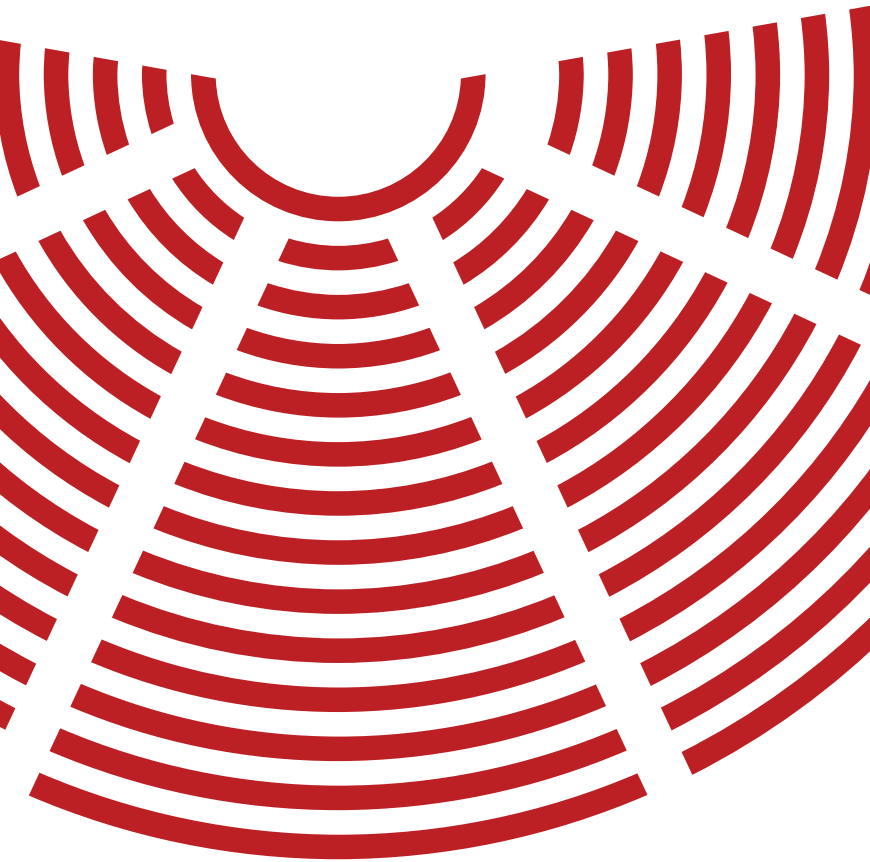
Transforming the Political Union

Reinforcing europarties ahead of the European elections



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Transforming the Political Union: Reinforcing europarties ahead of the European elections

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European political parties and the future of European democracy - the Why, the What and the How

Maria João Rodrigues

FEPS President

Let us face it: a majority of European citizens support the EU project, but they are somehow frustrated with its political institutions. How can European citizens aggregate their preferences at European level to ensure more clear and effective democratic decisions of the European Union? The European democracy needs to bring about new responses to this central problem and the European political parties can play a very important role in this.

Political parties are organisations of citizens which are democratically accountable for their proposals of political orientations and elected politicians. They are indispensable for representative democracy to work at national level and they should also become so at European level.

The role of the European political parties has been increasing. There is a reality which is quite unknown out-

side the Brussels bubble: most of the official meetings of the European Parliament, of the Council of Ministers, of the European Council and even of the European Commission College, are prepared at informal meetings organised by the European political parties or families. And these hold regular meetings with their national parties and allies to define their political strategies and positions about general and many specific issues.

This publication, prepared by FEPS and building on a recent sequence of workshops, addresses from different angles WHY the European political parties are necessary, WHAT kind of organisations they should be and HOW they can better play their roles in the future.

My reflections below are based on my personal political experience since 2000 as minister, special advisor in the European Commission and in the European Council, Vice-President and Parliamentary Secretary of the S&D in the European Parliament and inter-institutional negotiator of the European Pillar of Social Rights. But they are also based on different kinds of collaboration I could give close its leadership to develop a progressive European political party, by inventing new solutions of cross-national joined-up work: thematic meetings; ministerial meetings; preparation of the European Council meetings; and co-ordination of several programmatic developments including the first draft of the progressive programme for the European Commission.

The legislative process to develop the European political parties is put into perspective well in this book by one of its main authors in the European Parliament, Jo

Leinen, who highlights that these organisations are still in the making regarding their potential roles, organisation and accountability.

WHY do we need European political parties?

A central potential role of the European political parties is the programmatic one, as assessed by Ania Skrzypek, focusing particularly on the European elections. The particular experience of the PES shows the interest of combining an electoral manifesto prepared with the national parties with an electoral programme prepared with the Spitzenkandidaten, as was done in 2014, as well as with a draft and informal programme for the European Commission prepared with European Commission officials, as was done in 2019. In fact the ambition of the European political forces should be not only to win elections, but also to govern Europe.

The role of the European parties and their parliamentary groups can also be central in the crucial period of negotiating priorities and conditions within and by the coalition of political forces underpinning the election of the president of the European Commission by the European Parliament – as analysed by Luciano Bardi.

The European political system is complex, with the European Council as a collective head of state and the double executive power held by the European Commission and the Council, but it is and should certainly be evolving towards a more parliamentary format. This gives to the European political parties a central role in building governing majorities and oppositions in the

complex game of variable geometry we sometimes have in the European Parliament, according to the issues at stake.

Within this framework, the European Commission tends to become a more political body with a permanent need to secure parliamentary backing. More recently, a new interaction is emerging between the European Parliament with the presidency of the Council as well as with the president of the European Council.

Nevertheless, I believe that alliances and coalitions between different European political parties are more viable *ex post* than *ex ante* European elections, because they are still very young organisations with a weak identity for the national and European electorates.

WHAT kind of European political parties do we need?

When it comes the kind of organisation European political parties should be, one needs to recognise that political parties are among the slowest political institutions to Europeanise themselves. They remain a confederal organisation to collaborate and at best to coordinate action, rather than a supranational one. Just see their internal decision rules, which are based on consensus and unanimity, not qualified majority voting, regarding most of the issues as in the EU Council, even less simple majority as in the European Parliament.

Even if European political parties are able to evolve towards a more supranational approach, it seems to me they will remain multi-level organisations, as hinted at

by Lucy Kinski. That is why several attempts being made to create direct membership for the European political parties are considered problematic, because this is often perceived as creating parallel organisations regarding the national parties. The involvement of many more national party members in different types of joined-up work at European level seems to me a more promising road for Europeanisation.

By contrast, the critical assessment of the deficits of feminisation proposed by Isabelle Hertner are certainly well justified and certainly more should be done. To be progressive is also to be feminist and involve half of humankind in full equality. As simple as that. A political European party not understanding this will have no future.

HOW can European political parties better play their roles in the future?

This books also contains two major breakthroughs regarding HOW European political parties should develop their role to create a vibrant European democracy.

The first is elaborated by European Parliament rapporteur Domènec Revesa, regarding the revision of the European Law with the aim of developing a true pan-European debate, the role and accountability of the European political parties and a more effective Spitzenkandidaten process.

The second is a tandem electoral system for the European Parliament as proposed by the joint work by Jo Leinen and Friedrich Pukelsheim.

Let us remember that the Spitzenkandidaten process was invented by the European progressive family and then followed by the others in order to give a role to the European citizens in the choice of the European executive power in terms of the president of the European Commission. Hence it is up to this political family to improve this process for the future, and transnational lists are an important contribution for this purpose because they will enable the lead candidate to be elected by a European constituency rather just a national one.

All this is also about using the potential of the next European elections to bring a new response to my starting question: how can European citizens ensure more clear and effective democratic decisions of the European Union to cope with the current crucial challenges?

Dealing with different storms now (the war in Ukraine, the pandemic, climate change), we are in historical times for the European project. A stronger and democratic European Union is more important then ever and a democratic transformation is needed. This is a central task requiring requiring a special effort of imagination and sense of historical responsibility from the European progressive family if she wants to seize the opportunity of regaining the leadership of the European project for its next phase

Strengthen the europarties: open up the organisations and dare more deliberative democracy

European political parties
A cornerstone for transnational democracy

Jo Leinen

Former S&D Group member of the European Parliament

Political parties in the member states of the EU took a long time to organise themselves into European political families. For some decades they have been only loose bodies with occasional meetings.

The Maastricht Treaty in 1991 mentioned for the first time European political parties and their role for the integration process. They should create awareness about the European dimension of politics and represent the will of the citizens in the EU. This new expectation in the treaties triggered the formal creation of European political parties. On 9-10 November 1992, the Party of European Socialists (PES) was founded. Nevertheless, this European party had no legal statute and very limited finances.

For a long time, the PES secretariat resided next to the PES Group in the European Parliament (EP). Most activities have been financed with Parliament's money.

The big step forward came in 2003, when Parliament and Council agreed on a regulation for a statute and financing of European political parties. As the EP rapporteur I could tell many stories about the difficulties in achieving this milestone.

The definition of a European political party already engaged endless controversies. Not to mention the role of European parties in referenda or election campaigns. Their visibility and engagement were not yet allowed. Europarties did not get a European legal statute. They had to register under any national legislation, most of them as a Belgian ASBL.

The Parliament was clever enough to demand a review of the Party Regulation two years after it came into operation. Having again the honour to be the EP rapporteur, we could get major improvements with the revised Regulation in 2007. Now European political parties got the task of campaigning in European elections as well for referenda with European issues. On top of this, European political parties could establish European political foundations as open platforms for analysis and deliberations on transnational topics. PES together with existing progressive foundations created in 2010 the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS). In the last ten years this foundation was quite successful in bringing together progressive people from Europe and around the world to analyse political and societal challenges and come up with concrete proposals for policy making. In 2017, finally, with the next review of the Regulation, European political parties got European

legal status and therefore a higher legitimacy and independence.

Despite all this important progress there is still a lot to do for a truly transnational democracy in the EU. It starts with the organisation and functioning of a European political party. PES is still a party of national parties. Direct membership of citizens is not yet possible. This is a decisive weakness for reconnecting with ordinary people who are interested in European affairs. The European party should figure on the membership card and on all party materials. The membership fee should as well reflect the belonging to the European party family by splitting it in a way that is adequate for the national party as well as the European party.

A fundamental deficit for European political parties is the lack of ability to run in the European elections and to compete for mandates in the EP. European elections are 40 years after the introduction of direct elections still not *really* European elections but national elections with national candidate lists and national rules for the election process. Therefore, national issues and controversies are very often at the forefront of the European election campaigns and truly European topics get lost.

A European constituency with transnational lists remains a top priority to fill the democratic deficit on the European level. Political parties in a parliamentary system have the important function to run in elections and compete for the best ideas with other political actors. Winning mandates and majorities in a parliament are the driving factors for vibrant public campaigns and

political debates. Transnational lists are the strategic element for transnational political competition and thus create a European public sphere. Media everywhere in the EU would take much greater interest in the EP elections and citizens would recognise the truly European character of these elections.

The European Parliament demanded in 1995 the introduction of European lists for 10 percent of the overall number of mandates in the EP. This would *actually* mean some 70 seats to win by the European political parties. This number leaves enough space for geographical and gender balance on the party lists.

The main European political families started in 2014 and then again in 2019 to select a lead candidate ('Spitzenkandidat'). European lists are the missing link in the triangle of European political parties and the Spitzenkandidaten method. The lead candidates are somehow fake, because the citizens can elect them only in one member state and not everywhere in the EU.

Despite the big disappointment, that none of theSpitzenkandidaten was proposed by the European Council after the EP elections in 2019 for the Presidency of the European Commission, the Spitzenkandidaten method is still key for transparency and democracy in the EU. The personalities who want to become the president of the European Commission must be known to the citizens before the election day. They must explain in public their programme and roadmap for the further development of the EU. To choose the Commission president behind closed doors after the

EP elections must belong to the past and is a no-go for any EP election to come.

The PES was the first European political party to present a Spitzenkandidat in 2014. This achievement is even anchored in the party statutes. It has to be repeated in 2024. Maybe there are some lessons to learn. The selection and election process of a PES Spitzenkandidat could be more transparent and inclusive. Competition between different personalities for this position should not be hampered but encouraged. Primaries with public debates among the candidates online as well as offline would mobilise the members and steer interest in a wider public. Since no party family has an absolute majority, alliances and coalitions are necessary to win the competition in the decisive EP vote after the elections. There is some food for thought for the party leadership to perform better around the EP elections in 2024.

Better performance of European political parties is an overall challenge and obligation. It starts with the visibility of European parties. They do not really exist in the public awareness and not even among their own members. The sister parties on the national level should have the logo of their European party family on all materials. This logo should be visible in particular on election campaign tools as well as on the ballot paper.

European political parties should open themselves up for individual membership of citizens. Most of them are so far only a party of parties. This is an incredible weakness, because the communication from the na-

tional to the European level is channelled and restricted to a few representatives of the member parties. PES activists was a good idea to start, with direct involvement of engaged members in PES activities. Now we need the next step of direct membership.

The sufficient financing of European political parties is a permanent issue. Donations are rarely available and the financial contribution by the specific EU budget line covers the basic needs of these parties. Why not split the membership fee into one part for the national party and another part for the European party? This would create a sense of belonging and additional interest in the PES's existence and activities.

The Conference on the Future of Europe is an experiment for transnational debates with online and offline events. The multilingual platform especially makes it possible and somewhat easy for citizens to express their proposals and priorities. The PES should profit from this experience for topical debates with all interested members. The preparation of the election manifesto in particular should involve far more members than usually happened in the past.

The Internet makes it much easier to run a common campaign across Europe.

Some crucial issues of injustice, for example tax injustice, should be tackled by our members and our friends. The European party should not be silent or only express itself through leaders' meetings and press statements.

Conclusion: European democracy needs European political parties. In this decade these political bodies on

the European level must evolve as real transnational actors, with direct membership of interested citizens, with political debates and campaigns across the EU and with running for mandates on European lists in truly European elections.

Transnational partisanship in the EU: opportunities, incentives and obstacles

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Introduction

Interdependence and transnationalisation in the European Union (EU) system of governance challenge the very adequacy of the 'standard account' of national representation based on national parties contesting in national elections. In this environment, transnational partisanship has been suggested as a way to transnational democracy (White 2014; Wolkenstein 2018), but (national) parties have not (yet) proved too enthusiastic about organising across national borders. This chapter explores the potential of transnational partisanship for European multilevel democracy in two distinct ways.

First, it identifies three actors of transnational partisanship in the EU: 1. national parties; 2. European par-

liamentary party groups (EPGs), and 3. extra-parliamentary *Europarties*.

1. National parties provide the link to national citizens and remain primarily concerned with national political competition. At the same time, they have continuously developed both horizontal and vertical linkages with other partisan actors in the EU (Pittoors 2021a).

2. With the empowerment of the European Parliament (EP) as an equal partner in the EU's ordinary legislative procedure rose the need for increased transnational partisanship within the EPGs as well. Even though the national party remains a key principal of members of the EP (MEPs) due to the rules of candidate selection, we do observe transnational party group cohesion and coalition dynamics (eg Hix and Høyland 2013; Rose and Borz 2013).

3. As the transnational umbrella organisations at European level, Europarties are to 'contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union' (Art. 10, 4 TEU). In theory, they would be the ideal drivers of transnational partisanship in the EU. Yet, despite many improvements when it comes to individual membership or pan-European candidate selection, as so-called 'party-parties', they still have little direct connection to European voters and comparatively limited resources. They also face comparatively high administrative burdens and hurdles when it comes to receiving EU funding (Norman and Wolfs 2022). What is more, they are in competition with both the national parties and the EPGs, which have been reluctant to transfer to or share key powers with the Europarties.

Second, drawing on previous research by Poguntke and Pütz (2006) on opportunities for Europarties to gain importance, this chapter systematically discusses opportunity structures, (dis-)incentives and obstacles these *three actors* face in *transnationalising* political parties' core functions of 1. integration and mobilisation, 2. interest articulation and aggregation, 3. recruiting of political personnel, and 4. policy-making in the EU.

1. With regard to *transnational mobilisation*, national parties increasingly occupy (both sides of) a transnational cleavage (Hooghe and Marks 2018), while EPGs mobilise beyond borders by offering distinct and coherent policy alternatives, especially on European integration issues (Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2018). Some Europarties have introduced individual membership, but the numbers of individual members remain low, and their actual participation rights vary greatly across Europarties (Hertner 2019; Norman and Wolfs 2022). The less severe, but still existing second-order nature of European elections (Schmitt and Toygür 2016) also restricts Europarties' transnational mobilisation potential. For a long time, Europarties have only assumed supportive co-ordination tasks in campaigning, and they still face difficulties being more involved in national campaigns because rules on funding campaigns differ between member states. In ten member states, national parties cannot accept contributions into their national EP election campaigns by Europarties (Anglmayer 2021, 50-1). The pan-European *Spitzenkandidaten* in the EP elections of 2014 were only visible in a few countries

and had a limited effect on turnout and vote (Hobolt 2014). For the 2019 elections, research did find an effect on vote intention (Gattermann and Marquart 2019) at the same time stressing the importance of *Spitzenkandidaten* prominence in their *national* campaign contexts (Gattermann and de Vreese 2019).

2. When *transnationalisation of interest articulation and aggregation* are concerned, national parties do not only represent national voters' preferences, but also take account of other EU citizens' interests (Kinski 2018, 2021). Even though national parties want to retain control over formulating the electoral manifestos, Europarties aggregate coherent and distinct programmes at the EU level that the EPGs can turn into policies (Bressanelli 2013). EPGs themselves contribute to party policy diffusion between their member parties (Senninger et al 2021).

3. *Candidate selection* remains dominated by national parties for lack of transnational lists, yet the *Spitzenkandidaten* process has increased the influence of both EPGs and Europarties (Put et al 2016; Wolfs et al 2021). The failed process in 2019 has, however, revealed severe weaknesses in transnational partisan coordination (Crum 2022; de Wilde 2020).

4. Europarties support *transnational policy-making* in that national party leaders, be they heads of state and government or in opposition, regularly meet with the president of their Europarty and their EPG's chairperson in preparation for European Council meetings. Europarties also have thematic networks and policy-

oriented working groups. Partisan politics also increasingly play a role in the co-ordination between executive and legislative, when we look at the overlap between Europarties' election pledges and Commission priorities (Kostadinova and Giurcanu 2018).

Overall, there is considerable 'transnational partisan potential', but each actor faces its own obstacles and disincentives given not only inter-institutional dynamics, but also, especially, competition between national parties, EPGs and Europarties. In the concluding remarks, I argue why we need to understand partisanship in the EU as a *multidimensional* and *multilevel phenomenon* to reap its full potential for EU democracy. For this to work, we need to take seriously new pan-European political movements such as Diem25 or Volt, and European citizens as agents of transnational partisanship and democracy in the EU (Kinski 2018; Wolkenstein 2018). They can ultimately put pressure on the three party actors to truly transnationalise.

1. Transnational partisanship in the EU: actors and opportunity structures

In recent years, political theorists have increasingly turned to normative questions surrounding party politics including its transnational incarnation. In doing so, they have developed, criticised and expanded the concept of transnational partisanship (eg White 2014; White and Ypi 2016; Wolkenstein 2018). Commonly, partisanship is taken to mean a 'belonging to a community of shared commitments' with those belonging to said community

engaging in joint activities to achieve these shared goals (White 2014, 393). It becomes '*transnational* when these attachments overstep the boundaries of a nation-state' (ibid, emphasis in original).

Empirical scholars have also dealt extensively with how, when and why political parties form, organise, mobilise and compete across national borders, particularly in the European Union multilevel system of governance (eg Bardi et al 2010; Poguntke et al 2007). Research into such empirical practices of party politics beyond borders and theoretical contributions on transnational partisanship could engage more with one another (for a fruitful combination, see Pittoors 2021a). Oftentimes, they use the same labels, but mean different things.

On the one hand, party researchers have a very distinct terminology and often address the topic with a strategic-actor approach.[1] In this view, political parties co-ordinate and co-operate across national borders, if there is an added value in terms of their central goals of vote, office and policy (Müller and Strøm 1999) and the institutional environment provides the opportunities to do so (Hall and Taylor 1996). Naturally, empirical researchers investigate the extent and conditions under which we observe parties acting across borders. Political will in the form of party strategic incentives and practical feasibility in terms of opportunity structures and favourable institutional condi-

1 This is of course not to neglect the body of empirical literature that uses theoretical approaches based on socialisation and intrinsic motivations in political parties to transnationalise (eg Scully et al 2012).

tions are assumed essential in explaining the kind and degree of transnational partisan politics we observe. More often than not, normative considerations of the desirability of these empirical outcomes become secondary or remain implicit.

On the other hand, for most political theorists, transnational partisanship goes beyond this empirical understanding of party politics across national borders in two distinct ways. First, it is not restricted to political parties (White 2014). In fact, parties are not even necessarily the actors best suited for (transnational) partisanship (see discussions in Bonotti et al 2018; also Wolkenstein 2018).

Second, and maybe even more fundamental, partisanship in its transnational variant is explicitly considered 'something deeper' than mere pragmatic co-operation across borders in the event of aligned national interests or short-term common goals (White 2014). Rather, partisanship describes 'a common allegiance (by a like-minded group) to a set of jointly defined ethical ends – ends which are irreducible to factional/sectional interests' (Vincent in Bonotti et al 2018, 290). Partisans in this sense want 'to be advancing a shared interpretation of the public good and how to shape public life accordingly' (Donovan in Bonotti et al 2018, 293 referring to White and Ypi 2016).

For many empirical researchers, the term 'partisan' has a different meaning. In fact, they may even understand it to mean precisely the opposite of a common good orientation, namely parochial and clientelist inter-

est representation (for a discussion, see Piattoni 2001). Representative role research defines a partisan as a politician who sticks to the party's policies to allow for voters' preference aggregation. Politicians may do this out of conviction, but also for more pragmatic reasons like seeking office. A partisan representative is explicitly contrasted with a constituency delegate who serves the interest of his or her constituency, and a trustee who independently enacts the common good (eg Converse and Pierce 1979; Önnudóttir 2016).

In sum, when political theorists and empirical scholars talk about partisanship, they tend to mean different things. A logic-of-consequentiality approach often clashes with a logic-of-appropriateness view (March and Olsen 1984). Party politics across national borders is not automatically congruent with transnational partisanship, but it may very well be one possible expression thereof.

This chapter now aims to bridge theoretical and empirical considerations on transnational partisanship. Specifically, it examines the practices of transnational partisanship in the EU to assess their transnational partisan potential. In his discussion of theory and practice of transnational partisanship, White (2014) critically analyses the favourable conditions for partisanship that allegedly exist(ed) in the nation-state context. He then considers what this means for configurations of partisanship across national borders. This chapter takes a similar approach in that it starts from the tasks political parties ought to fulfil in domestic politics, and

then analyses how and to what extent these activities are transnationalised within the EU multilevel system of governance.

In doing so, it looks at the three central party actors in the EU, namely national parties, European parliamentary party groups and extra-parliamentary Europarties. To gauge these actors' transnational partisan potential with regard to central party functions, the chapter draws on a study by Poguntke and Pütz (2006) on opportunities for Europarties to strengthen their influence and increase their importance in EU politics. They assess both opportunities and obstacles to Europarties' rise in importance for four party functions: 1. integration and mobilisation; 2. interest articulation and aggregation; 3. recruiting of political personnel; and 4. policy-making in the EU (2006, 344). I take these four core functions as a yardstick to assess the transnational partisan potential of national parties, EPGs and Europarties drawing on both theoretical and empirical literature. I start from an 'opportunity structure' perspective that takes into consideration that even party actors who are deeply attached to shared commitments need a specific environment and support from their voters to be able to translate their goals into public policy. Being rationally motivated in that sense does not mean they cannot also be driven by higher aspirations towards a transnational common good.

2. Transnational partisan potential in the EU: national parties, EPGs and Europarties compared

What, then, is the transnational partisan potential of national parties, EPGs and Europarties when it comes to their capacities to mobilise, articulate and aggregate interests, select political personnel and make policies in the EU?

2.1 Integration and mobilisation

In the domestic context, one of parties' core functions is to mobilise political support for their programmes and integrate party members and citizens more broadly into the political process. In order for this to work, parties need to communicate their policy priorities and activities clearly to potential voters in both election and between-election times. Many scholars argue that the left-right dimension is still the 'shared basis for communication' (McDonald and Budge 2008, 30) between parties and their voters even though national parties face growing difficulties to mobilise on these grounds. Especially during election times, politicians, voters and the media alike use the left-right dimension to locate parties in the political space. At the same time, there is an ever-growing body of empirical literature investigating whether we see the emergence of a new, transnational cleavage between cosmopolitan and communitarian positions (eg Hooghe and Marks 2018; Kriesi 2012) along which both parties and voters mobilise.

At first glance, *national parties* have limited potential for transnational mobilisation in the EU. In the na-

tional arena, they are authorised by and accountable to their national electorates. Processes of political alignment and collective will-formation remain anchored at the national level (Crum 2016; Hooghe and Marks 2009). Even though we observe an increased politicisation of EU issues (eg de Wilde et al 2016; Hutter et al 2016), this does (so far) not correspond to a full transnational reconfiguration of mass politics: 'To the extent that European issues raise political conflict, they tend to divide European citizens along national borders, not across them' (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2016, 49). In this more pessimistic view, national political parties do not need to mobilise support across borders. In EP elections, they still fight national campaigns in the national electoral arena for lack of transnational lists. National political competition remains decisive.

In a more optimistic view, however, we know that national (parliamentary) parties fulfil their task of communicating their activities in EU affairs to their citizens, especially when issues are salient and public contestation is high (Auel et al 2016). Under certain conditions, the media even acts as a transmission belt for such communication (Auel et al 2018). National parties also increasingly occupy (both sides of) the transnational conflict dimension (Hooghe and Marks 2018). Specifically, we witness the 'rise of a transnational cleavage as a reaction to reforms that have weakened national sovereignty, promoted international economic exchange, increased immigration and exacerbated cultural and economic insecurity' (ibid, 110).

Empirical research has further shown that cosmopolitan attitudes increase citizens' willingness to redistribute within the EU (Kuhn et al 2018; Stoeckel and Kuhn 2018). Citizens do not automatically align only along national dividing lines, but care about what happens to citizens in other EU member states. Overall, even though national political parties do not mobilise a transnational constituency, they do increasingly mobilise *national citizens along a transnational conflict dimension.* New Pan-European political movements such as Diem25 or Volt try to harness this transnational potential.

The *party groups in the European Parliament* have strong potential to mobilise across national borders. They are in a unique position to discuss and co-decide alternative policy-proposals at the EU level that garner political support from European citizens. Recent research into the competition between and coherence within EPGs reveals that they actually do offer distinct and consistent policy alternatives to European citizens (Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2018), although the *Spitzenkandidaten*-process has not had a notable effect on this (ibid*,* 1478–79). At the same time, EPGs are of course still very heterogeneous (Rose and Borz 2013), and MEPs in leadership positions are needed to ensure cohesion within the EPGs (Meserve et al 2017). Institutionally, a reform of the electoral law of the EU is currently underway and very recently, the four biggest groups in the EP have agreed on a compromise to advocate for 28 MEPs being elected by a pan-European vote, which, if successful, would foster the transna-

tional mobilization and integration potential (Kurmayer 2022).

Finally, as extra-parliamentary umbrella organisations, *Europarties* could be key in communicating EU-level programmes to the voters during election times. European election campaigns have, however, long been dominated by national parties because 'Europarties had neither the financial nor organizational means to organize large-scale pan-European election campaigns' (Hertner 2011, 322; see also Gagatek 2009). For a long time, Europarties have only assumed supportive co-ordination tasks in campaigning and their pan-European election manifestos remained largely invisible (Hobolt 2014, 1531). Despite quite some improvement regarding the organisational and financial capacity of Europarties to be more involved in national EP election campaigns (Day 2014; Wolfs and Smulders 2018), they still struggle with different rules on funding campaigns between the member states. In ten member states, national parties cannot accept contributions into their national EP election campaigns by Europarties (Anglmayer 2021, 50-1), not even in the form of printed materials. Some Europarties have taken up individual membership possibilities, but citizens' participation (rights) so far remain rather limited (Hertner 2019; Norman and Wolfs 2022). Especially in the 2019 election, we did see a stronger Europeanisation of national election campaigns than in the past, but the degree of Europeanisation differs greatly between member states, and EP elections do remain second-or-

der, even if to a lesser extent than before (Schmitt and Toygür 2016) which also restricts Europarties' transnational mobilisation potential.

The *Spitzenkandidaten*-process in the EP elections did not only aim at strengthening Europarties' involvement in the selection of political personnel, but was also supposed to create a link between European citizens' vote and a kind of European 'Government in Waiting' (Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2018, 1468) akin to national parliamentary systems. The hope was that this process would thereby alleviate both the institutional and structural democratic deficits in the EU. Empirical findings on 2014 suggest that there was highly asymmetric attention given to the *Spitzenkandidaten* across the EU. Language[2] and home country of the candidates were decisive factors: in Germany and French-speaking countries, public awareness was consistently higher. Overall, the considerable efforts to mobilise resulted in a comparably low Europe-wide public awareness of the lead candidates (Hobolt 2014). Not only national parties, but also national media acted as the gatekeepers to the presence of *Spitzenkandidaten* in the national electoral arenas (ibid, 1535). TV debates were only aired in a few member states and overall media visibility varied considerably. There was virtually no media presence of *Spitzenkandidaten* in the UK regardless of the type of newspaper (broadsheets vs tabloids), while French and especially German (quality) newspapers reported

2 Bonotti (in Bonotti et al 2018) also discusses language differences as a possible impediment to transnational partisanship.

extensively on the lead candidates (Schulze 2016). National parties had limited incentives to emphasise the *Spitzenkandidaten* in their social media campaigns (Braun and Schwarzbözl 2019). At the aggregate level, the innovation had a limited effect on turnout and vote (Gattermann et al 2016; Gattermann and de Vreese 2017; Hobolt 2014, 1536–7). At the individual level, however, the presence of *Spitzenkandidaten and* their campaign efforts did have an effect on an individual's likelihood of voting (Schmitt et al 2015).

For the 2019 elections, transnational visibility and interest in the TV debates seemed higher, yet attention in national and European print and online media as well as social media did not increase significantly, and we still see large differences between countries and parties (Gattermann 2020). Research did find an effect on vote intention (Gattermann and Marquart 2019) at the same time stressing the importance of *Spitzenkandidaten* prominence in their *national* campaign contexts (Gattermann and de Vreese 2019). Unfortunately, in 2019, the process failed with regard to a more accountable and transparent recruitment of the Commission President (Crum 2022).

2.2 Interest articulation and aggregation

In the domestic context, political parties provide the transmission belts between citizens' pluralist interests and collectively binding decisions for said citizens. They are to articulate and aggregate diverse preferences into policies citizens accept as legitimate. Within the nation-

state, political parties have come under increased pressure in fulfilling this task. From below, there seems to be a pervasive feeling of not being represented that parties may themselves aggravate given their specific issue-emphases on the left-right scale (eg Meyer and Wagner 2020). From above, the transnationalisation of politics arguably widens the gap between governing parties' responsibility for externalities beyond national borders and their responsiveness to the national electorate. What is more, political parties seem increasingly unable to fill this gap (Mair 2009; see also Bardi et al 2014).

Again, upon first examination, the potential for *national parties* to articulate and aggregate transnational interests seems very bleak. The standard understanding of party representation has us believe that national parties care exclusively about interests within their country because mechanisms of authorisation and accountability connect them to *national* citizens only (Castiglione and Warren 2008). Newest research on representative speech behaviour in national parliaments reveals, however, that when dealing with EU matters, MPs from Austria, Germany, Ireland and – to a much lesser extent the then-still-member the UK – take into account other EU citizens (both trans- and supra-national) alongside national citizens (Kinski 2018; Kinski and Crum 2020). The extent to which they do so depends among other things on the party's position on the left-right and transnational conflict dimension and its governing responsibility. Most importantly, we witness a Eurosceptic Europeanisation in that Eurosceptic MPs left of centre emerge

as the main driving force behind the Europeanisation of national parliamentary representation (Kinski 2021). This inclusion of non-national citizens into national parliamentary parties' representative portfolio even goes beyond mere parliamentary speech and translates into deeper representative role-orientations that MPs hold (Kinski 2021). The study further reveals that these MPs tend to conceive of their represented as a common interest (be it national or Europeanised) rather than particular single interests (ibid).

The main theoretical assumption behind this research is that MPs Europeanise their representative speech behaviour not only due to institutional constraints, but also chiefly because certain groups of cosmopolitan voters incentivise them to do so. If certain groups of voters want their national representatives to transnationalise their representative efforts, responsibility and responsiveness may be reconcilable after all. Ultimately, this is an empirical question, but (cosmopolitan) national citizens would move from the (commonly assumed) impediment to transnational partisanship to its enablers. We could use national parties' 'unique "people-making" capacity […] in order to establish sustainable connections between the different peoples of Europe' (Wolkenstein 2018, 296).

As far as the transnational articulation potential of *EPGs* is concerned, we have learned so far that their policy positions do occupy the entire political spectrum and their distinctiveness and coherence indicate first steps towards a transnational party system (Lefkofridi

and Katsanidou 2018). When we look at debate networks in the European Parliament, for example, we also find these debates to be structured along a transnational left-right divide rather than purely along national lines (Walter et al 2021). Research into whom MEPs represent provides mixed evidence for transnational interest articulation and aggregation (eg Bale and Taggart 2006). MEPs have two main principals: the national party and their EPGs. They do vote with their fraction (Hix and Høyland 2013), but there is a large influence of national party delegations within the EPGs because they are the ones that own the incentives and sanctions (eg Scully et al 2012). Another problem for transnational interest articulation and aggregation through EPGs is the persistent gap between preferences of EU citizens and the way their delegations vote (Kaniovski and Müller 2011). The transnational representative linkage remains weak.

Finally, for *Europarties* to contribute fully to transnational interest articulation and aggregation, they would need a much stronger direct connection to organised social and civil society groups (Wolfs and Smulders 2018). Gagatek and van Hecke (2014) have shown that larger Europarties have benefited programmatically from the establishment of European political foundations, and Bressanelli (2013) adds that Europarties do aggregate coherent and distinct programmes at the EU level. Yet, national parties' reluctance to delegate control over the formulation of election manifestos remains a big impediment to transnational interest articulation

and aggregation (Gagatek and van Hecke 2014). While the *Spitzenkandidaten*-process did not have an immediate impact on the deepening of a European party system (Lefkofridi and Katsanidou 2018, 1479), incremental changes to the financial regulations for Europarties have at least to some extent contributed to the transnational character of interest articulation and aggregation (Wolfs and Smulders 2018).

2.3 Selection of political personnel

A key government-related function of political parties in the national context is to select electoral (lead) candidates. In their classic formulation, Rahat and Hazan (2001) distinguish four central elements of this process: the candidacy requirements (who can become a candidate); the composition and inclusiveness of the selectorate; the selection process (level of decentralisation); and the voting systems (see also Put et al 2016; Wolfs et al 2021 for *Spitzenkandidaten*). When assessing a possible transnational partisan dimension of the selection of political personnel in the EU, we can look at national parties, EPGs and Europarties together.

In the EU, political personnel need to be selected for the European Parliament and the European Commission (including the Commission President). Again, the lack of truly transnational lists and different electoral systems for the EP elections within the member states (Bonotti in Bonotti et al 2018) hamper the transnational potential here. *National parties* monopolise the selection procedure of EP candidates and draw up

their national lists. They want to retain control over nomination and have the organisational structure to do so. Hence, so far there has not been a strong political will to truly delegate this task to *Europarties* who could in principle draft a common European list of candidates and act as a co-ordinator and networker (Poguntke and Pütz 2006, 349). With regard to a more accountable and transparent selection of the Commission President, the *Spitzenkandidaten* process failed to deliver in 2019 (de Wilde 2020), and it remains to be seen if and how the process can be renewed (Crum 2022; Dawson 2019).

2.4 Policy-making

Ultimately, political parties are to formulate policies based on their ideological positions as well as on pledges in their party programmes and enact them (McDonald and Budge, 2008). Comparative research in the domestic context has shown that the degree of partisan influence on public policy depends *inter alia* on which parties are in government, the type of democracy (majoritarian vs consensus democracy) and the state structure (eg Schmidt 1996). Again, we can consider the three actors together.

Naturally, *national governing parties* contribute their national stances in the European Council and Council of Ministers. We still have rather limited knowledge about how EU governments' partisan preferences influence their negotiation position, coalition formation and ultimately their bargaining success in both intergovernmen-

tal institutions (Bailer 2010). In an earlier study, Tallberg and Johansson (2008) show that partisan influence in the European Council is restricted because the policy agenda cuts across partisan alignments. EU leaders do not tend to align along transnational party lines and rather form issue-specific coalitions (2008, 1222). At the same time, *Europarties* support transnational policy-making in that national party leaders, be they heads of state and government or in opposition, regularly meet with the president of their Europarty and their EPG's chairperson in preparation for European Council meetings. For the Council of the EU, Mühlböck and Tosun (2018) do find some indication of partisan voting behaviour, albeit based on national partisan considerations. Nonetheless, the transnational partisan potential of national governing parties in the EU's intergovernmental institutions seems rather limited.

Whether this has changed during the recent transnational crises in the EU is still a contested empirical question. Some have found transnational representation in policy-making during the Eurozone crisis in national parliaments who hold their governments acting at EU level accountable (Kinski and Crum 2020), while Schoeller et al (2017) suggest that 'Merkozy served to avoid undesired consequences of central institutions to the advantage of one or a few powerful actors' (ibid, 1220).

What we do see by national MPs and MEPs more broadly is transnational exchange and networking. This is argued to be a vital prerequisite of transnational

policy-making. There are many formal and informal formats of inter-parliamentary co-operation. The Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs (COSAC), for instance, provides a platform for members of the EU affairs committees in national parliaments and MEPs to meet and discuss issues of common concern. So far, however, the forum has been used more for exchange of best practices than developing common, transnational policy positions given its lack of any decision-making competencies (Raunio 2011). Very recently, bilateral formats such as the Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly (FGPA) have sparked new discussions on their transnational policy-making potential in EU (economic) governance (Borońska-Hryniewiecka and Kinski 2022).

Given their ideological heterogeneity, Europarties' policy positions are influenced by national parties who seek to push through their own policy positions. Those with a large seat share succeed in dominating Europarty policy positions (Klüver and Rodon 2013). EPGs in turn do not automatically assume these positions when making public policy (Wolfs and Smulders 2018, 184). Finally, transnational partisan politics do increasingly play a role in the co-ordination between executive and legislative, when we look at the overlap between Europarties' election pledges and Commission priorities (Kostadinova and Giurcanu 2018). In their study, the authors find overlap between transnational pledges and Commission policy priorities to be greatest for the EPP followed by ALDE, EGP and then only PES (370–71).

3. Towards multilevel and multidimensional partisanship(s) in the EU

This chapter set out to assess the transnational partisan potential of national parties, Europarties and EPGs in four core functions of political parties: integration and mobilisation; interest, articulation and aggregation; selection of political personnel, and policy-making. It tried to do two things: first, uncover opportunities, incentives and obstacles for these actors to engage in *transnational partisan activities*; second, bridge empirical research into such partisan politics across borders in Europe with theoretical discussions on the nature of transnational partisanship as a joint commitment to shared political aims more generally.

There are many indications for transnational partisan potential in all three actors and for all four functions even though variation exists. There is transnational mobilisation and interest articulation through *EPGs*. *Europarties* are transnationalising the candidate selection process. *National parties* network in transnational inter-parliamentary settings. At the same time, we can clearly identify impediments to transnational partisanship in the EU. There is still a certain lack of political will by national parties to transnationalise and a tough opportunity structure exists for the others.

For White (2014, 393), transnational partisanship would likely take the form of an 'episodic', 'ideationally de-localised' 'low-density network'. As this chapter has shown, to some extent, this is true for transnational

partisanship in the EU, yet this seems to be only part of the story. Transnational partisanship in the EU does occur at irregular intervals, but it happens more than occasionally. What is more, it is not erratic, but seems to follow distinct patterns that for some of the four areas discussed are even surprisingly continuous and institutionalised. While the transnational partisan network indeed seems to be driven by some rather than many partisan actors, these actors seem to be dispersed across national borders. Finally, the transnational conflict dimension in the EP may indeed be detached from more localised concerns, but national parties also seem to position themselves more and more on this dimension in domestic political debate. They thereby have to relate it to national voters' concerns on the ground.

Ultimately, transnational partisanship embodied by this transnational conflict dimension means that we have parties on *both* sides of that divide. Transnational partisans have to meet and deal with communitarian ones (eg Ripoll Servent and Panning 2021). The impetus to transnationalise given the cross-border nature of many pressing policy problems and an urge to renationalise in response remain the two forces pulling partisan actors in the EU in opposite directions.

What do all these theoretical and empirical insights mean, then, for transnational partisanship in the EU? We have clearly seen that we need to think about partisanship in the EU as *multidimensional* and *multilevel partisanships* with a variety of manifestations by different actors at different levels. Recent conceptual and

empirical work by Pittoors (2020, 2021b) suggests that there is a unique pattern in the EU: we see that national parties, EPGs and Europarties organise both vertical and horizontal linkages. These multilevel partisanships are not only driven by strategic concerns, but also historical considerations and domestic political contexts.

Ultimately, fostering transnational partisanship in the EU will need institutional reforms, be it with regard to transnational lists, making it easier for pan-European movements to become political parties or involvement of Europarties in national EP election campaigns. At the same time, the bottom-up drive to transnationalism exists and needs to be harnessed through horizontal participation options for European citizens, for example through (online) 'platforms for exchanges between citizens and party members from different member states, regions, and local communities' (van Hecke 2018, 46). Only if we think about partisanship in the EU as inclusive of European citizens, national *and* transnational political parties, EPGs, Europarties *and* European foundations, will we be able to reap its full potential for multilevel democracy in the EU.

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‘Doing feminism’? The feminisation of the Party of European Socialists

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Introduction

As the above quote by S&D president Iratxe Garcia Perez highlights, today’s gender-equality debate touches upon many fundamental issues, from women’s social, economic and reproductive rights to LGBTQ rights. It is no wonder then that the European Parliament’s gender-equality agenda has become increasingly politicised over recent years. The political groups – and especially those on the right – are less cohesive when voting on gender equality than on other issues, and there is significant disagreement between the left and right on all things gender equality (Warasin et al 2019). Against this backdrop, it is important to highlight that women have borne the brunt of Europe’s austerity policies and welfare state retrenchment in the aftermath

> We want a feminist, diverse and democratic Europe that: effectively fights against the pay gap and male violence against women and defends our sexual and reproductive rights, as well as the fundamental rights of the LGBTI+ community and other groups suffering from discrimination, throughout the Union. When we say feminism, we mean doing feminism. (Iratxe García Pérez, president of the S&D group, 2021b)

of the 2008 financial crisis, and more recently, of Covid-19 (Kantola and Lombardo 2021). Yet across Europe, far-right populist parties insist that gender equality already exists, and that women's reproductive, social, and economic rights need to be curtailed. In this febrile and polarised environment, 'doing feminism', in the words of Iratxe García Pérez, is more important than ever. In this paper I will therefore investigate the extent to which the Party of European Socialists (PES) has been 'doing feminism' over recent years. I draw on Joni Lovenduski's (2005) concept of 'feminisation' which refers to the political representation of women. Crucially, it includes both the numerical or statistical representation of women (inside political parties, parliaments, governments, and other institutions) and the policies that are specifically directed at women. These two aspects of feminisation are best studied together. Some scholars have argued that having a 'critical mass' of at least 30 percent of female politicians in parliament makes a difference (Dahlerup 2006) as women politicians are generally more inclined than men to attach importance to women's issues (Childs 2004). Yet a critical mass of female politicians is not enough. It takes 'critical' actors

– feminist women or men – who act individually or collectively to bring about women-friendly policy change within gendered institutions (Childs and Krook 2009, 126–7). Likewise, inside political parties at the national and European levels, critical actors (female and male) have over time succeeded in changing party rules and practices to enhance female representation. Examples include the introduction of gender-balanced leadership teams and party lists, and women-only party shortlists. Furthermore, critical actors have been instrumental in introducing gender-equality policies. In this paper, I will focus my attention on the representation of women *and* women's issues inside the PES, a topic that has not yet received much scholarly attention.

My argument is that over the past few years, the PES has made significant progress in addressing a big gender gap, both in representing women institutionally and policy-wise. In 2021, at the time of writing, the S&D group and PES's leadership teams were more feminised than ever before. What is more, an increasing number of policies were directed specifically at women, a recent example being a pamphlet entitled 'A feminist Economy for Europe' which was authored by the PES Women in 2020. Yet despite this increasing feminisation, true gender equality has not yet been achieved. If the European Socialists want to practise what they preach – that is, doing feminism – they need to further feminise the party organisation and policies. In particular, the selection processes for the key leadership positions – the PES president and the *Spitzenkandidat/in* – would need to

be reformed to ensure that there are several candidates to choose from, and that the list of candidates is gender-balanced. Furthermore, gender equality would need to become mainstreamed across all policy areas and be given a higher profile within the PES presidency to highlight its importance.

The first section of this paper focuses on the descriptive representation of women inside the S&D group and the PES headquarters. This will be followed by a discussion of the feminisation of PES policies, drawing on party manifestos and other official policy documents since 1999. Finally, I conclude my study and make seven policy recommendations that, if implemented, could further enhance the feminisation of the PES.

1. Oh sister where art thou? The PES and the representation of women

The S&D group is the PES's parliamentary party. In June 2019, Spanish Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Iratxe García Pérez became the S&D group's first ever female president. Described as a 'proud European and feminist' by PES president Sergei Stanishev (PES 2019), García Pérez has done much to raise the profile of women in the European Parliament. To provide some context, most party groups have been led by men or a gender-balanced team. In 2021, out of the EP's seven party groups, four were led by men and two by a gender-balanced team. Only the S&D group was led by a woman. This confirms Sundström and Stockemer's (2021, 9) observation that women's representation in

the party leadership positions inside the EP lags behind the representation of women inside the EP as a whole. Thus, this power imbalance at the top of the EP's political groups cannot be explained by a lack of supply of female MEPs. The EP's share of female MEPs has more than doubled since 1979, the year of the first direct European elections. At 39.6 percent, it is now higher than that of many national parliaments – for which the EU average is 28.6 percent (see European Parliament 2020).

Interestingly, while female MEPs are underrepresented in the EP's political leadership positions, they have assumed other positions of power and influence. For example, 54.54 percent of the EP's committees, which do important legislative work, were chaired by women in the 2019-2024 period. Out of a total of 27 parliamentary committees, seven were chaired by MEPs belonging to the S&D group, and of these, three were female. In 2021, the S&D group's share of female MEPs stood at 44.2 percent. Table 1 (below) illustrates the gender ratio of all political groups, comparing the results of the 2014 EP elections with those of the 2019 elections. At the time of writing, the S&D came third, behind Renew Europe (formerly ALDE) and the Greens/EFA.

To be sure, the selection of MEP candidates remains in the hands of national political parties, and as long as they don't do enough to promote women (eg through gender quotas) or the member states don't introduce legal gender quotas, there is no requirement to produce gender-equal party lists. At the same time, having gen-

Table 1: Percentage of female MEPs by political group, 2014-19 and 2019-.

	GUE/ NGL	S&D	Greens/ EFA	ALDE	EPP	ECR	EFDD	ENF	NI	Average
2014	51.9	44.0	40.4	45.6	28.6	22.7	39.9	29.7	18.2	31.1
	GUE/ NGL	S&D	Greens/ EFA	RE	EPP	ECR	--	ID	NI	
2019	43.6	44.2	49.3	43.9	33.2	31.1	--	38.2	34.5	39.5
Difference	-8.3	+0.2	+8.9	-1.7	+4.6	+8.4		+8.5	+16.3	+8.4

See Abels (2021, 415), updated by the author to reflect the gender ratio after Brexit. Drawing on data published by the European Parliament (2020) https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/646189/EPRS_ATA(2020)646189_EN.pdf.

der-balanced party groups does not necessarily result in men and women sharing power, prestige, and responsibility equally. Indeed, Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín (2019) demonstrate in their research that the EP's political groups remain 'gendered' in their everyday work despite increased female representation. Yet there are other ways for EP groups to become more gender-sensitive. For example, the S&D group could introduce a Code of Conduct in order to make gender equality a guiding principle inside the party group. Such a Code of Conduct was adopted by the PES Group in the Committee of the Regions in May 2018. The first of its kind, the Code proposes gender parity inside the PES group's executive and other Committee of the Regions' structures, as well as on speaker lists for conferences and other events (PES Group, Committee of the Regions 2018). If the S&D group adopted such a Code of Conduct, gender parity

(50:50) would become institutionalised, and male-only panels (so-called 'manels') became a thing of the past.

Although the EP is often viewed as the 'real champion' for gender equality (Locher 2012), its leadership has been overwhelmingly male. In its history, the EP has only had two female presidents, neither of whom were socialists: Simone Veil (1979-1982) and Nicole Fontaine (1999-2002). Thus, there hasn't been a female EP president since 2002. Still, at the time of writing, 57 percent of the EP's vice-presidents were female, up from 35.7 percent in the 2014-2019 term (European Parliament 2019). Amongst the 14 vice-presidents, three belonged to the S&D group, and amongst the three, two were female. Thus, there is some progress in the EP's feminisation, and the S&D group reflects this trend.

Given that, by and large, men remain in charge of the most high-profile, and therefore prestigious, posts inside the EP, it is perhaps unsurprising that S&D president Iratxe García Pérez was the only female MEP on the executive board of the Conference on the Future of Europe – an initiative meant to boost the EU's democratic credentials. Six out of the seven MEPs that were announced to represent the EP on the executive board of the Conference were male. Yet García Pérez must be used to being the only woman in the room. When the PES organises its meetings of socialist leaders ahead of European Council summits, she is frequently the only female leader to attend, or on occasion, one out of two or three. On the basis of her feminist statements, it appears that García Pérez might be a 'critical actor' in the

feminisation of not just the S&D group, but also the PES, the EP, and the Conference on the Future of Europe, but it is too early to tell.

Turning to the PES in central office, the party headquarters, we find that in the 2018 statutes, the PES states in Article 3.4 as one if its aims and objectives, 'to promote equality, diversity and equal representation in society, politics and in all positions of power, as well as in our internal bodies and meetings, especially for women and young people, and to encourage their active participation' (PES 2018a). Despite such aspirations, since its launch in 1957 as 'Socialist Parties of the European Community' and its re-launch in 1992 when it became the Party of European Socialists, the PES has never had female leaders. Thus, neither the political leader of the party (the president, who is usually an MEP) nor the person in charge of running the party on a day-to-day basis (the secretary general) have been women. Yet having female leaders would also do much to enhance the symbolic representation of women inside the PES family.

More recently, the PES has elected three women and one man as vice-presidents, and amongst these, Iratxe García Pérez is the first vice-president. Never has the team of vice-presidents been so female. As a result, meetings of the PES presidency are a bit more gender-balanced – which is an aim that the PES has set itself (Article 33.3 of the PES statutes). Important decisions about the direction of the party are taken by the presidency, such as the election of the secretary general and

the vice-presidents. For this reason, gender parity in this body is vital, and having female vice-presidents is therefore a good starting point. Yet in order to enhance gender sensitivity amongst the team of vice-presidents, more could be done. Currently, the PES vice-presidents' jobs are not attached to any specific briefs. If, however, one of these positions were attached to a gender-equality brief, this could help create a more gender-aware party leadership. The PES vice-president in charge of gender equality could be tasked with raising gender matters in leadership meetings to ensure that they gain a higher profile within the party. One way of ensuring this would be to make the PES Women president a PES vice-president ex-officio.

An important question is whether any of the female vice-presidents will eventually get the top leadership jobs. This remains to be seen, as there are no precedents. My point is that having female vice-presidents is no longer sufficient for a truly feminist party. Eventually, at least one of the PES leading positions should go to a female candidate. How could this be ensured?

The 2018 PES statutes do not prescribe gender quotas for party leadership elections. Indeed, whilst the delegations that elect the PES president at the party congress have to be gender-balanced (Article 22.4 of the PES statutes),[1] there are no gender quotas in place for the list of candidates for the presidency. The same applies to

1 Article 22.4 stipulates that there should not be more than a difference of one delegate between the two genders. If a delegation does not respect this rule, its vote to the Council will be reduced proportionally.

the election of the PES *Spitzenkandidat/in* (the common Candidate to the European Commission Presidency) by the PES Election Congress. Again, the 'selectorate' (the delegations) needs to be gender-balanced, which is a very good starting point. Yet there is no gender quota in place for the candidates for the *Spitzenkandidat/in* job which explains in part why there weren't any female candidates to vote for in 2014 and 2019. Here, the first step towards feminisation would be for the PES Election Congress to be presented with a minimum of two candidates to choose from, as gender equality can't be achieved if there is only one candidate. In addition, the way in which the 2019 PES *Spitzenkandidat* was nominated – with the support of 25 percent of member parties, up from 15 percent – could be re-thought. A slightly lower threshold of 15 percent might lead to a more diverse group of candidates (diverse in terms of gender, geography, ethnicity, ideology).

Next, presenting a gender-balanced list of candidates for the *Spitzenkandidat/in* job would be important for a feminist and internally democratic party. To be sure, the introduction of gender quotas for leadership elections needs to be initiated by the member parties rather than the PES, and the hurdles are rather high: it requires the proposal from a full member party, a super-qualified majority of the PES Congress, and the support of the presidency. There is a large candidate pool of highly qualified female candidates for the *Spitzenkandidat/in* job, amongst them the female MEPs and commissioners belonging to the S&D/PES family, so a gender-balanced

list of candidates could easily be achieved. Ahead of the 2019 European elections, only the PES and the European People's Party (EPP) had a completely male line-up of *Spitzenkandidaten*, whereas the European Greens, Liberals, and Left Party all had gender-balanced lists of candidates (Wolfs et al 2021). Male candidates can of course be feminists, as the example of Frans Timmermans, the PES's 2019 *Spitzenkandidat*, demonstrates. On Twitter he wrote: 'I proudly say that I am a feminist, and I want my sons to say the same' (Timmermans 2018). Still, having a gender-balanced group of candidates is important for a feminist party.

The PES has its own internal feminist 'lobby group', the PES Women. It is a full member of the PES presidency, includes a representative from each member party, and is led by a president in charge of her own bureau. PES Women has long-standing expertise and experience in promoting gender equality with the party. The PES could draw on PES Women's expertise and networks for the selection of female candidate(s) for leadership roles. Furthermore, and with the help of PES Women, the PES could also adopt a code of conduct on gender equality, such as that of the PES Group in the Committee of the Regions, as I mentioned earlier. If the PES adopted such a Code of Conduct, gender parity (50:50) would become institutionalised inside the party, at all levels and in all bodies.

2. Towards a feminist Europe? The feminisation of the PES's policies, 1999-2021

A feminised party-policy platform is one that addresses women directly. There are a number of criteria that can be used to identify whether parties' claims constitute the substantive representation of women. According to Celis et al (2009, cited by Celis and Childs 2012, 219) such claims would be: (1) directly *constructed* as being of importance to women; (2) *presented* as only affecting women; (3) *discussed* in terms of gender difference; (4) *spoken* of in terms of gendered effects; and/or (5) *framed* in terms of equality between women and men. These criteria can help us understand how the PES has sought to address female voters – and gender equality more broadly – over time.

For my analysis I have drawn on a variety of primary sources: PES manifestos, pamphlets, party resolutions, and documents adopted by the presidency. These are all authoritative, official documents, agreed by the party's formal decision-making bodies. They contain the PES's common policies (claims) and values and are therefore useful sources for my policy analysis. I have analysed the past five PES manifestos, dating from 1999 until 2019, to uncover elements of change and continuity. I first checked whether they contained a separate section/chapter on gender equality, as this would highlight the importance of gender equality as a topic. Second, I investigated the feminisation of the PES's policies. Unsurprisingly for a left-wing party, gender equality plays

a role in all five manifestos (see the Appendix). All manifestos, with the exception of that of 2004, have a separate chapter/section on gender equality. In general, the PES has focused more attention on gender equality over time. Yet amongst the five manifestos, the one from 2009 has the longest chapter/section on gender equality. The 2009 manifesto is also a much longer text than the other four. The 2014 and 2019 manifestos are very short but include a (short) chapter/section on gender equality.

Initially, gender equality was framed primarily in a liberal feminist (economic) way. Thus, in 1999 and 2004, the focus lay on 'equality of opportunity between women and men' in education, employment, and democratic participation. Yet the wording of these manifestos remains vague, as little is said about how this equality might be achieved. The 2009 manifesto stands out with its concrete policy pledges, such as: improving parental leave and childcare provision; creating a European Women's Charter; promoting women's sexual and reproductive health rights. The 2014 and 2019 manifestos also call for stronger LGBTQ rights in the chapters/sections on gender equality. Hence, the PES has recently broadened its scope when it comes to gender-equality policies to include LGBTQ issues. Finally, in its 2019 manifesto, the PES uses the term 'feminism' for the first time, calling for a 'feminist Europe'.

Thus, over the past two decades, the PES's manifestos have become more feminised. Yet overall, the PES's manifestos tend to be very short and, as highlighted by

Luke March (2021), lack in substance and detail. The same can be said about the gender-equality agenda, which remains rudimentary. One solution to the lack of substance and detail would be to 'gender mainstream' each manifesto chapter/section by highlighting the implications of existing gender inequalities for *all* policy areas and proposing solutions. Furthermore, it would be important to stress how gender, social class, ethnicity/race, age, and disability intersect to create inequalities across Europe, and how such inequalities would be tackled were the PES to win the elections.

It is also worth mentioning a number of other PES documents that have been published in recent years outlining the PES's positions on gender equality, including women's and LGBTQ people's rights. In 2017, the PES presidency adopted an LGBTI roadmap calling for stronger LGBTI rights at the EU level, within member states, and outside the EU (PES 2017). This came at a crucial time when gay rights were threatened in some member states. At the 2018 Lisbon congress, the PES ratified a document containing three resolutions relating to 'a Europe of Gender Equality and Empowered Women' (PES 2018b). Here, the PES calls for: the end of violence against women; women's reproductive rights; and for the closure of the gender pay gap. Gender-based violence was also condemned by the PES presidency in a common declaration in 2020 (PES 2020), in the context of the right-wing backlash against the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

The most comprehensive PES publication on gender equality is a pamphlet from 2020 entitled 'A Feminist Economy for Europe'. This very timely text, which was put together by PES Women, presents a vision on 'how to make Europe's post-COVID-19 economic system more gender just'. It presents a long list of feminist policy proposals in areas such as employment, education, training, equal pay, parental leave, childcare, women's representation in politics and business, health, safety, taxation, and the fight against sexism. The approach taken on gender justice is comprehensive, inclusive, and intersectional. This pamphlet serves as an example of how gender could be mainstreamed across different policy areas in future PES manifestos and campaigns – if the member parties were to agree to it.

3. Conclusions and policy recommendations

In this paper I have analysed the feminisation of the PES's organisational structures and policies over recent years. In doing so, I have highlighted not just the achievements, but also the room for improvement when it comes to empowering women. I have argued that, while the S&D group in the European Parliament has had a female president since 2019, and the PES has had a more female deputy leadership than before, more can be done to feminise the party. In particular, gender quotas should be introduced for all leadership elections. This should also apply to the election of the PES *Spitzenkandidat/in*, where a gender-balanced list of

candidates should become the new normal. To be sure, amending the party statutes takes willingness and time, and it must be initiated by the PES's member parties. Many member parties don't have internal gender quotas. As a consequence, they are not gender-balanced. Yet gender parity should become the 'new normal' and part of a much-needed modernisation process – at the national and European levels. Having women at the top – not just in deputy roles – is vital for a party that advocates a feminist Europe. As Iratxe García Pérez said, '[…] We, the Socialists and Democrats, want to lead a transition to a new way of doing politics, a feminist approach to power as shared responsibility and co-ownership' (García Pérez 2021). Sharing power and responsibility equally between women and men matters if the PES and S&D group want to be seen as feminist role models.

Finally, my analysis has demonstrated that the PES has done much to feminise its policy platform over the past 20 years by directing not just more, but also more concrete policies and policy pledges at women and LGBTQ people. In recent years, the PES has moved away from a narrower conception of women's rights (one that primarily relates to economic rights) to a broader and more intersectional approach. This type of feminism could appeal to younger generations of voters, for whom gender equality, identity, and diversity matter. At a time when gender equality has become more politicised in the European Parliament (and in many national parliaments), an outspokenly feminist policy platform is crucial. As the share of far-right populist and ultra-

conservative MEPs has grown over recent years, so has the opposition to feminism. Standing up for women's and LGBTQ rights matters more than ever, and the PES should be at the forefront of this movement by 'doing feminism'.

4. Seven policy recommendations for the PES

Regarding the feminisation of the party leadership

1. To introduce a Code of Conduct on Gender Equality inside the S&D group and the PES. The aim should be to have equal representation of women and men within the executives and throughout all of the political group and party's activities.
2. To change the PES statutes – this will require member parties to take the initiative – and introduce gender quotas for PES presidential elections, in order to ensure that there is gender parity amongst the list of candidates.
3. To change the PES statutes (again, this will require member parties to take the initiative) and introduce gender quotas for the selection of the *Spitzenkandidat/in* so that there is a *minimum of two candidates*: one female, one male.
4. To lower the threshold for the nomination of the *Spitzenkandidat/in* from 25 percent of member parties (as in 2019) to 15 percent. A slightly lower threshold might lead to a more inclusive selection process and diverse group of candidates.
5. To introduce a PES vice-president for gender equality by giving one of the four vice-presidents this brief.

This position could be held by the PES Women president ex-officio.

Regarding the feminisation of the policy platform

6. To further 'gender mainstream' the PES manifesto and all other policy documents by highlighting the implications of *all* policies for gender equality.
7. To further highlight the intersections of gender, social class, and race/ethnicity in all PES policy documents.

Appendix: examples of feminisation in PES manifestos, 1999-2021

PES manifesto: year and title	Separate section/chapter on gender equality	Examples of claims directed at women
1999: 'The New Europe'	Principle 9: 'Creating equality between women and men.'	The principle of equality of opportunity between women and men is fundamental to democracy. It must be applied in all aspects of society and form an integral part of social and economic policy. We warmly welcome the new commitment in the Treaty to achieve equity and combat all forms of discrimination. To exclude anyone from fair access to education, employment or democratic participation is to diminish society. Responsibility for family, society and work must be shared and domestic violence must be combated. Participation in political structures must be open equally to both genders. We commit ourselves to ensuring equal opportunities for women and men across the European Union and promoting that principle in all the policies of the Union.
2004: 'Growing Stronger Together'	None. Some references to gender equality under Commitment 1 ('Boost Europe's growth, fight poverty and create more and better jobs')	We have already fought for and secured European laws to promote greater equality between women and men at work. However, there remain inequalities of income and opportunity. Progress is still needed to ensure that equality laws are respected in practice and that there is sufficient support for working parents We aim to: Increase the participation rate of women and remove barriers that prevent women from taking up jobs.

2009: 'People First: A New Direction for Europe'	Chapter 4: 'Championing gender equality in Europe'	36. We propose to create a European Women's Rights Charter, to improve women's rights and opportunities and to promote mechanisms to achieve gender equality in all aspects of social, economic and political life. 37. We propose to introduce improved parental leave rights for men and women across Europe up to the highest standards in Europe. 38. We will campaign for equal political representation of women and men in all decision-making bodies at European level. We will campaign for a gender-equal European Commission and a gender-equal European Parliament, and will call for the creation of a European Commissioner for Gender Equality. 39. We will work to support parents so that they can balance their caring responsibilities with their professional responsibilities. To support this goal, we propose that Member States achieve the existing EU target of 33% childcare coverage for 0-3 year olds and 90% coverage for children from 3-school age, and adopt complementary EU qualitative targets for child care. 40. We will lead the fight to close the gender pay gap, which is vital to improve living standards, fight poverty and increase economic growth. 41. We will encourage and support women entrepreneurs, scientists and researchers to broaden their opportunities. 42. We will ensure and promote women's sexual and reproductive health rights throughout the EU. 43. We propose to step up European efforts to eradicate human trafficking and sexual exploitation through closer judicial and police cooperation. 44. We propose to encourage and support the EU and its Member States in their efforts to stop domestic and gender-specific violence, including that perpetrated against women of ethnic minorities, through all appropriate EU programmes and funds.

2014: 'Towards a New Europe'	Section 5: 'A Union of equality and women's rights'	The principle of equality must be at the heart of what it means to be a European citizen. We all benefit from living in a more equal society. Ensuring, promoting and enhancing women's rights and gender equality remains one of our highest priorities. We need a binding commitment to end the gender pay and pension gap. Violence against women must be ended. Reconciling professional and family life must mean promoting balance not sacrifice, and promoting women's free choice and access to sexual and reproductive rights, must be urgently and vigorously protected in the face of a conservative backlash. We will be relentless in our fight against all forms of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia and intolerance. We stand for the values of equality and of non-discrimination and promote that women and men must equally share work, share power, share time and share roles, both in the public and in the private realms. We will safeguard the rights and well-being of children, and ensure that no person is denied a job, a position, a future or any other fundamental right because of the colour of their skin, sexual orientation, identity, religion, age, gender, disability, political opinion or any form of discrimination.
2019: 'A New Social Contract for Europe'	Chapter: 'A feminist Europe with equal rights for all.'	Any form of discrimination is unacceptable in our modern European societies. • We want a binding EU Gender Equality Strategy, through which we will continue to lead the fight to end the pay and pension gaps, combat sexual harassment and gender-based violence, and ensure that every individual has access to their full sexual and reproductive rights. • Every person has the right to decide over their own body. • We believe in a society where women and men enjoy the same work-life balance and equal political participation; every woman has the right to a career, just as every man has the right to raise his children and care for his family.

	• We will be relentless in our fight to end all forms of discrimination. • Europe should remove legal and societal obstacles for LGBTI people to live freely, equally and with respect.

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For creativity and ownership – How can the programmatic debate(s) inside of the Europarties be enhanced?

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In 2004, a young candidate trying to succeed in the European elections held her team weekly meeting. It was late evening already and it would get even later. Once the gathering was over, the volunteers would rush out with posters, buckets and wallpaper glue to join the battle for scarce space on the poster boards. In that sense, the meeting wasn't meant to be unusual. If anything, there were the usual points on the agenda: where to go, which door to knock, what could be the remarkable action which would potentially, even for a short moment, draw attention to the candidate. Talking was down to the absolute minimum, especially since all the people in the room had been continuously in each other's company on the campaign trail. But as the meeting came to its end, two new members of the squad – who were as young as everyone else in the room – stood up to approach the

candidate. One of them asked: "How come there was no discussion about the programme today?" The candidate froze, surprised. The weekly meetings were run with an executive objective and there was an assumption that since everyone from the team had done a fair number of public events with the candidate, they would know the answers to many of the questions. Especially as the vast majority of them came up across all the meetings. Therefore, they considered weekly meetings as a routine moment to discuss how to get campaign-related things done. This attitude made them forget to keep in the spotlight the whole idea as to why they were making a giant effort for a candidate who was young, unknown and possibly without a viable chance of being elected. And that it wasn't at all about who gets to cover the biggest poster board with his or her posters. It was about a powerful idea and a strength coming from a conviction that a better, fairer and more sustainable future for all was worth fighting for.

Political ideas never stopped mattering

While this scene actually happened, one could imagine it wasn't all that unique. From a historical perspective that may point to a certain paradox. While the end of the 1990s and the beginning of 2000s saw perhaps the last – so far – grand, divisive ideological battle inside the progressive movement, at the same time many people went back to the thesis of Daniel Bell[1] and claimed that the turn of

1 See D. Bell, *The End of Ideology. On the exhaustion of the political ideas in the fifties*. Harvard University Press, 2000.

the century was the period marked by the *end ideologies*. And while some were fervently debating and exposing the political trade-offs of the Third Way (and *Neue Mitte*), in the opinions of very many others the conflict wouldn't matter much in the long term. It wouldn't – as in the age of mediatisation of politics,[2] promptness of an answer and charisma of the respective leaders were perceived by many as potentially more relevant in communication terms. And hence more pertinent to attracting voters.

To that end, what seems to have mattered more than engaging in the ideological battles was an assumed ability to *deliver.* This term would instigate a more managerial and perhaps less idealistic approach to politics. And indeed, to *be able to deliver*, parties would consider it necessary to expand their appeal to other voters and win the so-called centre. This phenomenon was described in some of the literature as a prolongation of the trend towards the building of the 'catch-all parties', while in other literature it was a party model comparative to a business.[3] This was worrying and addressed with a great note of caution by authors such as Sheri Berman, who at that time published her famous volume on a need for the primacy of politics.[4]

2 Which would prompt other phenomena, such as the so-called 24-hour-news cycle.

3 A. Krouwel, *Party transformations in European democracies*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 2012, p. 30

4 S. Berman, *The Primacy of Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2006. For the online publication see also: https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/primacy-of-politics/DD19C88ECBF20B33D8D6DE445D198D13

These deliberations, though greatly pondered on the national level, inevitably transcended to the European level. And they echoed in the plenary halls of the PES (Party of European Socialists). With a decade since the approval of the Treaty of Maastricht and the introduction of the Political Union, there was a sense that the European parties (Europarties) should aim at becoming more than federations. The debate about the reform that would make them more independent from the groups inside the European Parliament (EP) was rather advanced,[5] but next to preoccupations regarding new legal provisions there was a question about what kind of role the Europarties should play.

Consequently, there were also divergent visions for the PES, which in 2004 saw a battle of giants. Social democrats had been in a majority when it came to the European Council – but had just suffered a loss in the European Parliament. 1999 was the first time since the introduction of direct elections to the EP that social democrats did not enter the chamber with the largest number of MEPs. There was a sense that another kind of approach would be needed on the EU level, and hence also when it comes to framing the PES.

So when it came to the PES Congress in 2004 in Brussels, on one side there was Giuliano Amato, who prior to this was the leader of the progressives in the

5 It refers to Regulation (EC) No 2003/2004 of the European Parliament and the European Council on the regulations governing the political parties on the European level and the rules regarding their funding. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32003R2004&from=EN

Convention on the Future of Europe. One could say that his vision for the PES was somewhat more focused on the role that a Europarty should play in the intra-institutional matrix. And on the other side there was Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, who argued for a PES that would reclaim the ground when it comes to the debates on globalisation, open up, and would reach out to the social movements. The latter were at this point considered to be the refuge of many disenchanted left-wing voters, who had been refusing to buy into the TINA (There is No Alternative) narrative. And Rasmussen was already pursuing the mission of bridge-building through the newly created organisation that he had been leading, namely the Global Progressive Forum (GPF).[6] After many debates and intense campaigns, Rasmussen carried. He became the president of the PES, who would need to consolidate the party and would inaugurate a new era.

Rasmussen's talent, experience and political instincts allowed the PES to be ahead of the curve in terms of claiming and framing the issues before they were even raised on any political agora. Exemplary to that was the initiative on hedge funds[7] and another on childcare, alongside the process that would eventually lead to the

6 See: *Europe and a New Global Order. Bridging the global divides*, A report for the Party of European Socialists by Poul Nyrup Rasmussen. PES, 2003.

7 See: *Report with the recommendations to the Commission on Hedge Funds and private equity* (2007/2238 (INI)); 11.9.2008; A6-0338 (2008); Raporteur: Poul Nyrup Rasmusse. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-6-2008-0338_EN.pdf

'New Social Europe'[8] report – co-authored by Rasmussen and Jacques Delors after months of debates, public events, online consultations and publications. Yet again, 'Social Europe' became a banner under which the previously divided PES could unite, as much as it did before – in 1973[9] – when the term was used for the first time. What was different this time, however, was the idea to use it as a key to open the party and involve leaders, stakeholders, experts and activists – who otherwise may have been either reluctant or simply disinterested in being involved in the PES.

The programmatic activities inside the PES were correlated with the reform that would see the party adopt a statutory reform. It latter was an outcome of the work carried out under the chairmanship of the then PES Secretary General, Philip Cordery, and as a process took almost two years. It was to embrace new legal provisions for the Europarties and the organisational logic, based on a calendar presented at the PES Congress in Vienna in June 2005. The PES political cycle inside the PES cycle would now mirror the legislative process inside the EU. The Congress[10] would take place every two-and-a-half years. In between, there would be a new kind of as-

8 *Das Neue Soziale Europa*. Poul Nyrup Rasmussen and Jacques Delors, PES, Brussels, 2007.

9 9th Congress of the Socialist Parties of the European Community in Bonn on 26 and 27 April 1973, "Towards Social Europe". See: A. Skrzypek, *Partia Europejskich Socjalistow 1957 – 2009, Geneza – Organizacja – Mozliwosci*, Warsaw, 2010, pp. 53-59.

10 At that point there was no debate about the so-called 'Electoral Congress', which arrived much later, during the debates on the mechanisms of selecting top candidates (Spitzenkandidatinnen).

sembly – Council, which would serve as a programmatic conference. Moreover, the party embarked on a two-step process, which would aim at adopting a new Declaration of Principles[11] (first) and the Fundamental Programme (a little over a year later).[12] This was a qualitative change, as with these documents the PES and all its members came to a common position, which would outlive the electoral momentum and would clarify what the party was standing for.

It has been almost a decade since these latter processes concluded. Many developments have taken place, formats of political participation have changed (especially with Millennials and Gen Z acquiring full civic rights) and evidently the context has altered at least twice. In the meantime, in addition two – very different to one another – texts of European manifestos were adopted.[13] But what leaves no doubt is the fact that those who claimed that the time for ideologies had finished could not have been more wrong. Survey after survey, the numbers show that young people in particular care about politics – the pure, good old-style politics, in which ideas matter and idealism is to be applauded and not ridiculed. At the same time, when asked why they believe that it is more effective to take their ideas onto the street, as they did in the case of the Climate

11 See: https://pes.eu/en/about-us/our-values/pes-declaration-of-principles/

12 See: https://pes.eu/export/sites/default/Downloads/PES-Documents/pes_fundamental_programme_en.pdf_1488447709.pdf

13 See: https://pes.eu/export/sites/default/Downloads/PES-Documents/110001306_PES_Manifesto_UK.pdf_1095316046.pdf and https://pes.eu/en/manifesto2019/

Strike, they claim it is because *politicians simply do not listen.*[14]

These observations brought together inspire a fundamental question: what can be done to enhance the programmatic debates inside the PES and open them up, offering space for creativity and ownership of many more than is the case just now?

Traditions to build on

The predecessor of the PES – the Confederation of the Socialist Parties of the European Community (CSPEC) – established three kinds of process that would lead to defining political priorities. First among them included preparations to the Congress, where Congress documents and eventual additional resolutions were adopted. Looking back at archives, one concludes that with the passing years, the number of resolutions grew, up to the point where several were adopted at once, some of which remained quite short. They were equivalent to raising a point, expressing solidarity or condemning something. The second group included leaders' declarations, where again the topics could be either general or very particular. And finally, there were reports – which the leaders would usually ask one of the prominent politicians to help prepare. Some reports would be drafted with the support of a working group, while some would see the politician mandated with the task to deliver the

14 See: A. Skrzypek, with the support of M. Freitas, *The Future starts now! 10 cornerstones for a dialogue between the Progressive Family and Millennials Generation*, FEPS, Brussels, 2016.

document by themselves. What was incredibly relevant about these documents is that they served as openings, allowing the discussion of diverse scenarios without looking instantly for phrasing that would permit everyone to sign off the draft.

Table 1: Typology of documents in the early years of the CSPEC

	Type of a document	Drafting process	Objective
CSPEC documents	Leaders' declarations	Prepared by the Secretariat, sherpas and international secretaries	Usually on a topic of great relevance at the moment of adoption
	Congress declarations and resolutions	Prepared by the Secretariat and international secretaries	Used to align member parties regarding an issue
	Reports	Prepared under the leadership of a specially appointed person	Used to deliberate an issue and put forward recommendations (especially on organisational matters)

Crucial to the evolution of the culture of those processes was the above-mentioned CSPEC Congress of 1973 in Bonn. It was held under the motto 'Towards a Social Europe', building on the ground-breaking speech by Willy Brandt, which he gave at the leaders' meeting in 1972.[15] From that point onwards, the CSPEC (and later PES) has a tradition of choosing a unifying,

15 See also: A. Skrzypek, *Europe. Our common future. 20 years of the Party of European Socialists*, PES, 2012. https://pes.eu/export/sites/default/.galleries/Documents-gallery/Europe-Our-Common-Future-Celebrating-20-years-of-PES-Low-Res.pdf_2063069299.pdf

leading theme (for which all the political activities tend to cater). Unfortunately, there is also another side to that coin: at this event a 'disclaimer' mechanism was used for the first time – a footnote of a respective party, that did not agree on either the whole or part of the text adopted by the CSPEC. Nevertheless, the Congress in 1973 is still recognised as one of those meetings at which member parties showed a greater degree of unity than ever before (and also than many times after).

In the next three decades *disclaimers* were used in particular for the electoral manifestos, with respective parties exempting themselves from supporting one or another policy proposal. Once disclaimers were finally got rid of, the memory of them kept haunting the signatories of subsequent documents. This meant that though the decisions would be taken with the majority, the aim has remained to reach unanimity – for which reason perhaps several scholars (and analysts) see the adopted positions as simply the reflection of the lowest common denominator.

With all the changes taking place in the 1970s and the approaching prospect of the first ever direct European elections, the CSPEC was also preparing with the intention to unite the member parties under one programme. The agreement was reached in 1977 to call it a 'Manifesto', which would be drafted by Sicco Mansholt and would see diverse chapters written under the supervision of the respective member parties' leaders. The process was going well, but towards its conclusion it became clear that the final product would be heavily

criticised and it was quickly replaced by a short paper called 'Appeal to the electorate',[16] leaving the CSPEC with no manifesto in the end.

Except for these first direct elections, the CSPEC and then the PES succeeded in later drafting and adopting manifestos. The legacy includes eight, each of which has a different format, length and consequently content. The first documents offered a greater degree of analysis than their successors. They were a mixed genre, which would include analyses of the situation at hand, as also principal ideas for in the future. The Manifesto 1999 provided a changed approach: '21 commitments for the 21st century'. This title not only stood for the catchier message – suggesting that the document was oriented at addressing voters – but also was comparatively shorter. Five years later, there was a return to a longer document, but with a limited number of priorities – indicated through five chapters.

To that end, the 2009 Manifesto was yet another breakthrough. The text was a political declaration, drafted as a consequence of two processes. The first was a two-year process, which saw the stream of work in three working groups – each led by a leader from one of the respective member parties and each seeing at least two seminars in different capitals of Europe. The seminars were opened to the delegates from both parties, as also sister organisations. It was by far the most participatory process, resulting in several publications, the extensive text of the report, and a political declara-

16 *Appel aux electeurs 1979*, X Congress, Brussels, 10-12 January 1979.

tion based on the report's findings. Subsequently, the process of drafting a manifesto was launched, whereby there was much innovation. Today it may seem more usual, but back then an interactive online platform with blogs, chats and other interactive tools was a great novelty, as was also open consultation with the involvement of the PES activists. Their first forum took place in June 2008 in Vienna, serving as one of the last steps in harnessing ideas and preparing the first draft. It took place way ahead of the Council and hence also in time to use the meeting to record promotional materials, which would then feature in the Manifesto toolbox.

Five years later, the process was again narrowed down – which back then was motivated by the fact that just ahead of it the Declaration of Principles and the (first ever) Fundamental Programme were drafted. The Manifesto was then designed in a way to be much shorter and 'snappier' (as it was frequently repeated at the internal meetings), which was accomplished. The problem that remained was that the progressive family was at this point quite divided internally when it came to the diagnosis of the recent financial crisis and the way out of it. Therefore, the text also included statements such as 'austerity-only solutions…', which was a compromise between those parties which had been in government and felt they had to apply austerity rules, and those in the opposition and in the countries, which would suffer the political consequence of these the most. To make things more complex, this was the first time social democrats were entering the European elections with their candidate for the position

of the President of the European Commission (their so-called Spitzenkandidat). The PES backed Martin Schulz, who in addition to the PES Manifesto presented his electoral programme.

Since then, there have been several adjustments. First of all, the Manifesto was steered even more to be the electoral platform and become the sort of document that could be easily translated and consequently used in the European elections on the national level. It would be the only document and the Spitzenkandidat (in this case Frans Timmermans) campaigned on it, without providing any additional individual platform. This was a great step forward, as it meant greater visibility of the ideas on the one hand, and on the other hand greater coherence when it comes to issues the PES members campaigned on across the EU.

Secondly, this led in consequence to another way of thinking about the PES Manifesto. It would, even more so, be considered as a list of priorities rather than an actual programme – the latter of which would traditionally include explanatory analyses and a mix of both long- and short-term policy proposals. In that context, a thought that had been discussed a little earlier on was picked up: to create, alongside the Manifesto, a draft that could serve as a governing programme. It was the first time that an attempt was made to construct one and as the process was run behind closed doors with experts invited to respective meetings, perhaps not too many realised that an ambition to work on such an agenda was worked upon.

Thirdly, because of the complexity of the situation after the European elections, several parliamentary groups – S&D included – opted for sending letters to the president-candidate and then president-elect. These would be statements a few pages long, adopted by the MEPs and issued by their respective presidents on their behalf, outlining the political conditions for the groups to lend their support to the president-elect and her future Commission. The meaning of these documents seems to have been rather underestimated since there is hardly any further reference made to them – but scholarly and politically speaking, they were more than crucial. They represented the attempt not only to unite the ranks, but also to effectively influence the governing agenda.

While the Manifestos and the letters present themselves as crucial, orientating documents, they are not the only documents that provide the PES and PES family with political guidelines. For the overall testimony as to what PES stands for there are at least three more that need to be quoted here to complete the picture. The first is the PES Founding Declaration of 1992, which is no longer in focus but has a historical value as an organising document that set the tone for the establishment of the PES. Though it will have been 30 years next year since its adoption, it may come as a surprise just how many of the pledges included remain valid. The Declaration had eight pledges – which include, somewhat traditional for the PES at that point, 'Social Europe', as well as 'An Environmental Europe', 'A Democratic Europe' and 'Adequate Funding for Europe'. This declara-

tion was elaborated on at the intra-partisan level and signed by the leaders of the respective parties at the PES Founding Congress in the Hague.

Two decades later and amid the internal party reform, it was agreed that the Founding Declaration may not be sufficient to explain the PES ideological positioning. In that spirit, a process was launched to draft a Declaration of Principles, which involved a set of experts meetings under the leadership of Maria João Rodrigues (at that point a special advisor to the PES president). The Declaration was adopted and was included in the statute in 2011. It enumerates the values that the PES and its members stand on and it was the anchoring point for the drafting of the Fundamental Programme, which process was presided over by Caroline Gennez and saw the final document adopted a year later, firstly by the Presidency and then by the Congress. While these two documents were drafted with the ambition of lasting for several decades and the points they include can be translated into specific policies even nowadays, it may be worth looking back at them – both to refresh the awareness of their existence and to perhaps update them slightly, taking into account the turbulent decade since they were drafted.

This list can serve as an index of the key, principal documents that the PES family (including the above-mentioned letter by the S&D Group) have adopted in the last decades as the guiding ones. Their primary role derives from the fact that they are the results of longer, greater processes; that they have extraordinary visibility

because of the context in which they serve (campaign, vote on the new Commission, as well as establishment or reform of the PES). And in particular manifestos, which are the documents adopted with a defined frequency (every 5 years), allowing the study of the programmatic evolution of the PES.

This means that on average twice per decade there is a process that offers a general orientation and that by definition has to involve the entire membership since these documents are voted by the Council or Congress respectively. That said, several other documents are crafted in between: the resolutions adopted by the PES Presidency (prepared through the networks or self-standing), and, especially in the last year, a growing number of brochures (which have the task of guiding and informing the membership regarding PES positions). These processes base themselves on procedures involving composing a draft, which then passes through the Coordination Team (CT, that is, the first filter of the amendments) and then moves on to the Presidency (which tends to discuss the major controversial points, the ground having already been prepared by the CT). In parallel, there is then a decline in the number of leaders' declarations.

Table 2: Typology of PES documents[17]

PES document	Declaration of Principles	Adopted, part of the statutes, no expiration date
	Fundamental Programme	Adopted, no expiration date
	Manifestos	Adopted every 5 years since 1984
	Leaders' declarations	Adopted at the leaders' meetings, focused on relevant political issues (especially in the context of the subsequent EU summit)
	Declarations and resolutions	Can be adopted by the Presidency, as prepared by the Coordination Team (and eg. PES Network); can be adopted at the Council or Congress
	Brochures	Prepared within the secretariat

All in all, looking at the number of documents that have been drafted and successfully adopted, one comes to be impressed by the rich legacy and complexity of the programmatic discourse inside the PES. That said, taking into account the brief analyses of the different modalities and placing that in the context in which so many demands are being formulated regarding opening up political debates, it seems to be an interesting avenue to pursue – to debate how the programmatic debates could become more open, inclusive and allow more creativity from the engaged citizens – who themselves may not be directly in a position of member parties leaders, international secretaries or MEPs.

17 The typology doesn't include the campaign reports or documents such as 'The New Social Europe', as this modality used during the mandate of P. N. Rasmussen is no longer applied.

Looking into the future

There are several reasons why it would be important to look at the programmatic debates not from the perspective of the content that they create, but from the angle of what kind of processes lead to the respective documents'adoption and how they could be improved when it comes to inclusiveness, transparency and output.

The first motivation derives from an understanding that there is a pejorative image of the so-called 'traditional parties', to which categorisation social democrats belong. There is an impression that in general, these parties drifted away from being the organisations in which politics is discussed on all levels. Part of the problem here is the legacy of the previous decades, which saw a tendency to the professionalisation of political parties and hence the outsourcing of the programmatic work (to experts groups, the parties' affiliated think tanks or even spin doctors, entrusted to compress the programmatic issues and simply craft catchy messages).[18] This outsourcing is quite disempowering for the members and sympathisers, and, looking at the surveys, it is seen as particularly repulsive for the younger generations as degenerating the concept of party membership[19].

Secondly, particularly social democrats seem to be falling into a trap – which sees them reacting to perpetual claims about their movement's crisis by closing ranks. By seeking unanimity for any proposal that would

18 See C. Crouch, *Post-Democracy*, Cambridge, Polity, 2010, pp. 70 -77.

19 See also: T. Bale, P. Webb and M. Poletti, *Footsoldiers. Political party membership in the 21st century*, Routledge, 2019.

be articulated externally, they tend to focus more on the objective (final compromise) than on the process (which by nature involves exchanges featuring pluralistic opinions). What it means is that – with some exceptions at the national level – more and more the programmatic debates are organised as closed processes. In their realm society is imagined via the prism of opinion polls and not through the lenses of the party members. That kind of turning inwards is growing to be contradictory to what the citizens desire – beyond specific political aims, namely a more open kind of programmatic debate.

Thirdly, there is another reason for which revising the programmatic processes and broadening access to them would be particularly relevant now. The world finds itself at a turning point. Leaving aside for the moment the global context, a slow process of deconfinement is already taking place and life (including social and political) resumes a certain course. Although from a distance it may have seemed that the world of politics contracted, seeing stakeholders focus on the pandemic, this is not entirely true and not consistent symmetrical when it comes to the impact the lockdowns have had across populations.

On the one hand, there are several countries, led by progressive prime ministers (such as Finland, Denmark or Spain), where the debate on crisis management and recovery has been intertwined with long-term thinking (in some cases up to 2050, so across one more generation). And there is the ongoing Conference on the Future of Europe, which with a lot of effort (and not

always successfully) tries to encourage citizens to take part in a crucial conversation. On the other hand, for many people the world has shrunk to the size of their households and surroundings, and they are in need of being offered a way to reconnect. But what connects the two sides of the spectrum is the sense of 'at the end of the day, we have all been in this together'. That basic sense of interconnectivity should be used to bring to the debating table progressives from across Europe, who would forge a mutual understanding and intensify a dialogue, resulting in solidarity across the borders.

The momentum seems to be now, especially as after the stunning (for respectively different reasons) electoral results in Germany and Portugal, there is a sense of expectation among the voters and a feeling of particular responsibility among the progressives.[20] Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and subsequent speech by Chancellor Olaf Scholz in the Bundestag,[21] there remain many questions about the European progressive agenda. And although the Conference on the Future of Europe may not be at the point where progressives would like it to be, as an experience it provides many insights into how to (and how not to) organise the public political sphere in the EU. That is exceedingly important, especially ahead of

20 See the words of Antonio Costa after the Portuguese general elections, as quoted here: https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/30/portugals-prime-minister-antonio-costa-wins-election-and-could-clinch-the-majority.html

21 https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378

the next European elections – in just two years in 2024.

Consequently, looking at the past, analysing the existing PES traditions and looking at the situation at hand raises the following questions. What would indeed be the proposals to make the programmatic debate more inclusive? What would make them inviting enough to engage with citizens from across the Union? Would their passion, creativity and readiness to be part of a process be a good way to re-opening the party?

Perhaps a good starting point for defining the paths towards a more open, inclusive PES is an attempt at defining what it would entail. In the political sciences literature, political parties are described as organisations that are established to represent and aggregate views of groups within society, while aiming at winning and/or retaining the power to govern.[22] This very classic approach was for many years the reason many researchers investigating transnational political parties – such as the PES – would claim that they are *not real parties* since they do not compete in elections and do not have much influence over who stands on their behalf. The reasoning behind the criticism will have to be reviewed. , Especially with the introduction of the institution of Spitzenkandidaten, there is a clear say that the Europarties have when it comes to the important symbolic leadership of the campaign. That said, one could also argue that the classical definition could not apply to organisations, which have to act in a system that is dissimilar

22 E. Zielinski, *Nauka o panstwie i Polityce*, Elipsa, Warsaw, 1999, pp. 195-98.

to any other institutional or party-political system on the national level. Hence perhaps it is more productive, when examining the Europarties, to move from the focus on the functions of the political parties towards placing their roles in the spotlight.

Though there are several typologies, most, generally speaking, seven main categories define the roles of the political parties. These are: encouraging greater political participation; giving the electorate choice in government and policies; representation and articulation of the interests of groups in society; recruiting and training future politicians; organising the executive branch of government (supplying MPs); ensuring scrutiny of the government; and educating and informing the public on issues. Looking at these, there are ways in which the PES could indeed raise the bar higher, especially as it would seem that European citizens have become much more involved in the questions of European integration and much stronger opinions on its matters. So, the degree to which they start distinguishing between different members the European political family may grow. This means that the Europarties may gradually become less focused on promoting Europe and battling the arguments against it and better placed in a more conducive position to focus the narrative rather on a distinctive vision for the EU. This is a qualitative change to what earlier was described as a two-fold mobilisation challenge inside the European political sphere.[23]

23 B. Wessels, *Mobilization and attitudes equals turnout – A simple equation?*, Paper for Presentation at the EES Spring Meeting 2006 of the European Elections of 2004, Lisbon, 11-14 May 2006.

What would that mean in practical terms? First, perhaps what would be useful is to look back at the list of the tools and traditions that the PES already has in place. These are to a certain degree captured in Table 2. From there, there would be a need to decide how to diversify among the documents and hence processes, leading to making some of them more open and inclusive.

Secondly, opening up would need to have a clear objective of giving voice to more people. This is never easy, as straight away one enters into a debate about the meaning and prerogatives of partisanship, and how citizens, who are party members are able to have a a greater say than the by-standers have (when it comes to electing leadership or defining the programme). This polemic arrived on the back of the application of open primaries (that is for example, in Italy). And it is more complex at the level of the PES, where there is a discussion about direct versus individual membership. Direct membership means that every member of a PES member party automatically becomes a PES member (the basis for PES activists°; Individual membership means that anyone is able to sign up to the PES, regardless of whether they are the member of a national party. While this may look like a difficult challenge, in fact the PES could easily go beyond that by learning from the Conference on the Future of Europe. It could set a distinction whereby networks could be opened up to the PES activists (or their representatives), while there would also be forums that would enable anyone interested to take part in a broad debate (pretty much like

any conference does, only with a more solidly defined purpose).

Thirdly – assuming that the objective is indeed to enhance the debates, offering a broader set of opportunities to participate, take ownership and be creative – there is a need to think about the documents, not in the category of products only, but the processes that they enable to be established. This is an important distinction, as it would make the procedures equally relevant to the result, diversifying the outputs. Here a reminder about the principles of the top-down and bottom-up mechanics may be useful (see Figure 1).

With reference to Figure 1 and based on what has already been discussed earlier, the following set of concrete proposals could be therefore formulated. First, the PES should attempt to update its Declaration of Principles and the Fundamental Programme. These processes should be structured as lengthy ones, enabling the PES to consider establishing a more permanent programme commission. The process could be led by one prominent stakeholder or a collective of prominent personalities. This pattern was used when the Declaration of Principles and the Fundamental Programme were being drafted for the first time, and earlier, during the time of the CSPEC and the drafting of the New Social Europe Report. Next to leadership (as mentioned, collective or individual), the programme commission would have to be the most representative possible (including the members, sister organisations and partners identified as crucial in the process). Tak-

	Top down		
Forums, debating platforms			Governing bodies and established networks
Informal participation, exchanges			Statutory defined meetings
Online platforms, social media			Traditional forms of participation
	Bottom up		

Figure 1: The top-down, bottom-up approach

ing into account the weight and importance of the document, the programme committee should hold a strong mandate (preferably voted for by the Council) and should be required to plan its work, envisaging both closed and open (to experts and academics, but also simply interested PES activists).

Furthermore, the inventory of the documents would allow the identification of which issues have been debated more intensely. And it would be key to the strategic mapping of the dimensions within which the PES would desire to either develop an even stronger (or different) position or elaborate a standpoint a standpoint. This would be particularly helpful ahead of the subsequent European elections. There the inventory would allow procuring a summary of the positions taken and which policies have been subsequently adopted on the EU level because of the actions taken by the social democrats. Equipped with this, the PES could on the one hand draft a solid report, in which it would describe its achievements of the passing legislative. On the other hand, it would be a good basis for drafting the electoral documents.

And then, speaking about the latter, it would be important for the PES to now imagine the process that would lead to a vote on a manifesto. As described earlier, there have been several modalities and the manifestoes have taken diverse formats. . Among them would be the lengthy texts with chapters and the short three-pagers. All of them would have been criticised.. The long ones would be described as too complex and the short ones as too brief. The long ones would be seen as inapplicable in the national campaigns, the short ones as too general to be convincing. That said, perhaps it would be a good idea for the PES to consider using three formats of the electoral documents ahead of the elections.[24] The first would be an electoral programme, which would in detail describe a short-, mid- and longer-term vision for the future of European integration. The second would be a manifesto – which would be a summary of the political proposals in the programme. The third would be a governing agenda, which would be essentially the set of legislative proposals for the upcoming mandate of the EU institutions. The distinction would allow the PES to have a certain equilibrium in the narrative and content of all three documents, and would allow for thinking about the process and sequence between the three. The recommendation would be to construct it in such a way that it makes a full round across the forms of participation in a process described in Table 1 – starting in the left bottom corner and finishing there too.

24 This proposal has been articulated by the author in previous papers, within the FEPS Working Group on Europarties and transnational politics.

The final point to make in this chapter paper is that the need to look at the opening up of the programmatic debate can prove to be an extremely beneficial exercise. It could help the PES to wake up and offer a new, reinforced sense of purpose to initiatives such as PES Activists. They could well be imagined as the ones to define and run the topics on the specially designated forums, and have their representatives (selected according to revised mechanisms) present at the meetings of, for example, networks.

Final thoughts

This chapter aimed at arguing that there is the momentum for the PES to consider reshaping the procedures and processes that lead to the adoption of its documents. It pointed out why the context calls for such a reflection, and – to the degree the scope of this chapter allowed – which tools could be used to simultaneously support the PES in becoming a more open and inclusive Europarty.

The relevance of the matter two years ahead of the next European elections, amid yet another set of developments that profoundly change many paradigms and towards the end of the Conference on the Future of Europe, is obvious. Indeed, against this backdrop a need to offer a collective experience for the progressives across the Union. Issues that may be raised in such an exchange, especially if it is broader than the one focused on Brussels-based stakeholders, may prove to be at this stage outside the scope of the European Union's

prerogative. That said, without creating a new kind of connection, there can be no sense of ownership among members and hence also no multiplication effect (on which Europarties tend to heavily count).

And finally, it has been repeated many times during the COVID-19 pandemic that this was unanticipated, and nobody could have imagined it. Regardless of whether one believes this claim, there is one lesson indeed to be learned. The institutional actors are focused on governing, but what they need now and then is a challenge to push the borders of their collective imagination. The latter – if to be constructive – comes from creativity and bold ideas, which are easily expressed in an open and inclusive organization. The PES, because of its set of values and the image it would like to have of itself, is definitely well-positioned to dare and make its debates more accessible.

Engage the citizens: connect with the activists and make the membership count

Do Europarties need direct members? If so, what for?

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Introduction

Political parties are, at their core, membership organisations, even though the position and role of members evolves in parallel to the changes that occur within parties and their social environment. Meanwhile, political parties at the European level have been, since their very beginning, a somewhat different case. According to Regulation (EC) 2004/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Europarties can be either a gathering of citizens or an alliance of national political parties. The first option implies individual and direct membership, while the second is based mainly on indirect, collective membership of national parties' members. In practice, the parties that operate today at the European level are primarily alliances of national formations. While such a choice of organisational form by no means prohibits Europarties from also building a base of direct, individual members, there are no requirements or in-

centives for them to do so. Moreover, attempts at modelling Europarties on their national counterparts (including openness to individual citizens) have often been met with reluctance on the part of the latter, which are keen to maintain exclusive control over their respective membership bases (Bardi et al 2010, 62).While the institutional environment has not been conducive to opening up Europarties to citizens without the intermediation of national parties, and while national member parties are still reticent about such ideas, the social environment is somehow pressuring on Europarties to move in that direction. In effect, the issue here is whether European citizens wish to be more involved in EU-level politics and would like to do so through Europarties. On the one hand, the answer to such a question may appear obvious and rather negative – especially when we analyse trends in membership of national political parties, low levels of trust in political entities or general recognisability of Europarties and people's awareness of their existence. On the other hand, there are several factors that may actually incentivise Europarties to prepare an offer of genuine, modern-style individual and direct membership for politically active citizens. Chief among them is people's tendency to look for new channels of political expression, their openness to novel forms of activism and their growing awareness of the need to act beyond the local, regional or even national level.

This paper is constructed as follows. First, we begin with an analysis of current trends in party membership in Europe at the national level, and the tendencies ob-

servable in citizens' political activity. Then, we present the membership solutions adopted by the most institutionalised parties at the European level, so as to identify some regularities in this aspect. All Europarties operate in the same legal and institutional environment, so it is interesting to consider how they interpret it in terms of direct membership. Subsequently, we examine what citizens and Europarties have to offer to each other. We also consider whether (and if so, how) the broadening of direct membership might affect European formations' ability to perform their social functions. Finally, we present recommendations regarding direct membership, with particular reference to the Party of European Socialists.

1. Current trends in party membership

Over the last decades, European democracies have been experiencing unprecedented challenges and profound transformations. These changes are driven by a perceived disconnect and an increasing gap between the representatives and the represented (Mair 2013). Political parties, traditionally seen as a 'transmission belt' between society and the state (Sartori 1987), are facing a deep crisis. Across Europe, the vast majority of citizens no longer actively participate in the life of political formations, as membership numbers have been plummeting in recent decades (Demker et al 2020). Today, the classic links between parties and citizens seem weakened (Guasti and Geissel 2019) or even defunct (Gherghina and Geissel 2019). Most political organisa-

tions in Europe have seen their membership bases shrink – a fact that indicates that their overall robustness is in decline (van Haute 2011; van Biezen et al 2011; van Haute et al 2017). The erosion of traditional social milieus, the weakening of political loyalties, the shift towards mass media campaigning – all these trends have reduced the supply of potential members and made parties less interested in formally enrolling their supporters (Scarrow 2002, 82). Although most formations still emphasise membership, they do not require their members to be as committed and involved as in the past. In turn, members often act as 'organized cheerleaders' for party elites (Katz and Mair 1995, 18) without much agency or say when it comes to decision-making. Interestingly, in some parties members formally enjoy more rights than ever before (eg they can participate in nominating the leaders) (Bolleyer 2009, 564), yet their role in the organisation has actually diminished. As members are increasingly atomised, they are less able to influence and control their parties' elites. Personal (sometimes also referred to as personalist or personalistic) parties built around a leader do not provide a range of meaningful activities for their members to engage in, especially outside campaign periods.

Changes to the structure of contemporary societies, parties' increasing reliance on state funding (Nassmacher 2006, 446–56), the professionalisation and mediatisation of campaigns and the growing role of marketing experts mean that even those members who remain active are not able to do much for their organi-

sations (Jacuński et al 2021). These phenomena have been noticed not only by scholars, but also, increasingly, by parties themselves. The latter have tried taking certain steps to address the changing circumstances, for instance by opening up to multi-speed membership (Scarrow 2015).

It is important to note that citizens have not lost their will to participate in political life altogether. Some simply want to do it in different ways and by using different means (Dalton and Welzel 2014). In fact, civil and political activism is actually on the rise, both in the mainstream and on the radical margins. Some scholars believe that the non-partisan activism is linked to the widespread erosion of party membership in established democracies. The traditional form of participation is fading, as people are reviving their interest in voluntary associations. The result is an expanding, increasingly diverse cause-oriented activism: the spread of demonstrations and protests, the development of consumer politics as well as new, diffuse social movements and transnational advocacy networks (Norris 2009; Theocharis and van Deth 2019; Merkel 2017). As noted by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), citizens 'view their political involvement as medicine they must take in order to keep the disease of greedy politicians and special interests from getting further out of hand'.

European citizens are generally unwilling to join political parties, as they perceive them as a necessary evil, or an element that has to be tolerated for the sake of democracy. Traditional membership competes

with non-partisan forms of political activity (and often loses). People choose to get involved in social and civic movements that protest against the governing elites, the policies adopted by the state, or the inaction of the international community in the face of crises and injustices (Norris 2002). Indeed, people often see political parties as part of the problem rather than potential providers of solutions. Low-intensity participatory opportunities are often related to single-issue actions. Equipped with online communication tools (Boulianne 2015, 524–38; Penney 2015, 52–66), citizens take the initiative into their own hands and circumvent parties which find themselves stuck in an ineffective, 20th-century-approach to aggregating and articulating people's interests. However, this trend may be interpreted not so much as the expression of parties' weakness, but rather as a reflection of the civic-society spirit, whereby people are capable of organising themselves without relying on the patronage of political parties.

Unlike national parties, Europarties are not faced with the dilemma of how to stop the shrinking membership base. Their challenge is to decide if, how and to what extent to change the existing formula of collective membership. Contrary to what a metaphor suggests, following the riverbed laid out by national political parties is not necessarily bound to be easier than carving out a new path, as by choosing the former, Europarties may well risk confronting the same problems that haunt their national-level counterparts.

2. Are there any regularities in the membership of Europarties?

The statutes of Europarties allow us to distinguish three types of collective membership: ordinary members (or full members); associate members; and observers. In addition, some formations envision various forms of individual membership and so-called supporting members (activists, friends). In general, parties at the European level are still based primarily on national political entities, which have the status of full members. This position is sometimes also granted to other organisations, movements or parliamentary factions and, in rare cases, to individuals with a special status (mainly Members of the European Parliament). In the following paragraphs we present a brief overview of membership solutions adopted by the most institutionalised Europarties.

2.1 Collective membership

The Party of European Socialists (PES) consists of three types of collective members: full; associate; and observer members. The European People's Party (EPP) has a very similar structure, with ordinary, associated and observer members. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) consists of two types of collective members: full and affiliate. The European Green Party (EGP) is in principle only open to collective members such as political parties and other groups with a green agenda, both within and outside the European Union. There are three collective membership categories: full; candidate; and associate members. Collective membership in the

Party of the European Left (often referred to as the European Left, or EL) is open to any left-wing formation and political organisation in Europe that agrees with the aims and principles of its political manifesto and accepts its statutes. Full membership, with its associated rights and obligations, may be granted to entities from EU member states and third countries alike, regardless of whether the candidate organisation has parliamentary representation at various levels.

2.2 Individual membership

In addition to collective membership, some Europarties have introduced a category of individual members in their statutes, adopting various solutions in this regard. In general, two approaches may be distinguished. One group of Europarties reserves direct individual membership for selected categories of persons only (mainly parliamentarians). Meanwhile, the other group opens it to all individuals, provided they meet certain conditions. In the former model, those who qualify for individual membership enjoy broadly the same rights as collective members. Other citizens, if allowed to enrol at all, are only given a curtailed catalogue of rights.

While PES's statute does envisage individual members, they can only be granted the status of observer members and their rights are narrower compared to other membership categories. Becoming a PES observer is only possible for people who are already members of a political organisation other than a party registered as a full PES.

In the EPP, all Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) elected from the slates of EPP member parties are members *ex officio* of the EPP, even if they are not members of a given national party. Other MEPs can become individual members of the EPP by the decision of the Political Assembly, on request from the presidency. The formation's statute stipulates that the speaking and voting rights of individual members within EPP organs are personal and inalienable.

Similar solutions have been adopted by the European Green Party. Members of the European Parliament who are part of the Group of the Greens and belong to an EGP member party are automatically granted a special-category membership. MEPs who are part of the Group of the Greens in the European Parliament but do not belong to a full, candidate or associate member of the EGP can be granted a special-category membership by the decision of the Council. All such MEPs exercise their membership collectively and exclusively through the Group of the Greens in the European Parliament delegation.

The two EU-level formations most open to individual members are ALDE and EL. First and foremost, there is no need to be an MEP to become a direct individual member. The ALDE website reads that individual members are a key part of the movement – they take part in multiple initiatives organised by ALDE and its member parties, play active roles in developing proposals, campaigns and petitions, run in elections to become a coordinator, Steering Committee member or Congress

delegate. Lofty rhetoric notwithstanding, ALDE reports over 1,300 individual members – a number that can be most generously described as modest at best. Since ALDE's model provides for full individual membership, there are no additional forms of 'light' participation (affiliates, friends, supporters etc).

The European Left also introduces the possibility of individual membership, treating it as a contribution to its future development. According to the EL statutes, in countries where full-right member parties or member political organisations exist, each member of such an entity may decide to become an individual member of EL. Citizens of other European countries associated with the EU can also apply for individual membership. They can join or create a national group of individual members, applying for an EL observer status. The EL does not publish data on the numbers of its individual members.

2.3 Narrow space for activists

Some Europarties provide opportunities for co-operation to citizens who wish to become involved in their activities. Such engagement status functions under different names: supporting members; activists; friends. In general, these groups do not enjoy the same rights and do not have the same obligations as collective or individual members. They also do not participate in the work of Europarties' bodies. In selected cases, they may be invited to observe the proceedings of party congresses. They are typically granted access to information about a given party's activities and events, mainly

through websites and electronic newsletters. They are welcome to make donations to the party.

All members of PES member parties who are automatically PES members can also register as PES activists by filling in a special form on the formation's official website. This opportunity is not available to citizens who do not belong to one of the national member parties. Activists can organise meetings, debate on the PES forum and present their initiatives to the party. So far the driving force behind such activities has been the PES with sister parties and partnering organisations, so the momentum has been going from the top down, not from the bottom up. Moreover, a group consisting of at least 300 PES activists who are members of at least one quarter of full or associate PES member parties may present policy proposals before the PES Congress and the Electoral Congress.

In the EL, individual citizens may become members following the procedure described earlier. They can also be sympathisers who make donations (EU citizens only), or join the monthly EL newsletter.

All other examined Europarties do not envision any 'light membership' formats that might enable EU citizens to be directly involved in their activities without the need for obtaining full membership.

The overview of solutions regarding direct membership paints a picture of European parties as being somewhat shy and indecisive in this matter. It seems as if they find themselves in an unfamiliar territory and feel no urgency to commit to a clearly defined path.

In the following paragraphs, we shall discuss what could be gained from parties being more open to direct individual members.

3. Europarties closer to citizens: what is there to win?

In order to understand potential gains from opening up to direct individual membership, we need to once again refer to the experiences of national political parties.

Researchers focusing on national-level politics point out seven main avenues through which members may contribute to their party's success (Katz 1990; Lawson 1980; Scarrow 1996, 40–6), along with their respective benefits both within and outside the organisation. These are: 1) providing voluntary labour; 2) providing financial support; 3) standing as candidates for public offices; 4) transmitting ideas and preferences into party debates; 5) providing electoral support; 6) communicating party ideas to the external environment; 7) enhancing party legitimacy (Scarrow 2015, 102). Some of the activities (eg voluntary work, financial support and running for offices) are hardly relevant to Europarties, but others may be worthy of attention. Rank-and-file members, affiliates and supporters are usually the most active political message-carriers, as they disseminate views, ideas and arguments throughout their social circles – these days, primarily through social media. In recent years, their potential impact has significantly grown thanks to the expansion of individuals' presence in digital net-

works. By treating them as party ambassadors among European citizens, EU-level formations would act in the spirit of the Treaty on European Union by contributing 'to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of the citizens of the Union provision'. Moreover, they would also increase their visibility and social legitimacy.

The 2003 Regulation cited in the introduction to this paper emphasises Europarties' social function: representing and articulating voters' interests; mobilising the electorate; and shaping public opinion. Admittedly, such provisions are still by and large mere postulates rather than a description of reality. Europarties' predecessors, transnational party federations, were formed to co-ordinate European Parliament election campaigns, but it is hard to argue that they have actually been running the campaigns since 1979. It was only after the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty that some Europarties began promoting their candidates for the position of the president of the European Commission (Spitzenkandidaten), in 2014 and 2019. In order to do so, they devised the nomination procedure, prepared agendas and established campaign HQs that took care of candidates' schedules, media relations and participation in debates (Skrzypek 2019, 112). This was a step well beyond the previous model, in which the Europarties' role was limited to co-ordinating actions conducted in parallel by national parties, preparing and delivering informational materials, leaflets or gadgets and organising meetings of national party leaders and candidates with well-known

European politicians. Although the Spitzenkandidaten mechanism has had mixed reviews, there is little to suggest that the most institutionalised Europarties intend to abandon the formula. To the contrary – the personalisation of European Parliament elections around the candidates for the presidency of the Council is bound to become a substitute for a trans-European campaign. It will increasingly attract voters' attention and push EU-level formations to expend ever more resources, including labour. Those Europarties which manage to engage with their electorate in the inter-electoral period will be able to tap into its energy when the time comes to run a campaign that transcends state borders.

The 2003 Regulation also tasks Europarties with mobilising the European electorate. The most clear-cut, measurable indicator here is, of course, voter turnout in the European Parliament elections. Since the introduction of direct election to that body, every subsequent trip to the polls until 2019 saw the turnout rate decline. To the surprise of many observers, the May 2019 election attracted more voters than that from five years earlier. However, even the most vocal proponents of Europarties did not credit them as key contributors to this success of European-level democracy. While some have argued that the increased turnout reflected citizens' growing interest in European integration and the EU itself, there is hardly any evidence that interest is the result of Europarties' mobilisation efforts. In Poland, for instance, the turnout in 2019 almost doubled compared to 2014. However, the change in Poles' atti-

tudes did not necessarily reflect some newly developed awareness of the EU's relevance to their daily lives or a belief that more issues (eg climate or migration policy, crisis recovery) should be decided at the supranational level. It was (just like in several other EU member states where turnout rate spiked that year) the national parties that expended extra effort on mobilising citizens. The fact their work bore fruits in the European Parliament election was simply a secondary matter of opportune timing.

Certainly, given the nature of European Parliament elections, it is always possible to shift all responsibility for the above-mentioned events to national member parties and their members. However, building circles of direct supporters may well be done in parallel by Europarties. While national party membership continues to decline, formations operating at the European level have more and more reasons to expand and strengthen their contacts with all those whom they might have a chance to mobilise for partisan purposes, regardless of whether these citizens will eventually become full-time individual members. The existence of such an important reservoir of activism means Europarties could be well advised to reform and supplement existing modes of memberships with new categories of affiliation, so as to develop closer links with European willing to be politically active. In the process, they might turn into multi-speed membership organisation (see Scarrow 2015), where supporters maintain multiple links to their preferred Europarties, each conferring different obligations and privileges.

The role of an intermediary that aggregates and articulates people's interests is another of the classic functions attributed to political parties. Parties act (or are expected to act) as the links between society and public authorities. Given that they increasingly struggle with that function even at the national level, it is almost bound to be a tough challenge for European-level formations which seem to be rooted far more in the EU's institutional environment than in societies. Such a state of affairs reflects the differences in how parties were formed nationally, compared to how they came to be in the EU realm. As Daniel-Louis Seiler argues, when it comes to national parties the reality has always been a step ahead of the legal framework, while Europarties have been the opposite case: laws governing the functioning of such entities had been adopted before parties themselves came into existence (Seiler 2003). Europarties were formed through an elitist (Suleiman 2005), top-down mechanism – they were born neither out of genuine social need, whereby certain groups would seek ways to be represented in the European political arena, nor out of the emergence of new socio-political divisions. Given such circumstances, they can only build their social roots and democratic legitimacy *post factum*, after they were established in the EU's institutional framework. Nonetheless, PES has all the necessary ideological, organisational and social potential to do just that.

3.1 Policy/organisational proposals for PES

- *Co-operation, not confrontation*: national member parties should not perceive the opening to direct individual membership as a threat to their position and privileges as collective members. The PES is more likely to succeed if its member parties co-ordinate their activities aimed at attracting 'party friends', 'activists' and 'affiliates', while the collective members retain certain special rights.
- *Strengthening of the activists*: the fairly wide and continuously expanding network of PES activists should be recognised in the statutes. Activists (or at least their representatives) should be granted broader rights, including the right of expression and initiative, as well as the right to vote. The engaged citizens should have a sense of agency that will provide the spark for their energy and willingness to act to the benefit of the party.
- *Turning weakness into strength*: as political entities, Europarties by and large lack recognition among citizens. Paradoxically, this means they do not carry negative connotations often attributed to national parties. By opening to direct individual membership, PES would create a participation opportunity that circumvents national-level entities. This might be particularly valuable with regard to mobilising the populations of those countries, where trust in the institution of party is low and socialist parties are burdened with long-standing negative perceptions.

- *Creating meeting and dialogue space for progressive Europeans*: the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly accelerated the growth of electronic communication – a fact that will, without a doubt, facilitate trans-European relations in the future. However, even though ICT technologies are becoming more and more available and ever-present, nothing can fully replace the traditional form of direct, face-to-face contact: an honest exchange of thoughts and heated debates that last until the first morning light. An annual meeting, preferably in the summer months, could be organised to gather PES activists of all ages and backgrounds, from all over Europe. Participants would have a couple of days to get to know each other, exchange ideas and good practices and share their ideas with PES politicians situated at various levels of the EU's institutional system. Such a meeting would be an investment in creating a circle of progressive Europeans who could then act as natural PES ambassadors in societies.
- *Making the most of the time left until the 2024 election*: opening up to direct individual membership in the next few years would enable PES to genuinely involve citizens of socialist or social-democratic views in the 2024 European Parliament campaign. By doing so, the party could move away from fairly technocratic, elitist-style campaigning. In mobilising grassroots activists and utilising the strength of informal contact networks, PES would inject a much-needed dose of energy and fresh

breath into its functioning. This could also change the party's image as an organisation of stagnant decision-makers.

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Bring in the Europarty activists: three alternative models for engaging with grassroots members

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Introduction

Europarties are most likely unknown organisations even among most members or activists of their national member parties. This is not surprising. In European Parliament (EP) elections the party groups of the Europarties remain firmly in the background, and Europarties and the EP groups seldom feature in national media between European elections. This low or almost non-existent grassroots-level presence stands in striking contrast to the strong role of Europarties in the institutions of the European Union (EU). Europarties co-ordinate the positions of their national member parties, particularly before European Council summits, and integrate interests across the Union and beyond. Through their heads of national governments, EP party groups and Commis-

sion portfolios, Europarties are in a powerful position to shape the laws, policies and agenda of the EU.

According to the 'party article' in the Treaty (Article 10, paragraph 4 of the Treaty on European Union), 'Political parties at European level contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union.' However, Europarties are easily perceived as being part of the 'Brussels bubble' that should do more to reach out to civil society and citizens (Van Hecke et al 2018). Europarties have introduced membership for individuals, but in her pioneering study Hertner (2019) showed that Europarties had only very small numbers of individual members, with national member parties often against giving individual members stronger participation rights in terms of leadership selection or policy formulation. Hertner thus argued that Europarties should empower their grassroots activists through granting them real participatory opportunities.

Interestingly, according to Hertner the Party of European Socialists (PES) has in many ways been – or at least was – a forerunner in engaging with individual members, or 'activists' as they are called in PES. Before the 2009 EP elections, PES launched an open consultation process that enabled the activists and other stakeholders to send in their written contributions. The activists clearly appreciated the consultation process as did many MEPs and national member parties, and it resulted in a comprehensive election manifesto. After the 2009 elections PES adopted the 'the PES activists

initiative', whereby an initiative was tabled at the PES presidency if backed by 2.5 percent of activists from at least 15 member parties or affiliated organisations – and the activists were also successful in using the initiative. PES activists can participate informally in PES policy discussions through various online platforms and have a special 'PES Activists Forum'. At the same time PES had not granted activists any real decision-making rights or representation in PES congress or other bodies. Hertner (2019, 497) thus concluded that 'the PES has the highest number of activists and a lively community spreading across Europe, but the PES activists' scheme is only a type of "light membership", as the formal powers of the activists remain very weak.' More worryingly, she also reported that the momentum had been lost as the activists were frustrated with the strong opposition from national member parties that were not willing to give the activists a bigger role inside the Europarty.

Active engagement with grassroots activists involves two major challenges: how to accomplish it (organisation); and how to connect the activities of the individual members to Europarty decision-making (influence). This paper focuses on the former aspect but acknowledges that a basic prerequisite for successful grassroots mobilisation is that the individual members feel that their efforts are not ignored. Hence, whatever the exact participatory arrangement, Europarties should guarantee that the views of the grassroots activists are channelled into their policies – or, at the very least, are debated and voted upon in Europarty organs. Without such a pub-

lic commitment, there is no purpose in reaching out to grassroots activists.

This paper discusses the costs and benefits of investing in a 'bottom-up' approach inside Europarties. It recognises that Europarties face the problem of scale: even democratic innovations such as deliberative panels or online platforms cannot bring all citizens or party members across Europe together. While recognising such practical difficulties, the paper nonetheless argues that offering grassroots activists genuine opportunities for meaningful participation brings clear advantages for Europarties. The second part of the paper puts forward three concrete proposals for connecting with individual members. The concluding discussion summarises and reflects how the changing modes of political participation provide both challenges and possibilities for Europarties.

1. The costs and benefits of involving the activists

It is common to talk about a 'participatory turn' in politics, whereby citizens are no longer content to wait for another four or five years to vote in elections (Pateman 1970; Barber 1984; Menser 2018). Against the backdrop of falling levels of turnout in national elections and diminishing trust in political institutions, public authorities across the world have established various types of participation mechanisms, from citizens' initiatives to 'democratic innovations', an umbrella term covering novel institutions - such as deliberative panels, mini-publics, crowdsourcing, or consultative assemblies

- that directly involve citizens in public decision- making (eg Smith 2009; Setälä and Schiller 2012; Elstub and Escobar 2019). Overall, digital means of communication, social media and various online discussion boards included, have become increasingly important. Individual politicians, political parties, private and public sector actors, and indeed the Commission of the EU have therefore invested resources into online feedback and dialogue channels. There is no scholarly consensus about the effectiveness of such instruments, but they are clearly here to stay and are popular particularly among younger age groups.

Reaching out to the grassroots level is no easy task for Europarties in an era when even national parties are suffering from diminishing memberships and vanishing local branches. Yet, also inside political parties it might be better to talk about changing patterns of participation. National parties have delegated decision-making to ordinary members, for example regarding leadership selection, with some parties even allowing non-members to vote. Parties have lowered barriers for membership, making it easier and less costly to join. Individual members in turn clearly appreciate their increased influence inside the parties. Traditionally it has been assumed that left-wing parties, and leftist persons in general, would be more supportive of inclusive decision-making structures, but parties across the board have introduced reforms empowering ordinary party members (eg Hansen and Saglie 2005; Scarrow 2015; van Haute and Gauja 2015; Scarrow et al 2017; Borz and Janda 2020). Par-

ties have also invested in their online presence and in utilising digital tools in intra-party communication and decision-making. While physical meetings are still needed at different levels of party organisation, parties have introduced a variety of online participatory mechanisms – from digital platforms to online video conferences – and the experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic no doubt will lead to increased use of such online methods. The pandemic period has seen a large number of virtual EU meetings from online European Council summits to hybrid Europarty events. Technically it is therefore easy to bring people together from different corners of the EU. Hence, the question is whether Europarties consider it worth the effort.

Critical voices point out that there is no way of ensuring the representativeness of the activists taking part in the discussions. This is a problem associated more broadly with direct democracy and democratic innovations: those citizens with more at stake or a greater interest in the issue will participate, and not the 'silent majority'. For example, inside Europarties it is conceivable that individuals with more pro-EU attitudes will come forward, as more Eurosceptical persons anticipate that their views would not be appreciated. Another possibility is unrepresentative polarisation: participants will consist primarily of persons from both ends of a policy dimension – for example, voters who are either strongly against or for European integration. However, deliberative experiments have shown that participants often change or moderate their views as the discussions fa-

cilitate better understanding of opposing arguments. National parties or other organised actors can also try to manipulate the discussion for their ends, a strategy often found in connection with referendums and citizens' initiatives. And finally, the outcome of the activists' deliberations may contradict the positions of the Europarties, and this might cause tensions inside the party organisation.

But the biggest question mark concerns the mobilisation of activists. It is very difficult to predict how many will become involved, especially if there is no existing active network of grassroots members. Here a crucial element is information – making sure that potentially interested citizens learn about the mechanism. An equally important challenge is durability: for the participatory instrument to be successful, the persons involved should remain committed to it for a longer time. The best way to achieve this is through ensuring that the views of the activists are taken seriously by the Europarties. Indeed, in the context of local or national politics a major challenge for democratic innovations has been their low impact: politicians have often praised citizens' input without taking on board their recommendations. In addition, activists should be given representation in Europarty organs, with financial rewards offered for those individual members organising the discussions.

However, the positive effects arguably outweigh such critical remarks. Engaging with the grassroots members has at least three main benefits. First, it is an investment in the future. Younger age cohorts appreci-

ate and utilise online participation mechanisms. Out of all the party families, particularly centre-left parties have been struggling to recruit new members, and hence a bottom-up approach would make the Europarties and their national member parties more appealing to younger voters. Second, active consultation of grassroots members would bring about more informed or 'Europeanised' policy-making. Currently the Europarties mainly aggregate the positions of their national member parties, and thus the European dimension does not receive sufficient attention beyond input from members of EU institutions. Through a participatory mechanism bringing together activists from across the EU, the Europarties would receive views and arguments not tied to the positions of the national parties. Here an obvious point of comparison is the way in which the Commission hears a variety of stakeholders when preparing new policies, as otherwise it would be too reliant on information provided by national governments. And third, engaging with the grassroots activists would make the Europarties – as well as their national member parties – organisationally more vibrant and dynamic and increase their presence in the member states.

Beyond such intra-party arguments, it is also from a normative point of view important that elected representatives and parties interact with the citizens between elections (Esaiasson and Narud 2013). National MPs and MEPs maintain contacts with their constituents, but in that context the dialogue takes place between the individual citizen or an interest group and the elected

office-holder. Europarties in turn fulfil a valuable co-ordinating function: they promote the sharing and exchange of information, knowledge and experience, and play an important role in facilitating and institutionalising networks. However, until now such networking has been almost exclusively limited to national and European political elites. Europarties should clearly do more to 'contribute to forming European political awareness and to expressing the will of citizens of the Union' – to cite the 'party article' referred to above. But as argued in the next section, much depends also on the attitudes of national member parties towards such bottom-up mechanisms.

2. Designing mechanisms for grassroots participation

This section puts forward three alternative models for engaging with grassroots activists. These proposals should be viewed as 'rough ideas' that deliberately do not go into details. The models are summarised in Table 1.

The Conference on the Future of Europe model obviously draws its inspiration from the conference with the same name that was officially launched on Europe Day, 9 May, in 2021 and is scheduled to run until spring 2022. This model is based on continuous deliberations, both within individual member states and transnationally, with also regular interaction between the activists and the Europarty. The outcomes could be a variety of position papers and reports, perhaps drawing on sur-

veys of activists, that are available publicly and brought to the attention of the Europarty organs. This model is the most demanding both in terms of organisation and input from the activists, and clearly requires a committed network of grassroots members. Hence, it is important that unnecessary obstacles for participation are removed so that the process is as inclusive as possible. The same consideration applies also to the two other models.

The *party congress model* is geared towards the congresses of the Europarty, with the activists involved in shaping the agenda and decisions of the congresses through various position papers and initiatives. Again, deliberations could take place within member states and transnationally, and activists should be ensured representation in the Europarty congress. The *campaign model* would focus on the EP elections, with the activists contributing to the programme of the Europarty – and perhaps to the programmes of national member parties – whilst also carrying out more traditional campaign work such as distributing information and campaign material or organising events. In this model the crucial element is making sure that the positions and ideas of the activists are not ignored in the final versions of the programmes. Activists should thus be included in any working groups preparing the programmes.

The models can be evaluated independently but can also be seen as different dimensions of a more comprehensive strategy for reaching out to the activists. Each of them emphasises online debates, but also envisages

Table 1. Three alternative models for engaging with grass-roots activists.

	The Conference on the Future of Europe model	Party congress model	Campaign model
Partici-pants	Activists (+ politicians)	Activists (+ politicians)	Activists (+ politicians)
Organisa-tion	Deliberations within member states and transnationally – activists also brought together periodically to Brussels to interact with the Europarty	Deliberations within member states and transnationally – activists also present in the Europarty congress	Deliberations within member states and transnationally – activists present in the drafting and adoption of the Europarty election programme
Timing	Continuous	Emphasis on Europarty congresses	Emphasis on EP elections
Outcomes	Position papers, surveys of members, reports, etc that are available publicly and discussed by Europarty organs	Position papers, initiatives, etc – shaping the agenda and decision-making of the Europarty congress	Shaping the Europarty election programme (preferably also inside national parties), and contributing to the campaigns of national member parties and the Europarty through campaign work

activists' presence in Brussels. Whichever organisational model is adopted, it is essential that the outcomes of the deliberations are not ignored by the Europarties. The most transparent way of achieving this would be that the positions of the activists are debated and voted upon in Europarty organs where the activists would also be represented.

In terms of participants and organisation, it is a question of finding a balance between self- organi-

sation and top-down co-ordination. Europarties would have to take organisational responsibility for the deliberations. To be sure, one option is delegating the design and implementation of the deliberations exclusively to the activists themselves, but even then the Europarties would need to appoint someone as a designated person for overseeing the process – co-ordinating discussions, maintenance of digital platforms, translation help, and just as a contact point in Brussels. Ideally, the Europarties should have a staff member, or maybe a co-ordinating team, for interacting with the activists. The political foundations could also be involved in managing the processes, but it is important that the activists have a direct link to the Europarties so that they feel belonging to the same organisation. It is probable that co-ordinating the debates would not require many organisational resources, either in terms of working hours or funding. A potential solution is of course delegating public mobilisation to national member parties that would organise debates and provide venues for citizen participation (Wolkenstein 2020, 138). However, in all three models the fundamental goal is to facilitate transnational or 'European' discussions by bringing together activists from as many different countries as possible. Activists could also include politicians (national MPs, MEPs, Europarty leaderships, etc), interest groups and other stakeholders such as the parties' youth organisations in the debates, but only to the extent they see it necessary. The Irish Constitutional Convention of 2012-2014 which brought together citizens and parlia-

mentarians managed to avoid dominance by politicians (Farrell et al 2020), and inside Europarties it is also paramount that the participatory mechanism is designed for and run by the activists.

Another important aspect would be the commitment of national member parties. While they might be lukewarm about such bottom-up approaches, particularly if the parties are internally divided over the EU, national parties would themselves also benefit from active engagement with supporters. It would make national parties more aware of what their grassroots members think of European issues, and overall make the party organisations more democratic – an aspect which again appeals particularly to younger age groups. The activists could also do important campaign work in EP elections, and this might spill over to national elections or local-level activities. Moreover, if a national party is initially opposed to the idea, activists could put pressure on their parties from the inside. In any case, national parties should not be veto-players: their co-operation is important, but Europarties can also bypass national parties and reach directly the grassroots activists.

3. Concluding discussion

Across Europe citizens, civil society organisations and interest groups are demanding better opportunities for political participation. They want their voices to be heard between elections, and gradually both national and EU decision-makers have established new participatory instruments, such as citizens' initiatives, delibera-

tive experiments, citizens' consultations, and online dialogue channels. However, the progress has been quite uneven and sporadic, with much variation between and within individual EU member states. On the European level, the Conference on the Future of Europe represents the most ambitious effort so far at reaching the citizens, but in general political elites have received criticism for not recognising the potential of newer, more direct democratic mechanisms (Alemanno and Organ 2021)

Particularly younger age cohorts are critical of existing channels of representative democracy. Younger people are also less likely to join political parties and to vote in elections, and hence investment into (online) participation instruments is also an investment in the future. In the EU context such instruments face obvious practical challenges, not least lack of a common language, but previous consultations organised by the Commission and various civil society activists show that EU-level deliberative processes can be implemented meaningfully. If younger people are not eager to join parties, then parties should re-evaluate not just their ideological messages, but also their internal decision-making structures. Political parties are of course democratic organisations, with specific roles assigned to different party organs. Hence, when a party reforms its internal decision-making processes it inevitably means changes to the existing balance of power. However, establishing stronger participation opportunities for grassroots activists should not be viewed as a threat to existing party machinery. The participatory mechanisms outlined

in this paper would not involve any major transfers of power inside the Europarties. Instead, activists can contribute towards a more vibrant, bottom-up party organisation and their viewpoints can improve the quality of party decision-making.

For the Europarties, the biggest question mark concerns the mobilisation of grassroots members. As argued in this paper, much depends on ensuring beforehand that the views of the activists are taken seriously. This is an essential prerequisite for successfully reaching out to the citizens and for making the participatory instrument durable. Europarties should also make the processes as inclusive as possible, so that 'outsiders' can join in the discussions – and subsequently perhaps become actual party members. Both the Europarty and its national member parties would need to invest in informing potentially interested citizens about the mechanisms. For the national member parties, the payoff would be a more active grassroots network that could spill over to national and local politics.

The three alternative models presented in this paper should be viewed as rough sketches or preliminary ideas for engaging with grassroots members. *The Conference on the Future* model is the most demanding to implement, but also the one with the potentially greatest long-term impact. It would provide a continuous mechanism for involving the activists, whereas the *party congress model* and the *campaign model* are geared towards events held every 2-3 years (congress) or five years (EP elections). Yet, the latter two models can also

be seen as complementary, and if adopted together would involve the grassroots activists in the formulation of party policy both during and outside of elections. The consultation process leading to the adoption of the PES manifesto for the 2009 EP elections certainly shows how the activists can be mobilized with positive results. Ultimately decisions about intra- party democracy and giving the activists a stronger role inside the party organisation reflect the values held by European and national party elites. Do they support a more participatory and deliberative version of democracy or is it enough that people can vote in regular elections and join parties? Considering that centre-left parties are particularly struggling to recruit new members, paying more attention to the activists would be a 'progressive' investment into the future.

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Encourage the stakeholders: pursue Spitzencandidates' system and improve intra-parliamentary cooperation

Parties and coalitions in the European Parliament and the parliamentarisation of the EU's political system

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Introduction

The question of how democratic the European Union (EU) really is has been at the centre of attention amongst scholars and practitioners for a long time. As the EU's competences have expanded, the European citizenry at large has also become increasingly concerned with its 'democratic deficit'. For a long time, it was felt that the key to a more democratic Europe was an increase of the powers of the directly elected European Parliament (EP). Since the first direct elections of 1979, the powers of the EP have certainly been expanded, but 'even if the Parliament has powers formally assigned to

it, it also needs to have a democratic mandate to use those powers and the organizational will to overcome the problem of strategic coordination among a large number of individual representatives'. According to the model provided by contemporary democracies, political parties are the instrument through which such coordination is achieved. By presenting the voters with alternative visions or programmes, they channel individual preferences and 'provide the structure within which compromises can be negotiated and coalitions first built and then enforced' (Bardi, Katz and Mair 2015, 127). A more powerful European Parliament would make for more powerful and also more Europeanised parties as well.

However, the expectation that in the directly elected EP a system of EU-level party government would be created was not fulfilled. The main limit of the powers of the EP and of the parties that operate in it is the lack of effective political control over the EU executive, divided as it is between the Commission and the European Council. To be sure, under the current constitutional configuration of EU institutions' relations, EP control over the Council cannot be established. But it can be surmised that if the Parliament's powers should be increased so as to include the ability to choose the president of the Commission, something not incompatible with the EU's institutional architecture, 'there would be a focus for the construction of real European parties. Each could either nominate its own Europe-wide candidate for the presidency, or else *join in a coalition with other Euro-*

pean parties to support a joint Europe-wide candidate [emphasis added]. If the popularly endorsed candidate were then elected to head the Commission without the nomination or approval of the member governments, real Europe-level democracy would follow' (Bardi, Katz and Mair 2015, 127).

This position clearly recommends a strategy aimed at the transformation of the EU into a parliamentary democracy. But European political parties potentially capable of promoting a working European political space could also be created by making the EU system presidential. This would no doubt happen if the president of the EU's executive, most likely the Commission, were elected directly by a Europe-wide electorate. Strong and focused European parties would be necessary to nominate candidates with a Europe-wide appeal and to organise and run a Europe-level electoral campaign for the presidential election. Directly elected presidents of the Commission would be accountable to the European electorate, to be confirmed or voted out of office at the end of their term. This would also enhance democratic dynamics through the alternation of political majorities in government.

To be fully operational, both the parliamentary and the presidential options would demand reforms of the EU treaties. For example, transforming the EU into a presidential system would require, among other things, concentrating most if not all executive functions in one institution the head of which would be elected by a Europe-wide electorate. Whether the president of

the Commission or the president of the European Council should have this distinction is also something that would have to be determined by the reform. And a formal parliamentarisation of the EU system would require depriving the member states of the power to designate the head of the EU executive and giving it to the European Parliament. But with the outcome and the possible guidelines of the Conference on the Future of Europe still far from being clearly outlined, sweeping reforms of the treaties such as these are not as yet foreseeable.

In this paper I will try to argue that, in the absence of foreseeable treaty reforms, more significant steps are possible in the direction of a parliamentarisation of the EU than of its presidentialisation. Most importantly, this could result from initiatives of the European parties themselves. The relationship between EU political and constitutional progress and the development of European political parties is somewhat circular. As the European level of politics has increased in relevance, so have European political parties. It seems possible for the parties to take initiatives apt to enhance EP politicisation and powers.

1. Parliamentarisation vs presidentialisation of the EU Commission

As our discussion has suggested so far, the shortcomings of the EP's powers are multifaceted. According to the treaties, the EP formally elects, but in practice simply approves, the Commission and its president, who are actually selected by the member states. Moreover, the Commission is not 'elected' by the EP on the

basis of a proper political programme to which it can be held accountable. If the EP should be placed in a position to approve a political programme in support of the EU Commission, the process leading to EU parliamentarisation would make significant progress. Moreover, the approval of a common programme is something European parties can do within the current institutional set-up. This makes the parliamentary solution to the elimination or at least reduction of the EU's democratic deficit more realistic than the presidential one.

Since the Lisbon Treaty came into force on 1 December 2009, there have been no significant initiatives aimed at further constitutional reform of the EU. Thus, a debate on whether it is possible to improve EU democracy under the extant constitutional arrangements has developed. The decision made by the European political parties to appoint *Spitzenkandidaten* prior to the 2014 EP elections and again in 2019 was one of the possible solutions that came out of this debate. At the time it was argued that this move could foster a presidentialisation of the EU without an extensive reform of the EU treaties. Andrew Glencross (2014) was one of the scholars who commented on the initiative and felt that the designation of a president of the Commission by the political group that would get the most votes in EP elections 'could be understood as a parallel to the use of direct democracy in Switzerland or a directly elected President in the United States to grant citizens a more direct connection with fundamental constitutional change' although 'this form of "presidentialisa-

tion" in the Commission's case [was] unlikely to bring about 'bottom up' constitutional agency overnight'.

The main problem with this interpretation, as Glencross himself realised, was that 'the *Commission President is not directly elected* [emphasis added], which precludes a personal connection with the EU electorate, while the presidency itself is not an office with the prerogatives needed to reconfigure the EU constitutional order'. However, presidentialisation could still occur, the argument went, if the 'cross-national, partisan fight for the Commission President' with "citizens" initiatives for generating policy proposals and the early warning mechanism that allows national parliaments to challenge legislative proposals' should prove to be 'ways of mobilising citizens around an increasingly politicised EU'.

As we know from the experience of the Juncker presidency, hopes for the creation of a strong, more direct, link between the EU executive and the EU electorate or also the national parliaments along the lines outlined above never materialised. Moreover, in 2019 there was a return to the appointment of the president of the Commission by the member states to the detriment of the best-placed *Spitzenkandidat* in the EP elections, Manfred Weber, who had been designated by the EPP (European People's Party), the European party with the most votes in the 2019 EP elections. To be sure, the new Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, eventually chosen by an agreement amongst the member states, also belonged to the EPP. But the practice to appoint a president from the win-

ning party was already in place and at least informally used for the appointment of José Manuel Barroso by the European Council.

So, the only real manifestation of a presidentialisation of the EU system seems to be due to provisions in the Treaty of Nice that 'gave preference to the coherence and efficiency of the Commission decision-making processes over collegiality, shifting towards a more "presidential" regime' (European Parliament 2014). While these norms certainly enhance the independence and power of the Commission's president, they do not necessarily strengthen European parties and hardly contribute to the improvement of EU democracy. On the contrary, they pose the need for reforms apt to make the now more powerful president effectively accountable to the European people. Any such reforms require a formal revision of the treaties.

On the other hand, and as suggested above, prospects for steps towards a parliamentarisation of the EU system under the current treaties appear to be more promising. Again, the *Spitzenkandidaten* strategy can be placed at the centre of this discussion. In a comprehensive own initiative report by Jo Leinen and Danuta Maria Hübner approved by the EP in November 2015, the nomination of *Spitzenkandidaten* by European political parties and the creation of a European constituency in EP elections were advocated. The idea was that:

But introducing transnational lists so comprehensively would require a treaty revision and this possibility does not appear to be likely to materialise any time

soon. Therefore, this aspect will not be addressed in this chapter. Moreover, the failure of the *Spitzenkandidaten* approach in 2019 would seem to indicate that any hope for a parliamentarisation of the EU through the strategy outlined above is for the time being unrealistic. This however does not necessarily imply that the *Spitzenkandidaten* approach developed by European political parties should be altogether discarded as a means to implement a project aimed at politicising the EU. On the contrary, it remains a potentially effective instrument for the further parliamentarisation and ultimately democratisation of the EU's political system.

Presenting lead candidates is something that European political parties can do of their own accord without going against any EU treaty disposition or other rules regulating EP elections. But most of the other measures that could be adopted to make this strategy more effective, such the institution of transna-

In this joint constituency, the party lists would be headed by the European lead candidates. An electoral system only consisting of transnational lists would decisively impact the European party system and foster the parliamentary nature of the EU concerning the inner working of the EP. With the parliamentary groups and the European political parties matching, the parliamentary groups' cohesion would increase, a real division between a parliamentary coalition and opposition might emerge and the chain of delegation between decision-makers and citizens would be improved. Whereas the coalition would elect the Commission, which would be closely linked to the parliamentary majority, the parliamentary minority would be mostly excluded from EU decision-making and be responsible for controlling the Commission (Müller Gómez and Wessels 2016, 15)

tional lists headed by the *Spitzenkandidaten* themselves, would require the involvement of other actors, mostly the national governments, to carry out the necessary reforms. However, there are two potential improvements that the political parties can devise and enact with no need for further external approval.

2. Europeanising EP electoral ballots

The first potential improvement, as already suggested in the Leinen-Hübner report, is the harmonisation of EP elections ballot papers with the inclusion of European political party symbols and even lead candidates' names. Council Decision 994/2018 indeed allows the member states to include in the European Parliament's elections ballot papers the names or the logos of the European political parties to which the respective national parties are affiliated. At least some political parties have shown a propensity to go beyond what the norms explicitly allowed in the 2014 and in the 2019 EP elections, when other 'EU-relevant actors' such as European Parliament party groups' *Spitzenkandidaten* names and even 'non-formally recognised European transnational movements and organisations' were included in paper ballots. A recent study has shown 'that in both 2014 and 2019, the most prominent European-level actors on electoral ballots are the EuPPs, in line with the recommendations of the new Article 3b (12 cases in 2014 and 11 cases in 2019)'. However, the Europeanisation of electoral ballots, as measured by the inclusion of Europarty logos and/or names, is still remarkably low, as only seven to

eight percent of all ballots include Europarty or EP party group names and/or logos and only one Italian party, *The Other Europe with Tsipras*, in 2014 included the *Spitzenkandidat*'s name (Cicchi 2021, 19–22).

The potential impact on the elections of this practice is also very low: in 2014 only 79 MEPs from parties displaying EU party/party group logos or names were actually elected; the 2019 figure, 42, was even lower. Among the party families, the Socialists displayed the highest number of inclusions in the ballots of either the Europarty or the party group names (seven in 2014 and four in 2019) followed by GUE/NGL (Gauche unitaire européenne/Nordic Green Left) with respectively two and five occurrences. The EPP figures (four and two) were surprisingly low (Cicchi 2021, 22–3). These disappointing findings notwithstanding, the further harmonisation of ballot papers appears to be very desirable and is technically possible under the current, nationally diversified, electoral rules in at least 18 member states (Bardi and Cicchi 2015, 28). Adopting this strategy in only 2/3 of the member states would not be entirely satisfactory but it would go some lengths towards the European politicisation of the elections. As things stand now, the situation is actually reversed: in only nine member states are electoral ballots 'Europeanised' with 'only Ireland and Italy hav[ing] around half of the parties with European references on the ballot' (Cicchi 2021, 24.).

3. Political programmes and coalitions in the European Parliament

A more effective step towards EU parliamentarisation, as has been mentioned already, could come from the adoption by European political parties of political programmes in support of the *Spitzenkandidaten*, especially if this could be done before EP elections. This is something that is compatible with the extant EU constitutional framework. European political parties can already draft and approve a political programme if they wish. Electoral platforms and manifestos, albeit too generic to be characterised as political programmes, have always accompanied EP electoral campaigns. They would have to be made more detailed as to the description of the future Commission's policy objectives and to the instruments to achieve them. Naturally they would also have to be made binding for the leading candidates who would have to be held accountable in case of victory in the elections. Given that the leading candidates are designated by the parties, this could be done simply with instruments of internal party discipline.

The main problem with this idea is that no European political party is in a position to command a majority in the EP. Even when the EPP's *Spizenkandidat* Jean-Claude Juncker was elected president of the Commission in 2014, the approval had to come from a coalition of parties on the basis of an impromptu post-election programme. As a result, the EP was never, even informally, in political control of the Commission. For this to

be possible, and for the president of the Commission to be effectively and not only formally accountable to the European electorate, a political programme would have to be agreed upon, preferably before the elections. This of course also means that a coalition of parties, capable of producing a common political programme and choosing a common candidate, would have to be potentially identified, if not formed, before the elections.

Thus, the *Spitzenkandidaten* strategy would have to be relaunched with a carefully planned strategy aimed at:

- creating a viable majority in the Parliament after the election to support the winning *Spitzenkandidat*; and
- developing a political programme capable of guiding the EU Commission for the five years of its term.

Both objectives can be seen as elements favouring a parliamentarisation of the EU. Ideally, both would require the building of a coalition before the beginning of the 2024 campaign. In the EP's history there have been many instances when which political groups have converged to pursue common objectives. Cross-political-group arrangements for the election of EP presidents provide a typical case in point. Such arrangements have obvious organisational motivations, as they are necessary for finding workable solutions for the day-to-day functioning of the EP. But forming coalitions capable of expressing a majority in the Parliament with a common programme in support of the EU executive requires a much more solid common ground which needs to be

found and cultivated. Two analytically different, but not necessarily poltically alternative, types of coalition are technically possible:

- those based on ideological proximity and value affinity; and
- those based on a common vision of Europe and European constitutional reform.

Coalitions based on ideological proximity and value affinity

Coalitions of this kind have the advantage of allowing a more transparent and democratic means of candidate selection, such as through coalition primaries, if so desired. Primaries are a potentially divisive instrument as they inherently favour the reciprocal distancing of the competing parties. It is important that they are engineered to favour a re-convergence of the potential coalition members, once the task of selecting a candidate has been performed. In this case, pre-primary understandings (on the attribution of positions and/or on concessions on the programme or parts thereof) would have to be reached. This would also help entice smaller would-be coalition members with no hope of seeing their candidates win the primaries.

The other advantage of such coalitions would come from the programme, which could probably be very specific, detailed and far-reaching, as it would be likely that serious divergences amongst the parties in the coalition would exist on fewer policy areas than for a coalition based exclusively on a common vision of Europe. Cer-

tainly, if ideologically based coalitions could be formed, a very important step towards the full parliamentarisation of the EU system would be taken.

Coalitions based on a common vision of Europe

Such coalitions have the advantage of being based on the long-established co-operation between the largest political groups of the European Parliament, the PES (Party of European Socialists), the EPP, and the ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe) – now Renew Europe. This co-operation of the political groups making up the 'core' of the EP party system was recently extended, at least, since 2009, to the Greens. EP party system core co-operation affords sizeable numerical majorities within the EP and has long been recognised as a crucial asset of EP politics. But a further strengthening of the understanding between these groups would be necessary to pursue a revamped *Spitzenkandidaten* strategy.

This would in turn imply forming a more consolidated alliance, based on a common programme, to support a common candidate in the 2024 EP elections. The programme could be centred on policies on which a sufficient convergence of positions already exists across the political groups and eventually extended gradually to other policy areas. This would permit the core European political parties to form a coalition with common policy orientations and goals while at the same maintaining their political and ideological identities. As for the selection of the would-be candidate, a procedure involving comprehensive negotiations on specific policy aspects

and eventually prospective rotations amongst the European political parties of candidates across time should be preferred over more direct procedures such as primaries. In this case the inevitable competitive distancing would most likely occur in the areas in which the potential coalition partners are least compatible. Finding a new political harmony after the primaries could be for them extremely difficult.

Sufficient convergence for building an ideologically based coalition seems to exist among parties of the moderate Centre and Left of the EP's party system. This could materialise if the S&D should attempt to build a coalition with ideologically less distant groups like Renew and the Greens. The main problem of such a coalition is that it would be numerically unfeasible in the current Parliament with a total of 317 MEPs. A Centre-Left coalition would have sufficient numbers if it could be extended to the radical Left. In this case the total number of seats of the four parties, 356, would give them a slim absolute majority that could be marginally extended by including a small number of non-attached MEPs. Conversely, no combination of Centre-Right parties, including the EPP but also populist and sovereignist groups, as well as some non-attached MEPs, could have a majority in the current EP. Be that as it may, both coalitions would be rather widespread on the ideological spectrum as they would have to include all groups, from moderate to extreme, on either side of the Centre. As such they would not be much more homogenous than one based on a common vision of Europe.

This is likely to hold even if we anticipate that the 2024 elections will return a differently composed Parliament. It is in fact unlikely that cohesive majorities will emerge on either side of the political spectrum. More importantly, in view of the likely distribution of seats in the next Parliament, which should be in any event rather evenly divided between Left and Right even if a majority on either side should be possible, strategies towards the building of ideologically based coalitions before the elections would be very risky and ill-advised. EP elections are important events for the consolidation of EP party group image and identity, especially at member state level. Forming coalitions with a programme, necessarily based on compromise, in support of a candidate that would possibly belong to a different, albeit ideologically close, political group would go counter to that objective. The trade-off would not be worthwhile, considering the coalition's likely numerical difficulties in obtaining a comfortable majority in the elections. However, the option of a coalition based on ideological affinity should not be discounted, as it might present itself as a serious option if the elections should return more decisive results than we can anticipate at this time.

For the time being however, for the main political groups of the EU party system's core the possibility of building a coalition based on a common vision of Europe remains the most viable and desirable. For the PES it would permit an understanding with the EPP, something that would greatly enhance the likelihood of

obtaining a large enough majority. Either way, a process leading to identifying the main points of a potential common political programme on which to build the candidates' electoral platforms needs to be started as soon as possible even if the winning *Spitzenkandidat* should be chosen only after the electoral results are in. This would be an acceptable compromise between the optimal but impervious option of a designated candidate with a pre-ordained majority in Parliament and a solid political programme and one who would be forced to put together a makeshift majority and improvise a programme after her/his appointment, as is the case with Council-appointed EU Commission presidents. It would also be a decisive step in the direction of an albeit informal parliamentarisation of the EU's political system.

Conclusions

It is well established in the literature that parliamentary groups are one of the three organisational components of political parties, the other two being the membership and the party's central office (Katz and Mair; 1993). The EP political groups are the parliamentary component of parties at EU level (Bardi 2020), As such they are considered by many essential actors in the enhancement of EU democracy. The analysis in this paper indicates that they could serve this purpose best by seeking, as a first option, a common ideological ground. The coalitions that could be built on such premises would no doubt boast strong cohesiveness and policy convergence. Perhaps more importantly, such a strategy would

end the long-standing consociational practices and help inaugurate an era of alternating majorities in the EP, something that is essential in a democratic system, be it parliamentary or presidential. However, it might be still impossible, as was the case in 2019, for any coalition to have the necessary numbers in the EP to approve a possible winning candidate. Thus, forming a coalition with groups sharing the same vision of Europe promises to be a more realistic objective. Given the current make-up of the EP, which is unlikely to undergo sweeping changes in 2024, such a coalition could provide a strong Europeanist majority in the EP against Eurosceptic groups, moving EU politics closer to a proper parliamentary dialectic based on a more politicised party system.

Policy recommendations

The *Spitzenkandidaten* strategy needs to be relaunched with a strategy aimed at:

- creating a viable majority in the Parliament after the election to support the winning *Spitzenkandidat*; and
- developing a political programme capable of guiding the EU Commission for the five years of its term.

This can be done only by forming a coalition in the EP. Two different types of coalition are technically possible:

- those based on ideological proximity and value affinity; and
- those based on a common vision of Europe and European constitutional reform.

Either way, a process leading to identifying the main points of a potential common political programme on which to build the candidates' electoral platforms needs to be started as soon as possible even if the winning *Spitzenkandidat* should be chosen only after the electoral results. This entails: a) studying in detail the positions of other compatible political groups in terms of ideology and/or vision of Europe on crucial policy questions (economy, health, environment and unemployment are currently of highest concern among the European publics according to surveys but the choice needs to fine-tuned); and b) preparing alternative political strategies, also by sounding out potential partners for different coalitions, to be chosen and implemented after the elections depending on the results.

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Why national democracies need a strong European Parliament

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The European Union is a multi-state, multi-democracy, multi-people political order that exercises powers from beyond the state without itself being a state. So, student essays have a point when they begin with Jacques Delors' joke about the Union being an Unidentified Political Object. But how should the Union be democratically controlled? And would any plausible answer make it even more of an Unidentified Political Object? That seems to be the direction of travel. The Union is not just unique amongst bodies that exercise power from beyond the state in having its own directly elected parliament. That unique creation has, in turn, been empowered to the point at which it now has extensive co-decision of the Union's laws, budgets and the political leadership of the Commission.

Nor do national governments even pretend to have a monopoly representation of their own publics in Union decisions. Rather, they famously claim through Ar-

ticle 10 of the Treaties that the Union is not just based on representative democracy. Better still, it is based on two forms of representative democracy: one that works through the representation of publics by their own elected governments in the (European) Council; a second that works through representatives citizens themselves choose, independently of governments, to represent them in the co-deciding powers of the European Parliament (EP). So, the EU has the broad design of a compound democracy (Fabbrini 2007), albeit it is something of an unidentifiable political object in compounding democracies that are themselves democratic states. As long as members remain members, the idea that they have constituted a new order 'for the benefit of which' they have 'limited their sovereign rights' (CJEU in Van Gand en Loos, 1963) may apply to the Union's representative system and not just its law.

Yet, critics (Majone 2005) are not impressed. In their view, attempts to ensure the democratic control of the Union through a directly elected EP have been one huge mistake of institutional design. Democracy requires a state. Democracy requires a people. The European Union has neither. Hence, the idea that the European Union (EU) could develop its own system of democratic representation – that is then compounded together with control of the Union through national democracies – has, to critics, been more of a folly than an act of originality.

To those critics, a directly elected EP has merely produced a 'Potemkin parliament'; or, in other words, an illusion of how citizens can control the authoring, amend-

ment and administration of EU laws through representatives they themselves elect. Without a people that sees itself as a democratic people (demos), European Union elections have failed to stimulate a competition for the people's vote (Schattsneider 1960) structured around choices relevant to the exercise of the Union's own powers. The EP is elected in second-order contests (Reif and Schmitt 1980) that have little to do with the EU, the EP or what anyone does in the EP. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are, therefore, sheltered from much linkage between their chances of re-election and their own record in the last parliament or their own promises for the next parliament.

Yet anxious to please national parties who control their careers, MEPs form just the kind of supranational parliament that might be expected of a Europe of cartel parties (Katz and Mair 1995). In place of choice, contestation and publicly visible debate, MEPs are preoccupied with building grand cross-party coalitions amongst themselves and grand cross-institutional coalitions with the Commission and Council. The EP has become a secluded arena of legislation by secretive trilogues and early agreements with the Commission and Council. All that risks absorbing the EP into the Union's technocracy at cost to restless and critical forms of public debate. Continuous interaction between representatives and represented is 'limited by low visibility' and understanding of 'affiliations' to 'European parties' (European Parliament [Hübner/Leinen Report]2015). Without a competition for the people's vote that has enough to

do with the EU and EP, a Europe of parties is at risk of becoming self-referential and self-serving, using for its own purposes those powers of the EP that are supposed to allow voters ways of influencing EU policy and law (Bartolini 2005).

Worse than a mistake, all the foregoing risks domination. Critics go on to argue that to attempt a democratic politics at the Union level peopled by Euro-citizens, Euro-parties, a European Parliament and Euro-media participating, aggregating, compromising and deliberating together to make binding decisions is to assume what is in question: namely, that a shared democracy at the Union level can add legitimacy or even be legitimate at all. The decision-rules that form the core of what the Union takes to be its own representative system – qualified majority in a Council representing national democracies and co-decision with a Parliament representing citizens – assume that a Parliament purporting to represent a non-existent democratic people or *demos* can legitimately bind the real *demoi* of member state democracies (Majone 2005, 25). Such an imposition risks being a source of democratic deficit rather than a solution to it.

Even accepting that the Union needs to be democratically controlled, it simply does not follow that it needs to be a democracy, as opposed to a body that can be controlled by its component democracies. So, critics might conclude, rather than perpetuating an illusion that the Union can be legitimated by directly elected representative institutions and democratic politics of its own,

the Union needs to 'come out' as a system that really depends on its member state democracies for legitimation. As Richard Bellamy (2019, 12) puts that argument, the problem is not a democratic deficit but a democratic disconnect. The Union cannot be in deficit to some ideal of representative democracy it was never feasible, desirable or necessary it should attain. But it could be better connected to its member state democracies. On that interpretation, the future of Europe debate should call time on legitimation and democratisation strategies that have focused since the 1980s on empowering the EP. Instead, better ways should be found of involving member state democracies in the democratic control of the Union; and of creating better opportunities for each member state public to share in the democratic control of the Union through their own national democracies.

That argument has one great strength and one great weakness. Its strength is in supposing that the Union remains in need of significant legitimation by member state democracies. Its weakness is in failing to understand how better participation and control by member state democracies also requires a strong EP. I start with the continued importance of legitimating the Union in part through its member state democracies. Even a fully federal European Union would be one in which the legitimacy of the national and European levels presuppose one another. Consider the long and demanding set of conditions that may be needed for representative democracy to work. They might include: a) freedoms of speech and association; b) free and fair elections; c) ap-

pointment of leading legislature and executive positions by popular vote; d) a form of political competition that allows voters to control the political system; e) a civil society in which all groups have equal opportunity to organise to influence the polity; f) a public sphere in which all opinions have equal access to public debate; and g) a defined *demos* (or democratic people) with agreement on who should have votes and voice in the making of decisions binding on all.

Achieving all those conditions simultaneously may be hard for the EU, given that it is a multi-*demos*, non-state political system. The capacity of the state to concentrate power, resources and legal enforcement has been useful in in all kinds of ways to democracy: in ensuring that the decisions of democratic majorities are carried out; in guaranteeing rights needed for democracy; in drawing the boundaries of defined political communities; and in motivating voters and elites to participate in democratic political competition for the control of an entity which manifestly affects their needs and values. Key ingredients and infrastructures of democratic representation – parties, organised interests, social movements, parliaments and elections – have only developed patchily beyond the state. Nowhere are those elements so fully and evenly developed beyond the state that they fit together to form a complete system of representation in the same way as their equivalents within the state.

Yet, any need for beyond-state bodies to draw legitimacy from democratic states may be more than a second-best solution in an imperfect world where it is

hard to reproduce conditions for democracy beyond the state. Citizens may value existing democratic states and communities. As Jürgen Habermas (2012) has argued, citizens may value, and seek to preserve, the achievements of a democratic-constitutional-welfare state in which each of those hyphenated terms depends on the other.

At first sight legitimation by member state democracies is amply provided by the intimate participation of elected member state governments in Union decisions from conception to implementation. Governments do not just retain collective control (Lindseth 2010). They also retain remarkable levels of individual control. Voting in the Council of Ministers demonstrates how far the Union strives for the agreement of all its member states to all its decisions, even where qualified majority voting is possible (Mattila and Lane 2001). Once made, Union decisions are often further adapted in real-time to what member states are willing and able to implement on the ground (Sabel and Zeitlin 2010). All that, moreover, is a structural necessity. The Union can do no other than strive for the highest possible agreement of its member state governments, given that the Union depends on the continuous, active co-operation of member states, not least to implement on the ground.

Yet, control by elected national governments is not, of course, control by national democracies. Collective oversight by national governments (Lindseth 2010, 12) is what others see as executive domination of Union decisions to the exclusion of public contestation, debate or

parliamentary supervision. It risks substituting technocratic management of problems between states for democratic politics within states (Habermas 2012 and 2015). Optimism that national parliaments can then scrutinise how their national governments contribute to Union decisions arguably gets power relationships the wrong way around. In many systems governments control their parliaments. National executives may even practise forms of 'reverse agency' (Bohman 2007, 7). Instead of supervising international bodies on behalf of their publics, governments may use international bodies to take decisions in ways their own publics and parliaments find hard to control. Hence, Habermas' complaint that euro-crisis decisions were dominated by a 'self-authorising European Council … confined to heads of governments' who – far from being supervised by national parliaments – undertook to 'organise majorities in their own national parliaments under threat of sanctions' (2012, viii) for failing to deliver those majorities. Joe Weiler (1997, 274) noted long ago that the Council's participation in legislation reconstitutes the executive branch of each member state as part of the legislature at the European level.

The close involvement of national governments in Union decisions is a part of what needs justification, and not just a part of what can provide representation and legitimacy. The Union changes the very statehood of its member state democracies. To be a member state of the EU is to be a different kind of state (Bickerton 2012). Even the core powers (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2014) of member states are exercised in ways that are shaped

by their membership of the Union. The EU changes the way in which its member states rule, even where it does not itself rule. What needs legitimation, then, is not just the Union itself. Rather it is the entire structure of power relations shaped by Union membership. That includes those powers and practices of member states that are reconfigured by membership: notably, the huge empowerment of national executives through their active everyday participation in Union decisions; and their making of some of the rules by which they coerce their publics through a process of shared law-making that is quite different in its powers, procedures and participants to law-making within single democracies.

Part of what is disastrously wrong with executive domination is that there has be to *some* parliamentary representation and control, whether at the national or European levels, or some combination of the two. The EU is nothing if not a huge undertaking in shared law-making. Parliaments have an indispensable role in 'norming of laws' by specifying the exact obligations, values and rights laws should observe. Only parliaments can ensure: **(a)** that representatives elected on a basis of one person, one vote can **(b)** test justifications for laws during law-making itself within **(c)** a public forum where all views can be tested in relation to one another (Mill 1972 [1861], 239), all (**d**) within an institution that can subsequently scrutinise, control and even sanction the application of those laws (Habermas 1996, 171).

So, if the Union needs some legitimation by its member state democracies, and if the intimate partici-

pation of national governments in EU decisions is not enough and even a risk of executive domination, there is presumably a need for legitimation by the wider democratic politics of each member state. That, though, will itself require a strong directly elected EP. Before discussing why, a few more words are needed about the EP as a form of representation.

What is, perhaps, a little unfortunate with the Article 10 formulation of dual representation through the EP and (European) Council is that, to some degree, the EP is itself a form of dual representation. For sure, it is primarily organised into European party groups which bring together at the Union level the mainly left-right ideologies and party families found in most member states. However, the practices of the EP mean that it is also a representation of its 200 or so national party delegations (Ringe 2010). The groups depend on the disciplines of the national party delegations for their own cohesion. They attempt to decide voting instructions by a consensus of the national party delegations. Sure, conflicts between national party delegations and party groups are rare. But, where they do occur, MEPs were found some years ago to be more likely to vote with their national parties (Hix et al 2007, 193). Elected in member states and comprised of national party delegations as well as European party groups, the EP needs to be included in any complete account of how *national* democracies are represented in EU law-making. That point was not lost on the German Constitutional Court in its ruling on the Lisbon Treaty: 'as seats are allocated

to the Member States, the EP remains a representation of the Member States … designed as a representation of peoples' (GFCC, para. 280-4) (see also Lord and Pollak 2013).

So, important powers are shared between national governments and a European Parliament. The EP is directly elected, but in the member states. The EP is composed of European party groups, but they have to build compromise between national party delegations. How might all that help publics influence and control the Union through their own national democracies?

First, a directly elected EP can help overcome asymmetries of information in ways needed for national publics and parliaments to participate effectively in the democratic oversight of EU decisions and of the contributions of their own governments to the exercise of the Union's powers. Technical though it may sound, overcoming asymmetries of information is fundamental to modern democracy. Elections, more than parliaments, need to be where publics exercise public control as equals. Parliaments, though, are still needed to provide continuous scrutiny; and, as seen, only they can meet core standards in doing that. Yet, a huge problem is that executive bodies usually know more (asymmetries of information) than the publics and parliaments supposed to oversee them (Krehbiel 1991).

A European Parliament helps national democracies overcome those asymmetries of information in their own oversight of EU decisions. Scrutinising Union decisions requires expertise specific to the institutions and

policies of the Union. Expertise in scrutinising Union policies may be a capability that needs to be cultivated over time (March and Olsen 1995). The Union may also depend on an experimental form of decision-making in which 'actors have to learn what problem they are solving, and what solution they are seeking, through the very process of problem solving' (Sabel and Zeitlin 2010, 11). Hence, oversight may need to be continuously updated as EU policies – as well as justifications for those policies – evolve in response to experience with the policies themselves. There is also an opportunity cost for national representative institutions. Time spent monitoring Union decisions is time not spent following domestic decisions. In contrast, a directly elected European Parliament, specialised, and full-time in following EU decisions, can itself be a positive externality in providing information and scrutiny from which national democracies cannot be excluded and to which they can be structurally linked through the high overlap between national party delegations in the EP and parties in national parliaments (Crum and Fossum 2009).

Second, a directly elected EP can contribute to the representation of other possible majorities within member state democracies than governing ones. Majorities are not the people. They are only majorities at one particular moment, at one level of aggregation, and according to just one method of counting votes (Rosanvallon 2008). A directly elected EP – rather than, say, a European Assembly formed out of national parliaments – means that opinion within each national democracy is

more likely to be represented differently in the EP, the (European) Council and its own parliament. Only parties of government get access to the Council. In contrast, representatives of national parties of opposition are structurally likely to form the larger part of an elected EP – and to be more numerous in the EP than in their own national parliaments – so long as the EP is elected in somewhat second-order contests that do not coincide with most national electoral cycles (Bardi 1994). That, ironically, is one advantage of second-order elections. Note also that national parties of opposition are directly included in EU law-making. They become a part of the EU's legislator. The EP's practice of building the largest possible majorities means that representatives of national parties of opposition are included in most compromises on most legislation. That provides some representation of possible future national governments.

Finally, we need to return to the most basic reasons why national democracies need some kind of European Union (though not necessarily the one we have). One clear problem is externalities where some national democracies can impose harms or a free ride on benefits provided by others. As I have argued elsewhere (Lord 2015 and 2017), without some means of managing externalities between themselves national democracies will struggle to meet their most basic obligations to their own publics to provide rights, justice, non-domination and standards of democracy itself. They are also, incidentally, likely to have poor answers to pandemics; to providing security free of arms-racing; to developing

financial systems without systemic risk; and to climate change.

Yet, if done badly, strengthening the control of each member state democracy over the Union could weaken the EU as a contribution to managing externalities within and beyond Europe. If any one national democracy has an interest in imposing harms on its neighbours or in free-riding on the efforts of others to maintain economic, ecological or security systems, then its own electorate and parliament will also have an interest in behaving in those ways. So, there are contradictions to be avoided in *internalising* to the democratic politics of each member state the control of decisions aimed at managing externalities between them. Seeking to control inter-democracy externalities through each national democracy risks putting the sharks in charge of the swimming pool.

If there is a solution, it is for national democracies to bind themselves into shared ways of managing externalities and for their control to take the form of oversight and periodic review of that self-binding in the knowledge that the alternative is a nightmare of undermanaged externalities. Here a directly elected EP can help. First, it can be a safeguard against collusion by member state governments to evade rules on managing externalities their own democracies have agreed. Recall the Council decision in 2003 to suspend the Stability and Growth Pact aimed at limiting fiscal externalities within a shared monetary union. As the European Central Bank's chief economist put it, 'potential transgres-

sors' may not be the best people 'to pass judgement on actual transgressors' (Issing 2008, 199). Governments can help one another avoid political inconvenience or embarrassment in keeping to the rules. National democracies seeking to manage externalities between themselves may need, therefore, to avoid giving the club of governments monopolies over any rule changes. One solution is to require co-decision of rule changes with a European Parliament whose strong representation of national parties of opposition gives it no obvious interest in rule changes that are motivated only by the political convenience of some governments. Second, it is by no means impossible that national parliaments might develop a shared deliberation over the management of externalities between member state democracies. But, for all the reasons mentioned here, that deliberation itself benefits from a directly elected European Parliament. As John Dewey (1954 [1927], 35) argued, shared forms of representation may be needed for publics to be mutually aware of their mutual affectedness.

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Reform the European Law:
provide transnational lists
and make the votes equal

A practical proposal for a pan-European electoral constituency

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Introduction

There is an old discussion about whether there is a European 'demos' (people) and to what extent this is a precondition for the establishment of a European democracy. Eurosceptics tend to hold a very ethnicist view of what constitutes a people. The fact that Europeans do not share a single language or religion would, for them, prove the lack of a European demos. So, the argument goes, any efforts to improve the democratic character of the EU is doomed to fail as far as there is no such a demos.

However, there is already a substantial linguistic and beliefs diversity within European societies themselves, while there are several historical examples of multinational state entities. Second, there is an interplay between politics and society, instead of a unidi-

rectional relation between the so-called demos and legal and constitutional innovations. Politics and policies do influence and shape also cultural and national identities. It can even be argued that it was the state that created the nation through common education curricula and mandatory military conscription, among other tools, instead of the other way around. Democratic constitutions also set common values and rights that belong to all citizens, binding them into a political community, which also brings together identity and belonging.

In any event, it is an indisputable fact that there is a European system of governance and an associated political system, regardless of the many particularities that make it unique. This includes the common set of values of Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU), the notion of European citizenship, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the right to vote and stand in the elections to the European Parliament, a co-legislative body, among other elements.

In this regard, it is of fundamental importance to identify ways to strengthen and improve our European transnational democracy, particularly by raising citizens' interest and participation in the elections to the European Parliament (the only EU directly elected institution), and further empowering it.

Since 1979, when the election to the European Parliament first took place by direct universal suffrage, turnout decreased in every election – until 2014, when it stalled at 42.61 percent only to increase in 2019 to

50.66 percent,[1] a very substantial jump and the highest turnout in 25 years. This improvement has probably been due to an increase in citizens' interest, particularly among younger voters, related to transnational topics such as climate change, alongside stronger mobilisation efforts led by the pro-European-organised civil society and the pro-European parties and the European Parliament institutional campaign.

Still, this average masks wide national disparities in voter turnout rate, as shown in the results in Slovakia (22.74 percent), Czechia (28.72 percent), Slovenia (28.89 percent), and Croatia[2] (29.85 percent). Just one in two citizens voted in the last elections to the European Parliament, even if the EU now shapes fundamental policies in several domains, including economic and monetary policy and the environment. Several reasons explain these trends. First, member states largely do not formally and consistently educate the public about the EU, its origins, values, institutions, and system of competencies.

Second, there is very little European media, which in any event lacks popular following, while national newspapers and broadcasters cover the EU in a myriad of ways in terms of airtime or space devoted, outlook, and knowledge, among other factors. Naturally, national political events always take precedence in the media and

1 European Parliament (2019): Turnout by Year. Final Results. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/turnout/.

2 European Parliament (2019): Turnout by Country. Final Results. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/turnout/.

often European politics are reported mainly in connection with the domestic political situation, including at the time of the elections to the European Parliament.

Third, European politics tend to be more technocratic and consensual compared to many (certainly not all) national political systems, making them less 'newsworthy' in terms of lower polarisation and lack of a clear government-opposition dynamic. A related factor is the general weakness and lack of visibility of European political parties, which could be seen as loose confederations of national political organisations.

Fourth, European elections are by and large conducted according to national rules, including in some basic features such as voting age, requirements for tabling candidacies, campaign periods, campaign finances, voting systems, formula for the allocation of seats, election day, and so on.

It is for these reasons that the so-called 'Spitzenkandidaten' or 'lead candidate' system went unnoticed by a majority of the European voters in the 2014 and 2019 European elections, when the main European political parties used this option to launch candidates for the presidency of the European Commission.

What can be done about this? A number of things can be done, such as developing a common curriculum for European citizenship education or setting up a European multilingual public broadcaster. So far, member state governments have shown no appetite for the first possibility, regardless of treaty constraints. It may not be sufficient anyway. As for the second, it is open in any

event to question whether there would be an audience for a public European radio and television station.

A third possibility, not incompatible by the way with those just mentioned, entails reforming the way European elections are conducted, in order to strengthen the pan-European political and electoral debate, the European political parties, and the Spitzenkandidaten system, in particular by creating a pan-European electoral constituency. For a full review and analysis of this idea see Díaz Crego (2021) and Alonso de León (2017, 2019).

1. The idea of a Union-wide electoral constituency

In accordance with the treaties, European elections are to be conducted either by 'common principles' or in accordance with a 'uniform electoral procedure'. The 1976 European Electoral Act, which has had just one modification,[3] opted for the first solution, thus strengthening the national character of the European elections not only from a sociological and political point of view, but from a legal one as well, since most relevant features of the system are governed by national provisions, excepting the proportional nature required for any method used for the allocation of seats.

3 Two modifications of the European Electoral Act have been adopted to date: Council Decision 2002/772/EC, Euratom, of 25 June 2002 and 23 September 2002, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32002D0772&from=EN; and Council Decision (EU, Euratom) 2018/994 of 13 July 2018, European Parliament website, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018D0994&from=EN. The second has not entered into force due to pending national ratifications.

Thus, moving from 'common principles' to a 'uniform electoral procedure' could certainly help to further 'Europeanise' the European elections and thus to strengthen European democracy overall, particularly regarding elements such as common campaign periods and a single election day. While it may be possible to further harmonise some of these features of the European elections, it is not, in all likelihood, politically feasible to adopt a fully uniform electoral system in all respects at this time.

Perhaps the most effective possibility, without prejudice of any achievable progress in harmonising the electoral procedure, regards the introduction of an additional, Union-wide constituency. If this solution were to be introduced, European political parties would have to prepare and submit transnational lists – in other words, lists containing candidates from different countries with candidates at the top of the said lists to preside the Commission. The European Parliament has shown its support for this proposal on several occasions, the latest one with the Huebner-Leinen Report in 2015,[4] as have several governments including those of Spain, France, Germany and Italy, even if Parliament failed to endorse this proposal when it voted the file on composition of the chamber in 2018.[5]

4 European Parliament resolution of 11 November 2015 on the reform of the electoral law of the European Union (2015/2035(INL)), European Parliament website, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2015-0395_EN.html

5 European Parliament resolution of 7 February 2018 on the composition of the European Parliament, Procedure: (2017/2054(INL) – 2017/0900(NLE)).

This new pan-European electoral constituency would achieve three goals that are very important and interconnected. First, European political parties would be strengthened, as they will be in charge of composing the transnational lists and running the electoral campaign, promoting both their candidates and manifestos, and using their own logo. This process itself would contribute to achieving the second objective of having transnational lists: to encourage a pan-European election and a transnational political debate through competition for obtaining seats in the Europe-wide constituency, based on the transnational lists and manifestos presented by the European political parties, thus helping to overcome the paradigm of 27 parallel national elections. Third, the lead-candidate or Spitzenkandidaten system piloted in 2014 and 2019 would become a reality: voters in any EU member state will be presented with two ballot boxes – one for their national constituency and the other for the transnational one bearing the name and logo of their respective European political party, and with the Commission president lead candidate at the top.

Does this mean that the candidate receiving the most votes in the Europe-wide constituency would automatically be put forward to lead the Commission? Not necessarily, because a sufficient majority would be needed in any event in the European Parliament including, of course, all the members elected in the existing national constituencies. It would therefore be perfectly possible to form post-election coalitions between, for instance, the second and third most voted parties in case this

would produce a viable majority. Whatever the case, the parliamentary groups supporting the parliament candidate for Commission president would have to negotiate a coalition agreement based on the respective manifestos presented by their parties in the elections.

The important thing is that voters would have the chance to clearly indicate their preferred candidate to lead the European Commission with their vote in the transnational constituency.

2. Criticisms

There have been a number of traditional criticisms levelled against the establishment of an additional pan-European electoral constituency. First, some argue that there are no federations with a nation-wide constituency. Second, the link with the territory is, according to this view, diluted when MEPs represent the entire Union and not just a national or regional constituency. Third, there would be after the election two categories of MEP, and those elected in transnational lists will enjoy a higher informal status, thus getting better parliamentary positions (committee chairs, group presidencies and as committee spokespeople, for example). Fourth, the apparatus of the European political parties alongside the leadership of the European political parties would nominate the candidates with no or little democratic input from the party members, or from the electors themselves at the time of voting if no preferential voting is allowed. Fifth, candidates from medium and small member states would be marginalised in transnational lists

in favour of those hailing from larger member states, typically backed by stronger national parties within the European political families. This problem would be even worse if preferential voting were allowed.

The first concern does not appear to be particularly relevant. Assuming that the EU is a federation of sorts or in the making, a view that not everyone agrees with, it is clear that there is no single federal canon and that all federal experiences are different. Whether the idea of transnational lists comes from the federalist tradition or not, certainly many high-profile European federalists back it. It shall be judged on its own merits, in relation to the objectives that such a pan-European constituency attempts to achieve.

The second criticism does not seem to take into account that currently all MEPs, regardless of where they have been elected, do represent the entire EU citizenship.[6] Furthermore, it perhaps loses sight of the fact that there is already a wide disparity in the size of territorial representation due precisely to huge differences in the size of member states. It is certainly not the same to represent Malta as, say, Germany. This is particularly so since some large member states, including France, Germany, and Spain, do not have regional constituencies, so formally MEPs elected in their countries represent their entire territory. In larger member states, MEPs typically conduct most of their external political activities at the regional level in which they have their residency or

6 Article 14 (2) of Treaty of the European Union (2010) Official Journal C83/13, 30 March.

party affiliation. However, this is by no means a legal obligation, and certainly MEPs are entitled to conduct political activity in any member state and in any region within their member state without any restrictions,[7] and many do so. Similarly, a similar practice of having a territorial unit of reference can be perfectly developed by MEPs elected in a transnational constituency, since they also have a residency in a particular city or region from which to conduct political activity.

The third concern is probably unwarranted altogether. The key positions in the European Parliament are fiercely contested by MEPs with lots of credentials. It is unlikely that MEPs lacking qualifications or not being widely known would have an advantage just by being elected in a transnational list. It could happen that European political parties select heavyweights for the transnational list, in terms of experience, foreign languages, abilities, cross-border popularity, and so on. In this case, the advantage these MEPs may enjoy in getting key parliamentary jobs would have been exactly same had they been elected in a national list.

The fourth criticism comes mainly from countries in which there is a strong participation by regional and local chapters in the selection of candidates, and/or in which the voting system allows for using preferential or cross-list vote. Indeed, in a transnational list the 'German' or 'Maltese' candidate would be proposed by the respective national party to the European political party,

7 Also, in terms of their immunity, see Articles 9, 11, 17 and 20, of the Protocol of immunity, and the current electoral act.

in accordance with their own procedures, which shall be as democratic as possible. On the other hand, given the need to ensure some degree of population balance in the transnational list (see the following paragraph) and for simplicity purposes, it is more appropriate to use a closed list voting system, with no preference.

The fifth consideration is without any doubt the most relevant. It is clearly necessary to avoid transnational lists becoming skewed towards the candidates of member states with the largest populations, whose parties tend to be more influential, to the detriment of those from small or medium-sized nations. So, any proposal for a Union-wide electoral constituency must seriously address this very legitimate concern.

3. A workable proposal for a Union-wide electoral constituency

Therefore, we believe that a pan-European constituency of 46 members would be appropriate – the maximum number allowed under the current treaty in Article 14.2. This in itself helps to create increased geographic and population diversity, in comparison with a smaller constituency of, say, 25[8] or 27 members, since more members will be elected per list. In any event, the current distribution by member state of the 705 MEPs elected in the national constituencies shall remain unchanged.

Using the outcome of the 2019 European elections, and applying the D'Hondt method for attribution of

8 As proposed by the Duff Reports (2011, 2012). https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/4514/ANDREW_DUFF/all-activities/reports/7.

seats, the PES (Party of European Socialists) would get six seats in a 25 constituency, and ten in a 46 constituency (see Table 1).

Table 1. Projected distribution of seats.

Seats	Nº seats
EPP	6
S&D	6
RENEW	4
ID	3
GREENS/EFA	3
ECR	2
THE LEFT	1
Total	25
Seats	Nº seats
EPP	12
S&D	10
RENEW	6
ID	6
GREENS/EFA	5
ECR	4
THE LEFT	3
Total	46

While it is true that a pan-European constituency of 25 or 27 members would provide some room for manoeuvre in the case of enlargement without affecting too much the current distribution of seats by member state, the accession of a new member state to the Union is a very distant possibility. Still, it is always possible to set a lower number than 46 for political reasons.

Some rules are needed to ensure that there is no repetition of member state residency, particularly at the

top of the list. Ideally, no repetition should be allowed until candidates from all member states are featured in the list. In practice, this means that repetition of residency will occur only at the 28th list slot.

Second, it is also essential that candidates from the largest countries do not monopolise the top slots, which would require a population balance to be achieved throughout the list, avoiding candidates from the same member states appearing more than once in each block of the list or across consecutive blocks. In this respect, I propose to group member states by population in five categories (see Table 2).

Table 2. Member states groups.

EXAMPLE 1.46 CANDIDATES AND 5 GROUPS OF MEMBER STATES				
	Categories	Candidates from	Total population	Countries per group
1	Group A (37,9 million - 83,1 million)	Germany	83.166.711	5
		France	67.320.216	
		Italy	59.641.499	
		Spain	47.332.614	
		Poland	37.958.138	
2	Group B (10,6 million - 19,3 million)	Romania	19.328.838	5
		Netherlands	17.407.585	
		Belgium	11.522.440	
		Greece	10.718.565	
		Czechia	10.693.939	
3	Group C (6,9 million - 10,3 million)	Sweden	10.327.589	5
		Portugal	10.295.909	
		Hungary	9.769.526	
		Austria	9.901.064	
		Bulgaria	6.951.482	

4	Group D (2,7 million - 5,8 million)	Denmark	5.822.763	6
		Finland	5.525.292	
		Slovakia	5.457.873	
		Irealnd	4.964.440	
		Croatia	4.058.165	
		Lithuania	2.794.090	
5	Group E (500.000 - 2,1 million)	Slovenia	2.095.851	6
		Latvia	1.907.675	
		Estonia	1.328.976	
		Cyprus	888.005	
		Luxembourg	626.108	
		Malta	514.564	

Each block of five slots in the list shall contain no more than one candidate resident in any of the member states included in each population group. This ensures that the five top slots in the list are not each taken by candidates which come from, say, the five most populated member states (Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Poland).

Table 3. Example of transnational list using the five categories group with 46 seats.

Sections	Countries	nº countries per section
Section 1	Belgium	5
	France	
	Malta	
	Slovakia	
	Austria	
Section 2	Sweden	5
	Romania	
	Germany	
	Slovenia	
	Croatia	

Section 3	Finland Hungary Greece Spain Estonia	5
Section 4	Latvia Denmark Portugal Netherlands Italy	5
Section 5	Poland Cyprus Ireland Bulgaria Czechia	5
Section 6	Belgium Germany Luxembourg Lithuania Hungary	5
Section 7	Sweden Greece France Malta Slovakia	5
Section 8	Finland Austria Romania Italy Estonia	5
Section 9	Slovenia Croatia Portugal Netherlands Spain Latvia	6

Certainly, this system is particularly favourable for candidates resident in the smaller member states, since they will have a guaranteed slot among the first five, which means an elected member for the five most voted parties, when projecting the outcome of the 2019 election using the D'Hondt method. This is more so if we take into account their very limited population size as a share of the total EU population (see Table 4).

Table 4. Group percentages of total EU population.

Groups	Country	Total population	% of the total EU population group
Group 1	Germany	83.166.711	66%
	France	67.320.216	
	Italy	59.641.488	
	Spain	47.332.614	
	Poland	37.958.138	
	Total	**259.419.167**	
Group 2	Romania	19.328.838	16%
	Netherlands	17.407.585	
	Belgium	11.522.440	
	Czechia	10.693.939	
	Greece	10.718.565	
	Total	**69.671.367**	
Group 3	Portugal	10.295.909	10%
	Sweden	10.327.589	
	Hungary	9.769.526	
	Austria	8.901.064	
	Bulgaria	6.951.482	
	Total	**46.245.570**	

Group 4	Denmark	5.822.763	6%
	Finland	5.525.292	
	Slovakia	5.457.873	
	Ireland	4.964.440	
	Croatia	4.058.165	
	Lithuania	2.794.090	
	Total	28.622.623	
Group 5	Slovenia	2.095.861	2%
	Latvia	1.907.675	
	Estonia	1.328.976	
	Cyprus	888.005	
	Luxembourg	626.108	
	Malta	514.564	
	Total	7.361.189	

After examining a number of combinations (see the Annex), this distribution appears optimal, also because the number of countries per group is roughly balanced (five and six). It must be taken into account that the lower the number of groups, the lower the discrimination. Therefore, if we were to set up just two groups of countries and to alternate a candidate from each, those coming from the member states at the top of each of these two very large groups would be more likely to get the best slots at the top of the list.

In the proposed system, a candidate from the group of least-populated member states will be placed, at the very least, in slot number 5 of the list, assuming a strictly descending population-based order (the worst-case scenario for the said group). It is, though, important to avoid repeating such bias throughout the list. So the order of candidates within each five-slot block must

also vary, so that no combination is repeated. There are more than enough possible different order combinations of five different elements so as to cover all nine list sections of five slots.[9]

Turning to the electoral system, I believe the best option is a simple system, with closed lists and using the D'Hondt method for allocating seats, which is the most commonly used method at a national level across Europe, and with no lower threshold that is always controversial for smaller parties. There is in any event a natural threshold of 2 percent. Specific provisions for campaign financing for the pan-European electoral constituency would be required. The entire electoral process would have to be overseen by an independent European Electoral Authority.

Conclusions

There is a clear need for a stronger transnational democracy in Europe. A carefully designed transnational constituency could help in this regard. Unfortunately, the proposal for transnational lists has become a totemic issue, in a negative way, for many European politicians, while at the same time no other alternatives have been put forward in order to achieve the three objectives of articulating a true pan-European electoral debate, strengthening and making more visible the European political parties, and making real the Spitzenkandidaten process.

9 To be precise 120; 5! is 5 x 4 x 3 x 2 = 120.

It will be desirable that the debate about this or other proposals is focused on their merits and not on a blank, ideological rejection of transnational lists, so perhaps the 2024 European Parliament election could constitute a new milestone in the federalisation of the continent's political system, raising the profile and legitimacy of our transnational democracy.

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Annex

Estimated results (D'Hondt system)

Table 5. Estimated results for 25 seats.

	Results	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
EPP	41.211.023	41.211.023	20.605.512	13.737.008	10.302.756	8.242.205	6.868.504	5.887.289	5.151.378	4.579.003	4.121.102	3.746.457	3.434.252
PES	35.421.084	35.421.084	17.710.542	11.807.028	8.855.271	7.084.217	5.903.514	5.060.155	4.427.636	3.935.676	3.542.108	3.220.099	2.951.757
RENEW	23.788.652	23.788.652	11.894.326	7.929.551	5.947.163	4.757.730	3.964.775	3.398.379	2.973.582	2.643.184	2.378.865	2.162.605	1.982.388
ID	20.980.853	20.980.853	10.490.427	6.993.618	5.245.213	4.196.171	3.496.809	2.997.265	2.622.607	2.331.206	2.098.085	1.907.350	1.748.404
GREENS/ EFA	19.886.513	19.886.513	9.943.257	6.628.838	4.971.628	3.977.303	3.314.419	2.840.930	2.485.814	2.209.613	1.988.651	1.807.865	1.657.209
ECR	14.207.477	14.207.477	7.103.739	4.735.826	3.551.869	2.841.495	2.367.913	2.029.640	1.775.935	1.578.609	1.402.748	1.291.589	1.183.956
THE LEFT	10.219.637	10.219.637	5.109.819	3.406.546	2.554.909	2.043.927	1.703.273						

Table 6. Estimated results for 46 seats.

	Results	1	2	3	4	5	6
EPP	41.211.023	41.211.023	20.605.512	13.737.008	10.302.756	8.242.205	6.868.504
PES	35.421.084	35.421.084	17.710.542	11.807.028	8.855.271	7.084.217	5.903.514
RENEW	23.788.652	23.788.652	11.894.326	7.929.551	5.947.163	4.757.730	3.964.775
ID	20.980.853	20.980.853	10.490.427	6.993.618	5.245.213	4.196.171	3.496.809
GREENS/EFA	19.886.513	19.886.513	9.943.257	6.628.838	4.971.628	3.977.303	3.314.419
ECR	14.207.477	14.207.477	7.103.739	4.735.826	3.551.869	2.841.495	2.367.913
THE LEFT	10.219.637	10.219.637	5.109.819	3.406.546	2.554.909	2.043.927	1.703.273

Possible member states groupings

Table 7. Example 1 of 46 candidates and 5 groups of member states, and example of transnational lists with 46 seats.

Example 1.46 candidates and 5 groups of member states				
	Categories	Candidates from	Total population	Countries per group
1	Group A (37,9 million - 83,1 million)	Germany	83.166.711	5
		France	67.320.216	
		Italy	59.641.499	
		Spain	47.332.614	
		Poland	37.958.138	
2	Group B (10,6 million - 19,3 million)	Romania	19.328.838	5
		Netherlands	17.407.585	
		Belgium	11.522.440	
		Greece	10.718.565	
		Czechia	10.693.939	
3	Group C (6,9 million - 10,3 million)	Sweden	10.327.589	5
		Portugal	10.295.909	
		Hungary	9.769.526	
		Austria	9.901.064	
		Bulgaria	6.951.482	
4	Group D (2,7 million - 5,8 million)	Denmark	5.822.763	6
		Finland	5.525.292	
		Slovakia	5.457.873	
		IrealInd	4.964.440	
		Croatia	4.058.165	
		Lithuania	2.794.090	
5	Group E (500.000 - 2,1 million)	Slovenia	2.095.851	6
		Latvia	1.907.675	
		Estonia	1.328.976	
		Cyprus	888.005	
		Luxembourg	626.108	
		Malta	514.564	

Sections	Countries	nº countries per section
Section 1	Belgium	5
	France	
	Malta	
	Slovakia	
	Austria	
Section 2	Sweden	5
	Romania	
	Germany	
	Slovenia	
	Croatia	
Section 3	Finland	5
	Hungary	
	Greece	
	Spain	
	Estonia	
Section 4	Latvia	5
	Denmark	
	Portugal	
	Netherlands	
	Italy	
Section 5	Poland	5
	Cyprus	
	Ireland	
	Bulgaria	
	Czechia	
Section 6	Belgium	5
	Germany	
	Luxembourg	
	Lithuania	
	Hungary	
Section 7	Sweden	5
	Greece	
	France	
	Malta	
	Slovakia	
Section 8	Finland	5
	Austria	
	Romania	
	Italy	
	Estonia	
Section 9	Slovenia	6
	Croatia	
	Portugal	
	Netherlands	
	Spain	
	Latvia	

Table 8. Example 2 of 45 candidates and 9 groups of member states, and example of transnational lists with 45 seats.

Example 1.46 candidates and 5 groups of member states				
	Categories	Candidates from	Total population	Countries per group
1	Group A (59,6 million - 83,1 million)	Germany	83.166.711	3
		France	67.320.216	
		Italy	59.641.499	
2	Group B (19,3 million - 47,3 million)	Spain	47.332.614	3
		Poland	37.958.138	
		Romania	19.328.838	
3	Group C (10,6 million - 17,4 million)	Netherlands	17.407.585	3
		Belgium	11.522.440	
		Czechia	10.693.939	
4	Group D (10,3 million - 10,7 million)	Greece	10.718.565	3
		Portugal	10.295.909	
		Sweden	10.327.589	
5	Group E (6,9 million - 9,7 million)	Hungary	9.769.526	3
		Austria	9.901.064	
		Bulgaria	6.951.482	
6	Group F (5,4 million - 5,8 million)	Denmark	5.822.763	3
		Finland	5.525.292	
		Slovakia	5.457.873	
7	Group G (2,7 million - 4,9 million)	Irealnd	4.964.440	3
		Croatia	4.058.165	
		Lithuania	2.794.090	
8	Group H (1,3 million - 2,1 million)	Slovenia	2.095.851	3
		Latvia	1.907.675	
		Estonia	1.328.976	
9	Group H (500.000 -900.000)	Cyprus	888.005	3
		Luxembourg	626.108	
		Malta	514.564	

Example of Transnational List:		
Sections	Candidates from	nº countries per section
Section 1	Netherlands	9
	Bulgaria	
	Croatia	
	Malta	
	Italy	
	Sweden	
	Slovakia	
	Estonia	
	Spain	
Section 2	Hungary	9
	Ireland	
	Cyprus	
	Germany	
	Greece	
	Denmark	
	Slovenia	
	Poland	
	Belgium	
Section 3	Lithuania	9
	Luxembourg	
	France	
	Portugal	
	Finland	
	Latvia	
	Romania	
	Czechia	
	Austria	
Section 4	Malta	9
	Italy	
	Sweden	
	Denmark	
	Estonia	
	Poland	
	Netherlands	
	Hungary	
	Croatia	
Section 5	Germany	9
	Greece	
	Slovakia	
	Slovenia	
	Spain	
	Belgium	
	Bulgaria	
	Ireland	
	Cyprus	

Table 9. Example 3 of 44 candidates and 4 groups of member states, and example of transnational lists with 44 seats.

Groups	Country	Total population	% of the total EU population group
Group A (17,4 - 83,1 million)	Germany	83.166.711	7
	France	67.320.216	
	Italy	59.641.488	
	Spain	47.332.614	
	Poland	37.958.138	
	Romania	19.328.838	
	Netherlands	17.407.585	
Group B (8,9 - 11,5 million)	Belgium	11.522.440	7
	Greece	10.718.565	
	Czechia	10.693.939	
	Sweden	10.327.589	
	Portugal	10.295.909	
	Hungary	9.769.526	
	Austria	8.901.064	
Group C (2,7 - 6,9 million)	Bulgaria	6.951.482	7
	Denmark	5.822.763	
	Finland	5.525.292	
	Slovakia	5.457.873	
	Ireland	4.964.440	
	Croatia	4.058.165	
	Lithuania	2.794.090	
Group D (500.00 - 2,1 million)	Slovenia	2.095.861	6
	Latvia	1.907.675	
	Estonia	1.328.976	
	Cyprus	888.005	
	Luxembourg	626.108	
	Malta	514.564	

Sections	Countries	no countries per section
Section 1	Belgium	4
	Bulgaria	
	Slovenia	
	France	
Section 2	Denmark	4
	Latvia	
	Germany	
	Greece	
Section 3	Estonia	4
	Spain	
	Czechia	
	Finland	
Section 4	Romania	4
	Sweden	
	Slovakia	
	Cyprus	
Section 5	Portugal	4
	Ireland	
	Luxembourg	
	Italy	
Section 6	Croatia	4
	Malta	
	Poland	
	Hungary	
Section 7	Estonia	4
	Netherlands	
	Austria	
	Lithuania	
Section 8	Romania	4
	Greece	
	Bulgaria	
	Cyprus	
Section 9	Sweden	4
	Ireland	
	Malta	
	France	
Section 10	Denmark	4
	Luxembourg	
	Spain	
	Belgium	
Section 11	Latvia	4
	Poland	
	Portugal	
	Finland	

Table 10. Example 4 of 42 candidates and 7 groups of member states, and example of transnational lists with 42 seats.

nº groups	Categories	Candidates from	Total population	nº countries per group
1	Group A (47,3 - 83,1 million)	Germany	83.166.711	4
		France	67.320.216	
		Italy	59.641.488	
		Spain	47.332.614	
2	Group B (11,5 - 37,9 million)	Poland	37.958.138	4
		Romania	19.328.838	
		Netherlands	17.407.585	
		Belgium	11.522.440	
3	Group C (10,2 - 10,7 million)	Greece	10.718.565	4
		Czechia	10.693.939	
		Sweden	10.327.589	
		Portugal	10.295.909	
4	Group D (5,8 - 9,7 million)	Hungary	9.769.526	4
		Austria	8.901.064	
		Bulgaria	6.951.482	
		Denmark	5.822.763	
5	Group E (4,1 - 5,5 million)	Finland	5.525.292	4
		Slovakia	5.457.873	
		Ireland	4.964.440	
		Croatia	4.058.165	
6	Group F (1,3 - 2,7 million)	Lithuania	2.794.090	4
		Slovenia	2.095.861	
		Latvia	1.907.675	
		Estonia	1.328.976	
7	Group G (500.000 - 900.000)	Cyprus	888.005	3
		Luxembourg	626.108	
		Malta	514.564	

Sections	Countries	no countries per section
Section 1	Greece	7
	Hungary	
	Finland	
	Estonia	
	Malta	
	Spain	
	Romania	
Section 2	Austria	7
	Ireland	
	Slovenia	
	Luxembourg	
	Germany	
	Netherlands	
	Czechia	
Section 3	Slovakia	7
	Lithuania	
	Cyprus	
	France	
	Belgium	
	Sweden	
	Bulgaria	
Section 4	Latvia	7
	Luxembourg	
	Italy	
	Poland	
	Portugal	
	Denmark	
	Croatia	
Section 5	Cyprus	7
	Spain	
	Netherlands	
	Sweden	
	Bulgary	
	Slovakia	
	Lithuania	
Section 6	France	7
	Belgium	
	Czechia	
	Austria	
	Ireland	
	Estonia	

Table 11. Comparison of the lists of candidates and number of groups

Options	No. of candidates/seats	No. of member states groups	No. of slots per member state group	No. of slots per section in the example of transnational list
Option 1	46	5	5	5
Option 2	45	9	3	9
Option 3	44	4	6/7	4
Option 4	42	7	3/4	7

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A tandem electoral system for the European Parliament

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1. Intent

1.1 Overview

A new *tandem electoral system* for the European Parliament (EP) is proposed. The system aligns the Union's citizens and the Union's member states in a synchronised (that is, *tandem*) way. The tandem electoral system amends the current European Electoral Act in various directions:

- The system achieves electoral equality of the Union's citizens by aggregating votes at Union level rather than exercising separate evaluations per member state.
- The unionwide alignments are arranged in a manner safeguarding the composition of the EP, that is, the allocation of EP seats between the member states.
- The new system promotes a unionwide view of EP elections by involving Europarties more visibly than in the past.

- Despite unionwide alignments, member states may maintain many of their domestic electoral provisions, such as ballot structures, vote patterns, and rules to assign the seats of a domestic party to this party's candidates.
- The tandem electoral system provides a natural setting for Europarties to field Spitzenkandidaten and contest the election under their lead.
- The new system expands on the proposal of transnational lists by embracing all EP seats rather than singling out a subset, and by respecting domestic traditions rather than imposing uniform voting behaviour on the Union's electorate.

Technically, vote counts for domestic parties are aggregated into vote sums for Europarties. These vote sums are translated into seat numbers ('apportionment of seats at Union level'). The seats of a Europarty are then allotted to its domestic affiliates in the member states ('allotment of seats by member state and Europarty'). Finally the seats are filled with candidates of the domestic parties just as in the past ('assignment of seats to candidates').

Conceptually, two prerequisites become vital:

- Domestic parties who are affiliated with Europarties ought to advertise their affiliation during the electoral campaign and on the ballot sheets. Thus voters are alerted to the fact that the votes they cast for domestic parties are tallied at Union level by way of Europarties.

- A *European Electoral Authority* needs to be established. Prior to the election its task is to register Europarties and multi-state alliances, and to admit them to the election. At the end of the polling period, it is the Authority's job to ascertain vote sums at Union level and to translate them into seats for Europarties and their affiliates.

The tandem electoral system is in perfect accord with Article 14 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). It may be implemented entirely within the scope of secondary Union law; it does not require any changes to the treaties.

1.2 Europarties, multi-state alliances, and single-state parties

The obvious political bodies for pooling votes at Union level are *Europarties*, that is, European political parties in terms of Regulation No 1141/2014 of 22 October 2014. However, the conditions applicable to becoming a Europarty are quite stringent. It seems appropriate to admit a more dynamic category of party grouping, *multi-state alliances*, who simply notify the European Electoral Authority of their intention to team up for the election. Of course, domestic parties may choose to be neither a member of a Europarty nor a partner of a multi-state alliance. This gives rise to a third category, *single-state parties*, who decide to stand alone.

1.3 Apportionment of seats at Union level

The aggregation of votes at Union level provides the base to apportion the 705 EP seats among Europarties,

multi-state alliances and single-state parties proportionally to the votes they garner. The apportionment uses the *divisor method with standard rounding* (Sainte-Laguë method).[1]

Thereby the apportionment of seats at Union level blends perfectly well with the *one person– one vote* principle and secures electoral equality for all voters in the Union.

1.4 Allotment of seats by member state and Europarty

The synchronising potential of the tandem system is brought to bear in the allotment of seats by member state and Europarty. The allotment is constrained by two interacting dimensions: the socio-cultural layout by member state; and the political division by Europarty, multi-state alliance or single-state party. Within a member state, the sum of the seats must meet the state's seat contingent as pre-ordained by the EP composition. Within a Europarty or a multi-state alliance, the sum of the seats must exhaust the party's seat apportionment at Union level.

The tandem electoral system resolves the task by determining seat numbers proportionately with vote counts in such a way that both constraints are satisfied.

1 The method is unbiased, that is,i.e. it is neutral tino size and neither favours nor disadvantages any of the participants. Another procedure – for historical reasons more popular – is the D'Hondt method. However, the D'Hondt- method is biased in favour of stronger participants at the expense of weaker participants. Since responsiveness to size is an extremely sensitive issue in the Union, the D'Hondt method is inept for use in the tandem system.

The result is an arrangement of seat numbers by member state and Europarty (including multi-state alliances and single-state parties) such that within every member state the sum of the seats matches the EP composition while within every Europarty the sum of the seats verifies the apportionment at Union level.[2]

1.5 Assignment of seats to candidates, and accountability of MEPs

Finally, once the number of seats of a specific Europarty in a specific member state has been obtained, the assignment of seats to candidates is carried out in the same way as in the past. The seats are filled with candidates of domestic parties who belong to the Europarty in question.

Therefore the new tandem electoral system perpetuates the nature of political accountability that links Members of the EP and the Union's electorate in the extant old system.

The tandem electoral system is illustrated in Section 2 using the data from the 2019 European elections. The illustration is based on a retrospective 2019 membership roster for Europarties and domestic parties that is hypothetically compiled in Section 3.

2 This is achieved by using the double-proportional variant of the divisor method with standard rounding. Dou ble proportionality employs two sets of electoral keys, district divisors and party divisors. With electoral keys published, the vote count which has been recorded in member state X for Europarty Y is divided by district divisor X and by party divisor Y. The resulting quotient is rounded to the nearest whole number to yield the seat number sought, that is, the number of seats for Europarty or multi-state alliance Y in state X.

1.6 System incentives

The tandem electoral system will prosper only when met with co-operation. A clear majority of domestic parties ought to agree to contest future EP elections under the umbrella of a Europarty or a multi-state alliance, and single-state parties ought to constitute a minor category.

In addition the system may be supplemented by stimuli backing the unionwide view.

With the number of seats at Union level to be as large as 705, there is the need for a minimum requirement for Europarties, multi-state alliances and single-state parties to participate in the apportionment of seats at Union level.

Another incentive might be to offer Europarties and multi-state alliances a financial per-vote remuneration.

In conclusion we note that the controversy over whether degressive representation of the member states is at odds with electoral equality of the Union's citizens is brought to an end by the tandem electoral system. The tandem system safeguards degressivity, yet stresses the goal of a unitary election. With regard to the political division of the electorate, it faithfully implements the *one person–one vote* principle for all voters in the Union irrespective of their provenance.

2. Procedure

2.1 Apportionment of seats at Union level

The re-evaluation of the 2019 EP elections solely serves to illustrate the tandem electoral system. It is unsuitable to be interpreted as a political prediction.

This example operates with the 10 Europarties listed in Section 3 together with the domestic parties affiliated with them. We assume no multi-state alliances, but two multi-constituency alliances (both in IE, namely SF and I4C). This leaves 33 single-state parties, that is, domestic parties who contest the election by themselves without European affiliation.

The vote sums of Europarties are aggregated from the vote counts that are documented in the study by Oelbermann et al (2020). Votes for parties which in the study are labelled 'Others' are omitted from the current example.

Table 1 shows that a total of 163,207,736 votes enters into the process of apportioning the 705 EP seats at Union level. Every 231,000 votes justifies roughly one seat. The term 'roughly' indicates that the 'quotients', of dividing the electoral key 231,000 into the 'votes' shown, are rounded in the standard fashion to obtain the desired 'seats'.

For the 10 Europarties an intermediate step is needed to disaggregate their seats at Union level by member state.

Table 1. Apportionment of 705 seats at Union level. 'Votes' are divided by the Union divisor 231,000 to yield 'quotients', then 'quotients' are rounded to obtain 'seats'. The divisor is determined so that the sum of all 'seats' is equal to the number of seats available, 705.

EP2019-Aggregation	Votes	Quotients	Seats
10 Europarties, totalling 640 seats			
EPP	39 338 118	170.3	170
PES	32 347 309	140.0	140
ID	20 286 866	87.8	88
ALDE	18 656 812	80.8	81
EGP	14 835 208	64.2	64
ECR	11 329 360	49.0	49
PEL	6 261 560	27.1	27
EFA	2 195 733	9.51	10
EDP	2 023 884	8.8	9
ECPM	467 206	2.0	2
2 multi-constituency alliances, totalling 2 seats			
IE-SF	196 001	0.8	1
IE-I4C	124 085	0.54	1
33 single-state parties, totalling 63 seats			
IT-M5S	4 569 089	19.8	20
FR-LFI	1 428 548	6.2	6
ES-JUNTS	1 018 435	4.4	4
DE-DIE PARTEI	899 079	3.9	4
PL-WIOSNA	826 975	3.6	4
HU-DK	557 081	2.4	2
DE-TIERSCHUTZ	542 226	2.3	2
DE-ÖDP	369 869	1.6	2
BE-2PTB	355 883	1.54	2
CZ-PIRATI	330 844	1.4	1

EL-KKE	302 603	1.3	1
DK-DF	296 978	1.3	1
SE-V	282 300	1.2	1
EL-XA	275 734	1.2	1
DE-FAMILIE	273 828	1.2	1
FI-PS	253 176	1.1	1
DE-VOLT	249 098	1.1	1
DE-PIRATEN	243 302	1.1	1
EL-EL	236 347	1.0	1
NL-PvdD	220 938	1.0	1
HU-JOBBIK	220 184	1.0	1
NL-50+	215 199	0.9	1
NL-PVV	194 178	0.8	1
CZ-KSCM	164 624	0.7	1
LT-LVZS	158 190	0.7	1
SK-KLSNS	118 995	0.52	1
LT-DP	113 243	0.49	0
IE-2indep	85 034	0.4	0
HR-MK	84 765	0.4	0
LT-AMT	82 005	0.4	0
CY-AKEL	77 241	0.3	0
HR-ZZ	60 847	0.3	0
CY-DIKO	38 756	0.2	0
Sum (Union divisor)	163 207 736	(231 000)	705

2.2 Allotment of seats by member state and Europarty

The allotment by member state and Europarty must satisfy two conditions. Firstly, within a member state, the sum of the seats must meet the state's seat contingent as pre-ordained by the EP composition. To this

end the seats which already have been awarded at Union level must be deducted from the contingents of the member states concerned. For instance, the Irish contingent of 13 seats is reduced to 11 seats because the two alliances get one seat each. The Italian contingent of 76 seats is diminished to 56 because of the 20 seats for IT-M5S. Altogether two multi-constituency alliances and 33 single-state parties total 65 seats that are dealt out by the apportionment at Union level. This leaves 640 seats to care for. The reduced seat contingents of the member states are shown in the second column of Table 2.

Secondly, within a Europarty, the sum of the seats must exhaust the party's due number of seats at Union level. The Europarties' seat apportionments are shown in the second row of Table 2; they are simply copied from the previous results obtained at Union level.

In order to satisfy both conditions, two sets of divisors are instrumental: state divisors (shown on the right in Table 2); and party divisors (shown at the bottom). Once these electoral keys have been publicized, it is quite easy to verify the allotment. The vote count of a Europarty in a member state is divided by the divisor for the pertinent state and by the divisor for this party. The quotient (not shown in Table 2) then is rounded to obtain the desired seat number.

For example, PES garners 1,104,694 votes in PT. The Portuguese divisor is 110,000, the PES divisor is 1.2; see Table 2. The quotient $1{,}104{,}694 / (110{,}000 \times 1.2) = 8.4$ justifies eight seats for PES in PT, that is, for PS. Similarly,

PEL is awarded three seats, which are assigned to BE. The six EPP-seats are divided between two EPP-member parties according to their vote tallies, into five seats for PSD and one seat for CDS-PP. In the same vein, of the four EGP-seats, two go to the electoral coalition CDU and two to PAN. This completes the allotment of the 21 Portuguese seats.

As another instance, EPP garners 1,305,956 votes in AT. The Austrian divisor is 169,000, the EPP divisor is 1.3437; see Table 2. This leads to the quotient 1,305,956 / (169,000×1.3437) = 5.8, justifying six seats for EPP in AT, that is, for ÖVP. There are another four Austrian parties, each in a one-to-one correspondence with a Europarty; they are allotted four, five, one and three seats, respectively. Thus the allotment exhausts the Austrian contingent of 19 seats.

In this way every member state receives its due number of seats, as does every Europarty.

Table 2: Allotment of seats by member state and Europarty. The votes are divided by the associated 'state divisor' and by the associated 'party divisor', the resulting quotients (not shown) are rounded to obtain 'seats'. The divisors are determined so that row-sums meet the states' seat contingents and column-sums exhaust the parties' apportionments at Union level.

EP2019-Disaggregation		EPP→Seats	PES→Seats	ID→Seats	ALDE Seats	EGP→Seats
	640	170	140	88	81	64
AT	19	1 305 956 6	903 151 4	650 114 5	319 024 1	532 193 3
BE	19	849 976 2	1 085 159 3	811 169 3	1 148 705 3	1 011 563 4
BG	17	725 678 8	474 160 5	0→0	323 510 3	0→0
CY	6	81 539 4	29 715 2	0→0	0→0	0→0

CZ	19	447 943 5	0→0	216 718 4	502 343 6	0→0
DE	85	10 794 042 22	5 916 882 14	4 104 453 14	2 028 594 4	7 677 071 22
DK	13	170 544 1	592 645 3	0→0	926 132 5	364 895 3
EE	7	34 188 1	77 375 2	42 265 1	134 959 3	0→0
EL	18	1 873 137 8	436 726 2	0→0	0→0	0→0
ES	55	4 510 193 11	7 359 617 20	0→0	2 726 642 6	0→0
FI	13	380 460 3	267 603 3	0→0	363 439 3	292 892 3
FR	73	1 920 407 7	1 403 170 6	5 286 939 29	5 079 015 17	3 055 023 14
HR	12	244 076 5	200 976 5	0→0	55 829 1	0→0
HU	18	1 824 220 14	229 551 2	0→0	344 512 2	0→0
IE	11	496 459 5	52 753 1	0→0	277 705 3	190 755 2
IT	56	2 493 858 5	6 107 545 15	9 175 208 32	0→0	0→0
LT	10	248 736 4	200 105 4	0→0	83 083 1	0→0
LU	6	264 665 2	152 900 1	0→0	268 910 1	237 215 2
LV	8	124 193 2	82 604 2	0→0	58 763 1	0→0
MT	6	58 699 2	124 441 4	0→0	0→0	0→0
NL	26	669 555 4	1 045 274 7	0→0	1 194 792 7	599 283 4
PL	48	4 009 958 17	1 239 977 6	0→0	0→0	0→0
PT	21	930 191 6	1 104 694 8	0→0	0→0	396 060 4
RO	33	3 447 949 13	2 040 765 9	0→0	2 028 236 7	0→0
SE	20	1 056 626 5	974 589 6	0→0	619 060 3	478 258 3
SI	8	180 155 4	89 936 2	0→0	74 431 2	0→0
SK	13	194 715 4	154 996 4	0→0	99 128 2	0→0
Party divisor		1.3437	1.2	0.85	1.38	1

(continued)	ECR	Seats	PEL	Seats	EFA	Seats	EDP	Seats	ECPM	Seats	State divisor
		49		27		10		9		2	
AT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	169 000
BE	0	0	0	0	954 048	4	0	0	0	0	280 000
BG	143 830	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	72 000
CY	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15 000
CZ	344 885	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	63 000
DE	0	0	2 056 049	6	0	0	806 703	3	0	0	357 050
DK	0	0	151 903	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	144 000
EE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	36 000
EL	0	0	1 343 595	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	180 000

ES	1 388 681	3	2 258 857	8	1 212 139	5	633 265	2	0	0	310 000
FI	0	0	126 063	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	88 000
FR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	212 000
HR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	91 546	1	35 000
HU	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100 000
IE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	80 000
IT	1 726 189	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	340 000
LT	69 347	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	44 000
LU	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	130 000
LV	77 591	2	0	0	29 546	1	0	0	0	0	38 000
MT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26 000
NL	602 507	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	375 660	1	133 190
PL	6 192 780	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	180 000
PT	0	0	325 093	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	110 000
RO	0	0	0	0	0	0	583 916	4	0	0	200 000
SE	636 877	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	145 000
SI	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30 000
SK	146 673	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	35 000
Party divisor	1.35		0.96		0.8		0.83		4		

2.3 Assignment of seats to candidates

The tandem electoral system concludes with the assignment of seats to candidates. Essentially, this is carried out as in the past. Factually, since the member states decree different provisions and since the tandem system respects these differences, every member state must be reviewed on its own. The review breaks down into three classes.

The first class embraces 13 member states for whom all Europarties are in a one-to-one correspondence with the state's domestic parties: AT, CY, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL. Clearly, the seats allotted to Europarties (and to single-state parties from this state, if any) are

passed on to the corresponding domestic parties without further ado. For instance, in Austria EPP, PES, ID, ALDE, and EGP are allotted six, four, five, one, and three seats in Table 2, and these seats are assigned to the candidates of ÖVP, SPÖ, FPÖ, NEOS, and GRÜNE, respectively.

The second class consists of 11 member states for whom one or more of the Europarties are in a one-to-many correspondence with domestic parties: BG, CZ, DE, DK, EE, PL PT, RO, SE, SI, SK. For every Europarty that comprises two or more domestic members, its seats must be parcelled out among its members. In almost all instances there are just two members and the split of seats is straightforward; see the Portuguese example above.[3] Only Romania features a three-way split, with PNL, PMP and RMDSZ-UDMR all being members of EPP. The 13 EPP-seats from Table 2 are divided between the three parties, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Romania, dividing 13 EPP-seats between three member parties of EPP.

EP2019RO-EPP	Votes	Quotients	Seats
PNL	2 449 068	9.1	9
PMP	522 104	1.9	2
RMDSZ-UDMR	476 777	1.8	2
Sum (Divisor)	3 447 949	(270 000)	13

3 A non-straightforward event occurs in Poland. The electoral coalition KE presents a common list originating from five partner parties of which some are members of EPP and others of PES. The attribution of list votes to EPP and to PES in the study by Oelbermann et al. (2020, pp. 49–51) is somewhat ad hoc.

The third class assembles three member states with special provisions: BE, IE, and MT. Belgium establishes three constituencies. Ten seats are occupied by single-constituency parties: four by N-VA (EFA) and three by VLAAMS BELANG (ID), both in the Dutch Electoral College; two by PTB-PVDA in the French Electoral College; and one by CSP (EPP) in the German Language Community. This leaves 11 seats for ALDE (three), PES (three), EGP (four) and EPP (one), in the French (five) and Dutch (six) Electoral Colleges; these seats are allotted with the same technique as in Table 2 or Table 4.

Ireland establishes three constituencies, as does Belgium, with four, four, and five seats, respectively. The parties' seats are one each for I.4.C. and SF, from the apportionment at Union level (Table 1), and five for FG (EPP), three for FF (ALDE), two for GP (EGP), and one for Lab. (PES), from the allotment by member state and Europarty (Table 2). The 13 seats are allotted by constituency and domestic party with the same technique as in Table 2; see Table 4.

Table 4: Ireland, allotting 13 seats by constituency and domestic party.

EP2019IE		FG Seats		FF Seats		SF Seats		GP Seats		I4C Seats		Lab.	Seats	Constituency divisor
	13	5		3		1		2		1		1		
Dublin	4	75 540	1	51 420	1	39 387	0	63 849	1	42 305	0	18 293	1	90 000
Midlands–North-West	4	199 130	2	73 034	1	77 619	1	51 019	0	0	0	12 378	0	120 000
South	5	221 789	2	153 251	1	78 995	0	75 887	1	81 780	1	22 082	0	140 000
Party divisor		0.8		1		1.2		1		1.07		0.4		

Ireland assigns seats to candidates by means of the Irish single transferable vote (STV) scheme. Minor adjustments are needed to reconcile the STV scheme with Table 4. For instance, in the Midlands-North-West constituency, the pure STV scheme would eliminate both FF-candidates; hence it would be impossible to realise the seat that is called for by Table 4. The obvious adjustment is to exempt the last FF-candidate from elimination when the STV scheme passes through its rounds of recounts.

Malta employs a Maltese STV scheme (with slight differences from the Irish STV scheme which here can be neglected). Table 2 allots two seats to PN (EPP) and four seats to PL (PES), as does the proper Maltese STV scheme. Specifically, with the 2019 data, the STV scheme fits into the tandem electoral system and does not need to be adjusted. Generally, candidates who are allotted a seat by the equivalent of Table 4 would need to be exempted from elimination during STV recounts.

All in all, the tandem electoral system leads to results which are by no means revolutionary. True, some seats are allocated differently, and true, arrays such as Table 1 or Table 2 look awesome and uninviting. However, the effort is rewarded by synchronising two goals that are of paramount importance at EP elections. On the one hand the composition of the EP is realised as desired. On the other hand, the electorate's representation by political persuasion reflects an assessment at Union level rather than decomposing into patchwork elections as in the past.

3. Europarties

3.1 Member states by country code

Member states are sorted by their two-letter country code because this sorting is independent of language.

3.2 Europarties and their members 2019

Our listings of Europarties and their members are entirely hypothetical. The lists solely serve to illustrate the procedural steps of the proposed electoral system by means of the 2019 European Elections; see Section 2.

The illustration exposes the *technical aspects* of the system; it must not be construed to imply any *political conclusions* whatsoever.

The differences between the parties' seat numbers which actually resulted from the 2019 elections and the parties' seat numbers which would result from the new tandem system should not be misinterpreted as definitive political gains or losses.

Europarties are presented in the sequence in which they appear on the webpage of the Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations. The members of the Europarties were assembled from various Internet sources (retrieved March 2021).

	https://www.appf.europa.eu/appf/en/parties-and-foundations/registered-parties.html
ALDE	https://www.aldeparty.eu/alde_member_parties; Filter: EU member https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alliance_of_Liberals_and_Democrats_for_Europe_Party#Member_parties
EPP	https://www.epp.eu/parties-and-partners
PES	https://www.pes.eu/en/members/

EDP	https://democrats.eu/en#anchor-about https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Democratic_Party#Members
EFA	https://www.e-f-a.org/member-parties/ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Free_Alliance#Full_members
EGP	https://europeangreens.eu/sites/europeangreens.eu/files/EGP Statutes as adopted in Tampere Council Nov 2019 - updated annex B from 13 June 2020.pdf https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Green_Party#Full_members
PEL	https://www.european-left.org/our-parties/ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Party_of_the_European_Left#Member_parties
ECR	https://ecrparty.eu/about#family https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Conservatives_and_Reformists_Party#Member_parties
ECPM	https://ecpm.info/members-and-associates.html https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Christian_Political_Movement#Full_members
ID	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identity_and_Democracy_Party#Composition

3.3 ALDE – Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party

AT	Neos	NEOS
BE BE	MR Open VLD	Mouvement Réformateur Open Vlaamse Liberalenen Democraten
BG	DPS	Dvizhenie za prava i svobodi – Movement for Rights and Freedoms
CY CY	DiPa EDI	Dimokratiki Parataxi – Democratic Alignment United Democrats
CZ	ANO	Ano2011
DE	FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei
DK DK	RV Venstre	Radikale Venstre Venstre Danmarks Liberale Parti
EE EE	CPE ERP	Eesti Keskerakond – EstonianCentreParty Eesti Reformierakond
ES	CS	Ciudadanos
FI FI	KESK SFP- RKP	Keskusta Svenska Folkpartiet

FR FR	MR UDI	Mouvement Radical – Mouvement social-radical liberal Union des Démocrates et Indépendants
HR HR HR HR	CENTAR HNS HSLS IDS	Centre Hrvatska narodna stranka – Liberalni demokrati Croatian Social Liberal Party Istarski Demokratski Sabor
HU	M	Momentum Mozgalom
IE	FF	Fianna Fáil
IT IT	+Europa IRadicali	+Europa Radicali Italiani
LT LT	LAISVĖS LRLS	Laisvės partija – Freedom Party Lietuvos Respublikos Liberalų Sąjūdis
LU	DP	Demokratesch Partei
LV LV	LA PAR!	Latvijas Attistibai Kustība „Par!"
NL NL	D66 VVD	Democraten66 Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
RO	USR	Uniunea Salvați România
SE SE	C L	Centerpartiet Liberalerna
SI SI	LMS SMC	Lista Marjana Šarca Stranka Modernega Centra
SK	PS	Progresívne Slovensko

3.4 EPP – European People's Party

AT	ÖVP	Die neue Volkspartei
BE BE	CD&V CDH	Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams Centre Démocrate Humaniste
BG BG BG BG	BCM DSB GERB UDF	Bulgaria of the Citizens Movement Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria (in coal. Demokratichna Bulgaria) Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria Union of Democratic Forces
CY	DISY	Democratic Rally of Cyprus
CZ CZ	KDU-CSL TOP09	Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party Top 09

DE	CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union
DE	CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern
DK	KD KF	KristenDemokraterne
DK		Det Konservative Folkeparti
EE	ISAMAA	Isamaa Erakond
EL	N.D.	Nea Demokratia
ES	PP	Partido Popular
FI	KOK SK-KD	Kansallinen Kokoomus Suomen Kristillisdemokraatit
FI		
FR	LR	Les Républicains
HR	HDZ	Croatian Democratic Union
HU	FIDESZ KDNP	Fidesz
HU		Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt
IE	FG	Fine Gael
IT	AP FI	Alternativa Popolare Forza Italia
IT	PATT PPL SVP	Trentino Tyrolean Autonomist Party Popolari per l'Italia
IT	UDC	Südtiroler Volkspartei Unione di Centro
IT		
IT		
IT		
LT	TS-LKD	Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats
LU	CSV	Chrëschtlech Sozial Vollekspartei
LV	JV	Vienotība – New Unity
MT	PN	Partit Nazzjonalista
NL	CDA	Christen Democratisch Appel
PL	PO PSL	Platforma Obywatelska Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe
PL		
PT	CDS-PP PSD	Centro Democrático e Social-Partido Popular Partido Social
PT		Democrata
RO	PMP PNL	Partidul Mişcarea Populară Partidul Naţional Liberal
RO	RMDSZ-UDMR	României Magyar Demokrata Szövetség-Uniunea Democrată
RO		Maghiară din România
SE	KD MOD	Kristdemokraterna Moderaterna
SE		
SI	NOVA SDS	Nova Slovenija
SI	SLS	Slovenska Demokratska Stranka Slovenska Ljudska Stranka
SI		

SK	KDH MOST-HID	Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie Most-Hid
SK	SMK-MKP	Strana Madarskej Komunity-Magyar Közösség Pártja
SK	SPOLU	Spolu
SK		

3.5 PES – Party of European Socialists

AT	SPÖ	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs
BE BE	PS SP.A	Parti Socialiste Sociaal Progressief Alternatief
BG	BSP	Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya
CY	EDEK	Kinima Sosialdemokraton
CZ	ČSSD	Ceská strana sociálne demokratická
DE	SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
DK	SD	Socialdemokratiet
EE	SDE	Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond
EL	PASOK	Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinima
ES	PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español
FI	SDP	Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue
FR	PS	Parti Socialiste
HR	SDP	Socijaldemokratska Partija Hrvatske
HU	MSZP	Magyar Szocialista Párt
IE	LP	An Luch Oibre – The Labour Party
IT IT	PD PSI	Partito Democratico Partito Socialista
LT	LSDP	Lietuvos Socialdemokratu Partija
LU	LSAP	Lëtzebuerger Sozialistesch Arbechterparte
LV	Saskaņa-SDP	Sociāldemokrātiskā partija „Saskaņa"
MT	PL	Partit Laburista
NL	PvdA	Partij van de Arbeid
PL PL	SLD UP	Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej Unia Pracy
PT	PS	Partido Socialista
RO	PSD	Partidul Social Democrat
SE	SAP	Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Arbetareparti
SI	SD	Socialni Demokrati
SK	SMER-SD	SMER-Sociálna Demokracia

3.6 EDP – European Democratic Party

CY	SP	Symmaxia politon – Citizens' Alliance
CZ	SEN21	Senátor 21
DE	FW	Freie Wähler
EL	EK	Enosi-kentroon – Union of Centrists
ES	CC	Coalición Canaria – Canarian Coalition
ES	CxG	Compromiso por Galicia – Commitment to Galicia Euzko
ES	EAJ-PNV	Alderdi Jeltzalea – Basque National Party
FR	MoDEM	Mouvement Démocrate
HR	NS	Narodna Stranka-Reformisti – People's Party-Reformists
HU	UK	Új Kezdet – New Start
IT	PDE	Partito Democratico Europeo Italia
PL	SD	Stronnictwo Demokratyczne – Alliance of Democrats
PT	PDR	Partido Democrático Republicano
RO	PROROMANIA	Pro România
RO	RO.AS.IT.	Asociaţia Italienilor din România – Association of Italians of Romania
SI	DeSUS	Demokratična stranka upokojencev Slovenije – Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia

3.7 EFA – European Free Alliance

AT	EL	Enotna Lista - Einheitsliste
BE	N-VA	Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie
CZ		Moravian Movement
DE		Lausitzer Allianz - Luzicka Alianca
DE	BP	Bayernpartei
DE	SSW	Südschleswigscher Wählerverband
DK	SP	Schleswigsche Partei
EL		Rainbow - Vinozhito
EL	DEB	Dostluk Esitlik Baris Partisi - Party of Friendship, Equality and Peace

ES		Nueva Canarias PSM-Entesa
ES		Bloc Nacionalista Valencià Bloque Nacionalista Galego Eusko
ES	BLOC BNG	Alkartasuna
ES	EA ERC	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya Unitat Catalana
ES	UC	
ES		
ES		
FI	AF	Ålands Framtid
FR		Femu a Corsica Unser Land
FR		Mouvement région Savoie Partitu di a Nazione Corsa Partit
FR	MRS PNC	Occitan
FR	PÔc UDB	Union Démocratique Bretonne
FR		
FR		
HR		Lista Za Rijeku
HU		Magyar Kereszténydemokrata Szövetség Erdélyi Magyar Néppárt
HU	EMN	
IT		Liga Veneta Repubblica Patrie Furlane
IT		Patto per l'Autonomia
IT		Pro Lombardia Indipendenza Süd-Tiroler Freiheit
IT		L'Altro Sud
IT	AS CLT	Comitato Libertà Toscana
IT		
IT		
LV	LRU	Latvian Russian Union
NL	FNP	Fryske Nasjonale Partij
PL	KJ RAS	Kaszebsko Jednota Ruch Autonomii Slaska
PL		
RO	PPMT-EMNP	Partidul Popular Maghiar din Transilvania-Erdélyi Magyar Néppárt – Hungarian People's Party of Transylvania
SI	OLJKA	Stranka Slovenske Istre
SI	SSK	Stranka Slovenska skupnost
SK	MKDSZ	Magyar Kereszténydemokrata Szövetség – Hungarian Christian Democratic Association

3.8 EGP – European Green Party

AT	GRÜNE	Die Grünen
BE BE	ECOLO GROEN	Ecolo Groen
BG		ZelenoDvizheniye– GreenMovement
CY		Movement of Ecologists – Citizens' Cooperation
CZ	Z	Strana zelených – Green Party
DE	GRÜNE	Bündnis 90/Die Grünen
DK	SF	Denmark Socialistisk Folkeparti
EE	EER	Erakond Eestimaa Rohelised – Estonian Greens
EL	OP	Oikologoi Prasinoi – Ecologist Greens
ES ES	EQUO	Equo Esquerra Verda
FI	VIHR	Vihreä liitto-Gröna förbundet – Green League
FR	EELV	Europe Ecologie-LesVerts
HU	LMP	Magyarország Zöld Pártja – Hungary's Green Party
IE	GP	Comhaontas Glas – Green Party
IT IT	FdV	Federazione die Verdi Verdi-Grüne-Vërc South Tyrol
LU	DÉI GRÉNG	Déi gréng
MT	ADPD	Alternattiva Demokratika-Partit Demokratiku – The Green Party
NL	GROENLINKS	GroenLinks
PL		Partia Zieloni – The Greens
PT PT	PAN PEV	Pessoas-Animais-Natureza – People-Animals-Nature Partido Ecologista "Os Verdes" – Ecologist Party "The Greens"
RO		Partidul Verde – Green Party
SE	MP	Miljöpartiet de gröna
SI	SMS-ZELENI	Stranka mladih-Zeleni Evrope – Youth Party-European Greens

3.9 PEL – Party of the European Left

AT	KPÖ	Kommunistische Partei Österreichs
BE		Communistes de Wallonie-Bruxelles
BG		Bulgarian Left
CZ		Levice
DE	LINKE	Die Linke
DK		Red Green Alliance-Enhedslisten
EE	EÜVP	Eestimaa Ühendatud Vasakpartei
EL	SY.RI.ZA.	Syriza
ES ES ES	 EUiA PCE	Izquierda Unida Esquerra Unida i Alternativa Partido Comunista de España
FI FI	VAS SKP	Vasemmistoliitto Suomen Kommunistinen Puolue
FR	PCF	French Communist Party
HR	RF	Radnička fronta
HU		Európai Baloldal
IT		Rifondazione comunista
LU	DL	déi Lénk
PT	BE	Bloco de Esquerda
RO	PSR	Partidul Socialist Român
SI		Levica

3.10 ECR – European Conservatives and Reformists Party

BG	IMRO	Bŭlgarsko načionalno dviženie – Bulgarian National Movement
CZ	ODS	Občanská demokratická strana – Civic Democratic Party
DE	LKR	Liberal-Konservative Reformer
ES	VOX	Vox
FI	SIN	Sininen tulevaisuus Blå framtid – Blue Reform
HR	HKS	Hrvatska konzervativna stranka – Croatian Conservative Party
IT		Direzione Italia Fratelli d'Italia
IT	FDI	
LT	LLRA-KŠS	Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania-Christian Families Alliance
LU	ADR	Alternative Democratic Reform Party
LV	NA	Nacionālā Apvienība – National Alliance
NL	FvD	Forum for Democracy
PL	PiS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – Law and Justice
RO	AD	Alternativa Dreaptă – Right Alternative
SE	SD	Sweden Democrats
SK	SaS NOVA	Sloboda a Solidarita – Freedom and Solidarity Nová väčšina –
SK	OKS	New Majority
SK		Obcianska konzervatívna strana – Civic Conservative Party

3.11 ECPM – European Christian Political Movement

DE		Bündnis C
DE		Familien-Partei Deutschlands
ES		Contigo Más
FR	VIA	Voice of the People - La voie du peuple
HR	HRAST	Croatian Sovereigntists
IE		Human Dignity Alliance - Comhaontas Dhínit an Duine
IT	IdeA	Identity and Action - Movimento IdeA
LV		No Sirds Latvijai
NL		Christian Union - Christen Unie
NL	SGP	Reformed Political Party - Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij
PL		Right Wing of the Republic - Prawicy Rzeczypospolitej
PT		People's Monarchist Party
RO		Democratic Union of Slovaks and Czechs of Romania Partidul
RO	PNTCD	National Taranesc Crestin Democrat
SK		Kresťanská únia

3.12 ID – Identité et Démocratie Parti

AT	FPÖ	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs
BE	VB	Vlaams Belang
BG	VOLYA	Volya
CZ	SPD	Svoboda a přímá demokracie – Freedom and Direct Democracy
EE	EKRE	Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond – Conservative People's Party of Estonia
EL		Nea Dexia
FR	RN	Rassemblement National
IT	LEGA	Lega
PL	KNP	Kongres Nowej Prawicy
PT	CH	Chega – Enough!
SK	SR	Sme Rodina – We Are Family

3.13 Electoral Coalitions

Some member states featured electoral coalitions assembling two or more parties who submit a joint list of candidates. The following table shows the electoral coalitions of 2019 together with the Europarties into which we decided to aggregate the votes for the coalition's list.

EL	Coal. KINAL (PSM+DA+MDS)	PES
FR	Coal. Renaissance (LREM+MoDem+A+MRSL)	ALDE PES
FR	Coal. EEES (PS+RDG+PP+N)	
HR	Coal. Hrv. Suv. (HRAST+HKS+HSP+UHD)	ECPM
HR	Coal. AMS (HL+PGS+HSU+IDS+HSS+GLS+D)	ALDE
HU	Coal. FIDESZ + KDNP	EPP PES
HU	Coal. MSZP + Párbeszéd	
LV	Coal. AP! (LA+PAR!)	ALDE
PT	Coal. Democrática Unitária (PCP+PEV)	EGP
RO	Coal. Alliance 2020 (USR+PLUS)	ALDE
SI	Coal. SDS + SLS	EPP
SK	Coal. PS (+SPOLU) Coal. (PS+) SPOLU	ALDE EPP
SK	Coal. OL'aNO + NOVA	ECR
SK		

We attribute coalitions to Europarties according to the membership of one of the coalition partners. Sometimes the attribution is obvious. For instance, in HU both FIDESZ and KDNP are members of EPP. Hence the Coal. FIDESZ + KDNP is aggregated into EPP. Sometimes the attribution is questionable. For instance, in SK the Coal. PS + SPOLU has partner PS who is a member of ALDE, and partner SPOLU who is a member of EPP. We decided to credit ALDE and EPP each with half of the coalition's vote count.

3.14 Single-state parties

At the 2019 elections, 33 domestic parties were not affiliated with any Europarty.

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Reforming the European electoral law: no political equality without social equality Bringing in the missing ´social´ link

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Introduction

Political participation in elections appears to be heavily skewed towards well-educated, affluent and employed citizens (Brady et al 1995; Smets and van Ham 2013; Schäfer 2015; Kaeding et al 2016; Haußner et al 2017). Citizens with a lower socio-economic status are significantly more likely not to exercise their right to vote than citizens with a higher status.

The current pandemic relentlessly exposes the weaknesses of society further. **People in socially precarious circumstances are particularly exposed to the coronavirus.**

Table 1. Cologne – matching voter turnout EP 2019 and Covid-19 incidence figures.

Cologne city district (selection out of 86 districts)	Voter turnout EP 2019 in % 64,63	Covid-19 incidence figures (7 days average 22 April 2021) 208,4
Klettenberg	79,87	75,7
Lindenthal	78,34	97,7
Sülz	78,24	70,7
Hahnwald	77,77	0
Braunsfeld	76,59	32,7
Neustadt/Süd	76,53	133,9
Neustadt/Nord	76,4	150,2
Lövenich	75,56	76,2
Junkersdorf	74,73	64,9
Weiß	74,56	186,2
Köln city (overall)	64,63	208,4
Neubrück	48,54	630,3
Höhenberg	48,47	516,9
Lindweiler	47,98	344,4
Ostheim	46,78	307,3
Buchforst	46,66	402,4
Seeberg	44,36	332,5
Finkenberg	40,50	337
Gremberghoven	38,94	717,1
Vingst	38,67	472,3
Chorweiler	30,61	520,1

Source: own compilation with data from the City of Cologne

Table 1 is a snapshot of 22 April 2021 for a major city in Germany: Cologne. At that time, the Covid-19 incidence figures (7 days average) for the city of Cologne were 208.4, but the figures differed dramatically between the 86 city districts, with values ranging from 0 for the Hahnwald dis-

trict to 717.1 for the Gremberghoven district of Cologne. Looking at all green-coloured districts that were below the Cologne average and the red-coloured districts that were above the Cologne average, **one notes a strong correlation between the Covid-19 incidence figures and the turnout figures of the last 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections**, which again can be directly linked to the socio-economic specifics of the districts.

Therefore, reforming the European electoral law will work once we accept that there is no political equality without social equality. Otherwise we jeopardise the basic ideas of modern liberal democracies: the ideal of political equality and its social integrative power (Verba 2003).

1. No political equality without social equality

According to Sidney Verba (2003), three types of political equality can be distinguished. In addition to the elements of equal right, ie legally equal access, and equal voice, ie the equal voting weight of each person, Verba also cites equal capacity and opportunity to participate (cf ibid, 665). He thus includes the resources, abilities and competences of citizens as well as equal access to information in the ideal of equality. **There are three separate dimensions of political equality, but they are interconnected and must ideally be fulfilled together in order to ensure democratic legitimacy.**

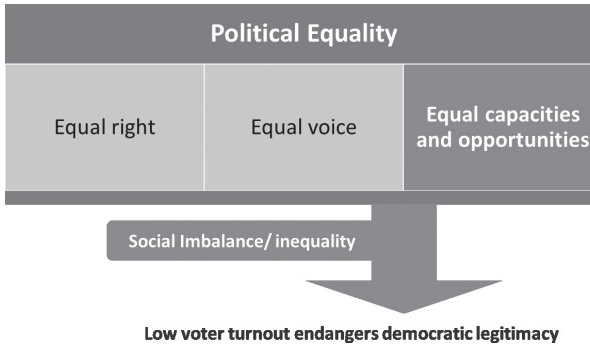

Figure 1. Three dimensions of political equality according to Verba (2003).
Source: own creation.

While the level of voter turnout plays only a minor role for the first two dimensions, it is essential for the third dimension. The third dimension of equality can hardly be achieved through legislation and vote distribution procedures, but can only be achieved if all socio- economic groups have a high voter turnout. Political equality is thus closely linked to social equality (cf Persson, Solevid and Öhrvall 2013, 173). Studies about concrete effects of voter turnout confirm that 'socio-economic status (SES) is strongly correlated to participation' (Lutz and Marsh 2007, 540). The focus of this paper is therefore to examine a central indicator of social equality and its influence on voter turnout in European elections – a dimension too often forgotten.

Table 2. EP proposals classified according to Verba (2003).

Equal rights	Equal voices	Equal opportunities and capacities
[…] considers therefore that common minimum standards are needed, […] including as regards the right to register a party and to stand for elections, access to ballots, the fielding of candidates, accessibility or the day of the elections (2020/2220(INL))	None	Believes that the introduction of postal voting is needed for voters that could not go to the polling stations on election day and could make the conduct of European elections more efficient and more appealing for voters in specific or exceptional circumstances; calls on Member States to consider the possible introduction of complementary enhancing tools such as electronic or internet voting, according to their own national traditions and with appropriate safeguards (2020/2220(INL))
[…] calls for the introduction of an (sic.) harmonized age for passive and active voting rights across Member States, as a way to ensure real voting equality and avoid discrimination in the most fundamental area of citizenship, namely the right to participate in the democratic process (2020/2220(INL))		Encourages Member States to take measures to promote adequate representation of ethnic, linguistic and other minorities in European elections (2015/2035(INL))
Considers essential facilitating the access to the vote in the European elections and guaranteeing that all those who have the right to vote, including EU citizens living outside their country of origin, homeless people and prisoners who are granted such a right in accordance with national laws, are able to exercise this right; calls on Member States to improve access to polling stations and the right to vote for persons with disabilities (2020/2220(INL))		Considers transparency of the electoral process and access to reliable information as essential elements for raising European political awareness and securing a solid election turnout […] (2020/2220(INL))

Proposes that all Union citizens, including those living or working in a third country, be
granted the right to cast their vote in elections to the European Parliament; considers that this would finally give all Union citizens the same right to vote in European elections under the same conditions, irrespective of their place of residence or citizenship (2015/2035(INL))
Encourages Member States to allow postal, electronic and internet voting in order to increase the participation of, and to make voting easier for, all citizens, and especially for people with reduced mobility and for people living or working in a Member State of which they are not a citizen or in a third country, provided that necessary measures are taken to prevent any possible fraud in the use of voting by those means (2015/2035(INL))
As a future step, recommends to Member States that they should consider ways to harmonise the minimum age of voters at 16, in order to further enhance electoral equality among Union citizens (2015/2035(INL))
Highlights the importance of an increased presence of women in political decision- making and a better representation of women in European elections; consequently, calls on Member States and the institutions of the Union to take all necessary measures to promote the principle of equality between men

	and women throughout the whole electoral process; emphasises in this connection the importance of gender- balanced electoral lists (2015/2035(INL))

Source: 2020/2220(INL): Modification of the Act concerning the election of the Members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage pursuant to Article 223(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union; 2015/2035(INL): P8_TA(2015)0395 Reform of the electoral law of the EU European Parliament resolution of 11 November 2015 on the reform of the electoral law of the European Union.

2. EU electoral reform initiatives need to embrace the ´social dimension´ of political equality

Many EU electoral law reform initiatives – including those that have been put forward by the EP in recent years and are now being outlined again – focus almost exclusively on one (equal right) of the three dimensions. This is astonishing for two reasons: first, they leave out other important aspects of political equality (see Table 2); and, second, they ignore the ´social dimension´ of political equality.

But, only if we keep all three dimensions of political equality in mind we will succeed in shaping the EU electoral law reform in a ´social way´, so that voting in Europe and in European elections is less socio-economically biased. (Proposal)

In the following this paper aims at elaborating on the social distortion of the 2019 voter turnout in European elections. Analysing the effect of unemployment on voter turnout at small-scale city district level in major European cities this paper shows that social distortion is not

a country-specific, but a continuing central feature of European election turnout across Europe, which has to be taken into account when reforming the EU electoral law. To conclude we discuss the findings and their implications for the ongoing EU electoral law reform discussions inside the EP and between the three institutions.

3. Increasing voter turnout in the 2019 European elections – greater differences at second sight

The European elections 2019 were the first European elections since 1994 in which more than half of the European electorate made use of their voting rights. Across Europe, voter turnout increased by about eight percentage points, reaching a staggering 51 percent.

Looking closer, though, there are some limitations to the generally positive view. Still, 15 out of 28 member states are below the 50 percent mark. Four countries even fall below the 30 percent mark, which is particularly worrying. Only Luxembourg and Belgium achieve really high participation rates of over 80 per cent – both countries with compulsory voting. Eventually, nine out of 28 member states experienced lower participation rates in the 2019 EP elections in comparison to 2014.

Figure 2 further specifies the differences in voter turnout per country. Here we notice (again) distinct differences across Europe. A strong increase in voter turnout (10 percentage points and more) only occurred in Germany, Spain and some Eastern European countries (Poland, Hungary etc), the latter however departing from low levels of participation during the 2014 Euro-

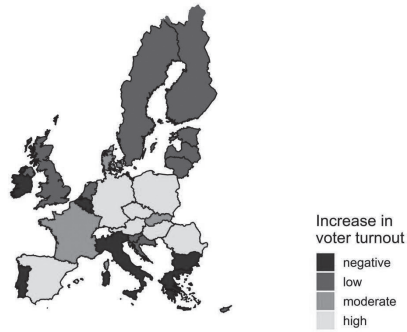

Figure 2. 2019 European election voter turnout in comparison to 2014.

Source: Haußner and Kaeding (2020b, 330).

pean elections. In southern Europe, Belgium and Ireland, voter turnout actually fell. Although these declines are only more than three percentage points in the case of Bulgaria and thus significantly lower than the increases in some states, Europe is still more differentiated than many commentators analysed on election night.

In addition, the increase in voter turnout in the 2019 European elections was mainly driven by large member states, which were among those with strong increases in participation. Due to their large number of inhabitants and voters, these countries naturally had a particularly strong influence on voter turnout in the EU as a whole.

Most importantly though, they remained second-order elections, also because – in comparison with the respective previous national first-order elections – voter turnout was lower for the European elections

across Europe (see also Träger and Andres 2020, 317) – with the exception of Romania, Lithuania, Greece and France.

4. Social inequality and voter turnout – a potential legitimacy and representation problem

Lijphart (1997) and subsequent studies are convinced that low (and declining) voter turnout exacerbates social inequality (Sinnott and Achen 2008, 2). Therefore, a growing imbalance between socio-economically privileged and less privileged groups calls into question the legitimacy of the democratic promise of political equality (Lijphart 1997). Political equality is thus closely linked to social equality (Persson et al 2013) and therefore '[…] declining voter turnout can mean not only a legitimacy problem, but also a problem of political representation' (Rabuza 2016, 6).

5. European second-order elections more socially distorted than first-order national elections?

The European elections have been repeatedly classified as second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980) and low-participation elections (Steinbrecher and Rattinger 2012). Following Tingsten's law (1975) we would expect greater social distortion in European elections in comparison to national first-order main elections as a consequence.

First, in European elections, there is a general perception that there is less at stake. On the voters' side this is

accompanied by little interest and a lesser sense of voting as a civic duty (Stockemer and Blais 2019) than in national elections. It is mainly those who are interested in politics who vote in European elections. This characteristic, as well the sense of civic duty, correlates strongly with socio-economic status (Stockemer and Blais 2019).

Second, a low interest in the European election campaign increased the likelihood of abstaining in past European elections (Schmitt et al 2020, 11). European election campaigns continue to be conducted by national parties, which have other important elections in mind. Although parties put more emphasis on European issues in their Euromanifestos than in national manifestos (Braun and Schmitt 2018, 6), these issues are often seen as insignificant when weighed against the 'national' issues of the party.

Third, parties are much less willing to spend money on voter mobilisation in second-order elections. This is especially true if the party expects to be successful even in a situation of low turnout (Reif and Schmitt 1980). Parties strategically direct their efforts towards the districts that are most promising. These are often districts with high turnout, which are mostly economically better-situated areas (Lutz and Marsh 2007).

Finally, and in addition to (1), voters in European elections are voters who generally vote in elections and do not skip a single election (Bhatti et al 2019). They tend to be predominantly better educated and earn higher incomes. European voters are often citizens with an established habit of voting (Franklin and Hobolt 2011).

Taken together, it can be deduced from the second-order-elections model that European elections are particularly susceptible to social imbalances in voter participation. So, is social inequality in the voter turnout more pronounced in second-order European elections than in national main elections?

6. Research design

Since smaller units of analysis are often more homogeneous, while in larger units, similarities fade due to greater heterogeneity, we will follow Hajnal and Trounstine's plea for smaller-scale units of analysis (2005, 517) and focus on the city district level.

6.1 Selected European cities

To start we selected nine cities from EU countries scoring traditionally low (Czech Republic, Slovakia), medium (Estonia, the Netherlands, UK) and high (Austria, France, Germany, Spain) on turnout in the 2019 European elections. In addition, the cities represent a wide range of variation in turnout between the city districts in one election. While in European elections in Paris the between- district difference is only about 18 percentage points, in Amsterdam it is more than 60 (see Table 3).

In sum the selected European capitals represent five percent of the total EU population and represent capitals of their respective countries with smaller (430,000 in Bratislava) and larger (8.9 million in London) total number of inhabitants and varying numbers of districts (from eight in Tallinn to 103 in Amsterdam).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of selected EU-capitals.

		Turnout figures for the respective election					
Capital city	# of districts	max. EP 2019	min. EP 2019	max. first-order	min. first-order	max. local	min. local
Amsterdam	103	83,50	19,90	99,10	42,80	77,89	27,76
Madrid	21	76,22	57,40	84,18	71,04	76,78	57,95
Vienna	23	73,34	50,18	81,53	69,18	80,97	69,26
Berlin	12	69,00	49,40	81,70	69,30	50,50	43,99
Paris	20	67,17	49,08	87,47	78,83	64,18	50,03
London	33	54,04	31,56	na	na	51,38	29,54
Prague	57	53,88	29,25	82,27	65,97	71,16	29,46
Tallinn	8	52,60	31,10	75,69	55,58	62,80	49,80
Bratislava	17	44,12	24,98	78,00	59,96	50,44	26,91

Note: The table shows the highest and lowest turnout in the city districts in the respective elections. Source: Haußner and Kaeding (2020a).

Since capital cities have special characteristics and might correspond to other patterns, we expand the selection of cities to include smaller major German cities (Bremen, Dortmund, Hamburg, Cologne, Leipzig and Munich). While this second step does not allow us to control for urban-rural effects, it does allow us to control for any potential 'capital-city effect'.

6.2 Operationalisation of the social situation in city districts: unemployment

Smets and van Ham report 'over 170 independent variables used to explain voter turnout' (Smets and van Ham 2013, 356). None of the explanatory factors is listed in all 90 studies in their meta- analysis. In the following, therefore, this chapter will focus on the role of unemployment, which has often been used as a strong indicator both at the individual level and at the

aggregate level to proxy for the socio-economic status of the potential voter (Schäfer 2015; Schwarz 2012). Strongholds of non-voters are almost invariably found in precarious neighbourhoods, which are often known as social hotspots (Kaeding et al 2016). Accordingly, we will use unemployment as a proxy for the latent variable 'socio-economic background' of city districts.

Data

The data sources are official statistical offices of the cities and/or their respective countries. These official statistics have the advantage that they are not affected by over-reporting (Karp and Brockington 2005). Survey data also tend to underestimate social differences in voter turnout (Lahtinen et al 2019). Turnout is consistently calculated as the ratio of voters to votes cast.

While unemployment is the only indicator, which is measured at the neighbourhood level on a fairly comprehensive basis, its operationalisation is more complex compared to turnout. (For more information see Haußner and Kaeding 2020a.)

Method

Using bivariate scatterplots for each city we show the effect of social inequality on turnout. Next, we pool the data to compare the effects using a linear regression model with interaction effects of electoral type and unemployment. The districts are nested in the cities and the elections, which is why we use cluster-robust standard errors. We then test the argument that lower turnout is associated with greater social inequality by

comparing different types of (first versus second-order) elections. We use data for the second-order European elections in 2019 as well as the most recent preceding national first-order election and another second-order local election (mostly those of the city council).

7. Results: European elections are not more socially distorted than first-order elections – but socially distorted still

For the European elections 2019, Figure 3 displays for the aggregate level a systematic correlation between unemployment figures and voter turnout across Europe. In all 28 states which participated in the 2019 European elections, employed citizens made systematically more use of their voting rights than unemployed citizens.

So, despite the European-wide increase in turnout during the 2019 European elections, we see that voter turnout is socially unequal across Europe. Comparing voters at the city district level, Figure 4 zooms in one step further, showing that voter turnout in first-order national elections and second-order European and local elections is significantly imbalanced in favour of certain city districts. Across Europe, voting is significantly less likely in city districts with a low social status – regardless of the election type (first- and/or second-order election).

Notwithstanding the expected significant differences in turnout at national, local and European levels, the social inequality of turnout is stunningly equal between election types. Apparently second-order elections with lower turnout are not systematically more socially imbalanced

Figure 3. Matching employment status with voter turnout in the 2019 European elections across Europe.
Source: own compilation.

than their preceding national main election – despite the special characteristics of second-order elections.

To determine whether the link between unemployment and turnout remains the same between the different elections, we build a linear regression model with interaction effects (see Table 4). (For a multi-level model as a robustness check please see Haußner and Kaeding 2020a). Although the elections differ in the level of turnout, the effect of the social context on turnout remains the same across all elections (including dummy variables for the election type in Model 2 and/or additional interaction effects between the effect of unemployment and the effect of the election type in Model 3).

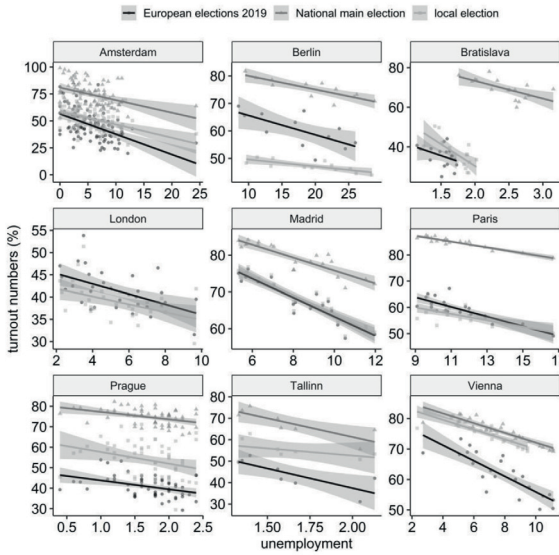

Figure 4. Scatterplots of unemployment and turnout across European capital cities and election- type.
Source: Haußner and Kaeding (2020a).

Table 4. Linear regression model to compare the social inequality between elections.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Unemployment	-3.57***	-3.58***	-4.19***
	(0.31)	(0.30)	(0.61)
Reference: EP election			
Election type: national		24.27***	24.27***
		(4.18)	(4.18)
Election type: local		3.04	3.04
		(5.54)	(5.54)
Reference: Unemployment x EP election			
Unemployment x national election			0.83
			(0.72)
Unemployment x local election			1.04
			(0.77)
R2	0.05	0.50	0.50
Adj. R2	0.05	0.50	0.49
Num. obs.	816	816	816
Nested in cities x elections	9 x 3	9 x 3	9 x 3
RMSE	2.73	1.99	1.99

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05
Cluster robust standard errors in parentheses

To control for a potential 'capital effect' we extend the analysis to six other major German cities, reaching out to the north, south, east and west of Germany: Bremen (569,352), Dortmund (587,010), Hamburg (1,841,000), Cologne (1,084,000), Leipzig (587,857) and Munich (1,472,000), covering a total of 6 million citizens in 2019. (For the calculation of unemployment rates see Haußner and Kaeding 2020b.)

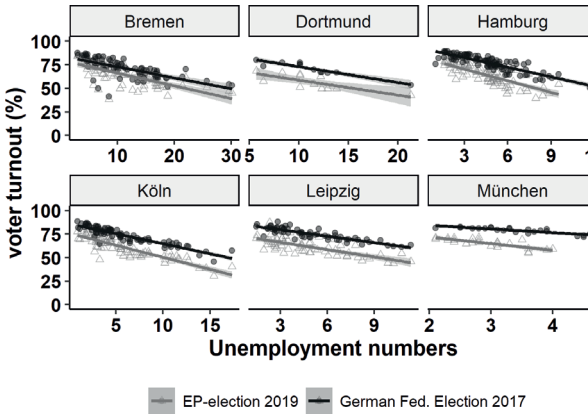

Figure 5. Scatterplots of unemployment and turnout across six German cities and election-type.

Source: Haußner and Kaeding (2020b, 334).

The figures for major German cities in Figure 5 display a very similar picture. All cities have in common that the indicator 'unemployment' has a strong negative effect on voter participation. The lower the unemployment in the city district, the more likely these neighbourhoods are to have significantly higher participation rates. Despite differences in strength, the effect is clearly visible in all cities. Furthermore, we see that the effect hardly differs in comparison to the 2017 German federal election. The effect sizes are all at roughly the same level when comparing the two elections.

Again, notwithstanding the expected significant differences in turnout at national and European levels, the

social inequality of turnout is stunningly equal between election types – also across the selected six German cities. Again second-order elections with lower turnout are not systematically more socially imbalanced than their preceding national main election – despite the special characteristics of second-order-elections.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

As for the 2019 European elections, we find, despite rising voter turnout, a strong correlation between the social context and voter turnout across Europe. The better the living conditions in the district, the higher the turnout in the 2019 European elections also. Contrary to the widespread expectation that lower turnout in European second-order elections would be concomitant with greater social distortion in comparison to national first-order main elections, however, the 2019 European Parliament elections were not more socially unequal. The European elections, generally described as 'special', do not seem to be really special from the perspective of social inequality. Overall, elections across Europe are socially biased, including EP elections with considerable discrepancies at the country, and most importantly, at the city-district level. During the EP 2019 elections in Amsterdam, for example, we find a difference in voter turnout between city districts of 60 percent (!).

The link between socio-economic status and participation is undisputed. It is not only a country- specific, but also a pan-European phenomenon.

Overall, social and economic structure and the living conditions of citizens across Europe are causing certain population groups to withdraw from the political process. The ideal of political equality is threatened all over Europe as long as we do not reform EU electoral laws, taking into account this apparent social dimension.

Unfortunately, the ongoing EP electoral law reform initiatives have focused almost exclusively on only one (equal right) of the three dimensions. This is astonishing for two reasons: first, they leave out other important aspects of political equality (see Table 2); and, second, they ignore the ´social dimension´ of political equality.

Only if we keep the social dimension in mind, however, next to the other two dimensions of political equality (equal right and equal voice), will we succeed in shaping the EU electoral law reform in a ´social way´, so that voting in Europe and in European elections is less socio-economically biased.

Let´s face it: the Spitzenkandidaten process has had regional rather than pan-European effects at best (Hobolt 2014; Schmitt et al 2015), despite all efforts on many fronts by various actors during the 2014 and 2019 European elections (Kaeding and Switek 2015 and Kaeding et al 2020; Put et al 2016; Wolfs et al 2021). The Spitzenkandidaten prozess will not solve the social dimension of low voter turnout during European Parliament elections, or thereby increase the legitimising power of the European Parliament in EU decision- and policy-making, especially in times of continued crisis.

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The volume **Transforming the Political Union: Reinforcing europarties ahead of the European elections** is published to serve as an inspiration for ahead and beyond 2024. The articles collected in here were developed as original research papers within the FEPS expert group on Transnational Politics and Parties, within which community they were thoroughly discussed, peer-reviewed and benefitted from numerous encounters from the policy makers of S&D Group and PES. The book is organised in 4 chapters, each of which carries a set of pioneering ideas on how to: *Strengthen the europarties; Engage the citizens; Encourage the stakeholders; and Reform the European Law*. Relying on both high academic standards, but also creativity and imagination of the respective authors, the individual proposals gathered here jointly draw a new horizon for the further political integration, which could strengthen the Union, bring new energy to its actors and importantly, make sure to leave no one behind.

This book is the most important collection of inspiring progressive ideas on the question of whether there is such a thing as a European democracy and how it overcomes the one thing that unites us, European diversity. An absolute must-read for all who dare to call themselves true European democrats.

Tanja FAJON, President of the Social Demcoratic Party of Slovenia,
Chair of the PES Democracy Network

The citizens participating in the CoFoE have endorsed the creation of a federal and more democratic European Union. As civil society, it is our responsibility to connect the institutions and citizens. As FEPS, you have made a huge effort in leading the EU transformation by gathering these important, progressive ideas and contributions and for always thinking ahead. Thank you !

Alejandra ORIOLA ALMARCHA,
Director of the Union of European Federalists (UEF) Secrerariat

This volume brings together a group of leading scholars and practitioners in EU affairs. The authors present a coherent set of well-grounded proposals and reformist ideas aimed at the constitution of a working European political space and the building of a more transnational and democratic European polity. The volume goes far beyond the ordinary. If policies require politics, this timely volume is a genuinely innovative and exciting contribution to EU politics. Highly recommended.

Gerrasimos MOSCHONAS, Professor, Comparative Politics, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Next Left Focus Group member

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