades in the absence of Europeans, but there is evidence that a significant degree of attachment to the EU has been created in the process. The struggle that is taking place in Europe about the future of the European Union is not merely a response to conflicting orientations, but actively shapes how people think about the European project.

Groups are producers as well as consumers of these changes in their political opportunities. They participate directly in the policy process and campaign for the reallocation of competencies to political arenas in which they feel they have more influence. When Communidad Valencia's plan for two national bird sanctuaries was rejected by the Madrid government, it succeeded in shifting the issue to the European area, and gained the support of DG-11 and DG-16 (environment and structural funds).[7] When the World Wide Fund for Nature was unable to convince governments of Ireland or Greece or DG-16 to integrate environmental concerns into several regional economic policies, it took the Commission to the European Court of Justice (Long forthcoming). Just as national states were sought as authoritative agents by groups which were disadvantaged by market or local forces, so groups today influence the allocation of competencies by appealing to European actors to overrule national governments or ameliorate problems that they cannot handle locally.

The unintended consequence of such activity is that it attributes problem solving capacity and legitimacy to some actors at the expense of others. The sheer number of groups that are present, their attempts to influence policy outcomes, their efforts to aggregate their interests to the European level to do so – each deepens the European polity and thereby recreates a potential for unconventional claims making that has formerly been reserved within national states. Against such pressures are, chiefly, the rise of nationalism in response to the insecurities unleashed by economic internationalization and loss of national sovereignty and opposition to further integration from those who would want to renationalize politics in Europe or those who are content to leave things as they are and continue the combination of a European-wide system of markets in the absence of a strong European-wide government.

IV.   CONCLUSION

Rather than joining the often diffuse debate regarding the globalization of politics, in this chapter we have sought to focus on a single topic: the effect of European integration on the form of claims making by social movements and interest groups in EU member countries. While based on only the most preliminary of empirical data (see Marks and McAdam 1996), our argument would nonetheless seem to accord with emerging trends in the EU. We assert that the formal EU-level political institutions that have developed over the course of European integration have come to constitute a new political opportunity structure for all manner of challenging groups in the member countries. Elsewhere we have sought to demonstrate the variable effect that this emerging structure has had on a range of European social movements (Marks and McAdam 1996). Here we have sought to account for the dominant forms of EU-level movement mobilization across this range of challenging groups. Overwhelmingly the forms of mobilization – even by nominally unconventional groups (e.g. Greenpeace) – have been narrowly institutional, reflecting the logic and structure of EU institutions. Thus, for us, the absence of conventional movement activity – that is to say, non-institutionalized forms of direct action – in the streets of Brussels in no way constitutes definitive evidence that European integration has failed to alter the dynamics of movement activity in Europe. On the contrary, given the close relationship we hypothesize between type of political opportunity and form of mobilization, any significant increase in EU-level direct action would have been surprising.

In short, in the rapid expansion in the number of movement groups with offices in Brussels, the growing willingness of movement groups to press their claims before the European Parliament the European Court of Justice, we see evidence that European movements are beginning to respond to the limited forms of institutional access afforded by European integration. Will this trend continue? On this score, we remain agnostic. At the very least, it would be hard to envisage a dismantling of the European Union and the 'multi-level' polity it has created. But the institutional architecture of the European Union, like that of the nation state in its formation, is politically contested. It is still far too early to tell how much further and at what pace the process of integration will unfold. In turn, it is this process that will determine how much more salient the EU-level will become for movement groups and what new forms of mobilization might emerge in response to changes in the institutional shape and logic of the European Union.

NOTES

1.   Among the scholars who have sought to theorize and to study empirically the relationship between political opportunities and movement form are: Kriesi et al. (1995); Kriesi and Wisler (1996); Duyvendak (1995); and Koopmans (1995).
2.   It is sometimes pointed out that governments retain a veto, mandated under the so-called Luxembourg compromise, that can circumvent these procedures. But the Luxembourg compromise is not nearly as potent as its reputation. See Teasdale (1993) and Nugent (1994).
3.   Tony Long, the Director of the WWF bureau in Brussels writes that one of the lessons of the past several years is: 'Don't rely on trying to influence just one or two European Union institutions but try to use the whole range of possibilities at different times to achieve maximum effect' (forthcoming).
4.   Conversation with Liesbet Hooghe.
5.   Authors interview with Greenpeace officers in Brussels.
6.   One favourite Greenpeace tactic is to rehire the very consultants used by the Commission, but to give them a wider brief to capture the environmental impacts of a particular policy.
7.   Interview, 1994.